

Historical and Theological Roots of Open Brethren in Romania

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Abstract

Brethren assemblies from Romania belong to an evangelical movement named Brethren, which emerged in the early nineteenth century in Europe. The Brethren churches in Romania were established in 1899 in Bucharest by the visit of an English missionary, Edmund Hamer Broadbent, and by the ministry of a Bible school director, Francis Berney, a member of Brethren assemblies in Switzerland. Swiss missionaries made a substantial contribution in establishing and developing the Brethren churches in Romania. A special contribution was also made by Brethren assemblies from Germany, both by missionaries sent to Romania and by young Christians trained in the German Bible School. Subsequently, Brethren churches have developed through the work of Romanian believers, experiencing their own evolution. Romanian Christians have remained attached to the principles of the Brethren movement worldwide.

Keywords: Brethren, Romanian Assemblies, church history, ecclesiology, eschatology.

Introduction

The Brethren movement is an evangelical movement which appeared at the beginning of the 19th century in Great Britain and from there spread throughout Europe and to all the other continents. The Brethren Assemblies in Romania were founded by missionaries who belonged to the Open or Free Brethren Assemblies from Great Britain, Switzerland or Germany.

The name under which the Brethren in Romania are known is “Christians according to the Gospel”. They took this name after the Romanian authorities insisted that they have a distinctive name other than just “Christian”, a name that other denominations had as well. It is possible that the name “Christian Churches according to the Gospel” might have been inspired by the first church of the Brethren in Geneva, Switzerland, who liked to call themselves the „Church according to the Word of God”, as the theologian and historian Jacques Blandenier stated (1993, 3-7).

In order to analyze the historical roots of Brethren churches in Romania, a short presentation of the beginnings of the Brethren churches in three European countries will follow, namely in Great Britain, Switzerland and Germany, countries which sent the first missionaries to Romania. The last part of the paper will focus on the study of the beginnings of Brethren churches in Romania and the first years of the consolidation of God’s work in these churches.

The Beginnings of the Brethren Movement in Great Britain

The first years of the 19th century were characterized by deep transformations: Europe was divided under the influence of Napoleon Bonaparte and the Tzar of Russia, the industrial revolution was endangering the noble and changing society. Religion had lost its power to renew. William W. Conard, in his book, *Family Matters*, says that in churches sermons were more and more formal, dead, and clergy education was superficial. The laymen could hardly change anything in the ecclesiastical field. Moreover, Conard (1922, 7-8) writes, “many clergymen held double positions in the church to gain more salary. In light of this, many people refused to pay the tithe or church pew rents that supported the clergymen”. In this climate there appeared various dissident groups who were mainly concerned with the Bible prophecies. The historian Tim Grass (2006, 11) writes that:

Brethren were just one of such movements which emerged in early-nineteen century Evangelicalism, dissatisfied with it and yet a fruit of its success. Their founders believed that Evangelicalism had lost something in the process of growth, having become formalised in its expressions of spiritual experience, and conformed to the world in its methods.

Consequently, the Brethren movement appeared as a reaction to the lack of spiritual liveliness in the churches of that time.

Three groups of students from Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, were involved in the origin of this movement. Robert Baylis, one of the historians of the Brethren, writes (2006, 26-27): “In the years 1825-29, when three small groups

of young people began to meet for prayer and study of the Bible, they eventually discovered one another.”

The first group was started in 1826 around Edward Cronin (1801-1882), a former Roman Catholic, a dentistry student, who had moved to Dublin for health reasons. The Bible study group grew into a small community which moved into a bigger building in 1829 (Baylis, 2006, 27).

A second group of believers started in the home of a lawyer and evangelical protestant named John Gifford Bellett (1795-1864). According to Timothy C. F. Stunt (2006, 225), a wealthy dentist from England, Anthony Norris Groves (1795-1853), also attended this group. The historian F. Roy Coad (2001, 20) writes that Groves had met both Bellet and his friend, a young priest of the Church of Ireland, John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), while they were in college.

Anthony Norris Groves is considered by many historians to be the founder of the Brethren Assemblies. William W. Conard wrote (1992, 23): „Many 19th century writers and historians regarded Anthony Norris Groves as the real founder of the Brethren movement”.

At this time, John Vesey Parnell (1805-1883), who later became Lord Congleton, started a third Bible study group. Tim Grass writes (2006, 22) about Parnell: “A wealthy member of the protestant ascendancy, Parnell had been converted as a student at Edinburgh through reading Paul’s letter to the Romans.”

Later on these Bible study groups in Dublin, which started independently, found out about each other and started to have fellowship with each other. Cronin’s group joined the group of A. N. Groves and Bellet. The groups of Groves and of J. V. Parnell rapidly grew into strong local churches, thus establishing the foundations of the Brethren movement.

Another remarkable figure of the Brethren movement was George Müller (1805-1898), who was born in Prussia. Immediately after his conversion in 1825 Müller became very interested in missionary work, according to his autobiography. “January, 1826, I began to read missionary papers, and was greatly stirred up to become a missionary myself” (Müller, 1906, 11). One of his biographers, Arthur T. Pierson, writes that George Müller decided to come to Romania as a missionary and to settle in Bucharest:

In August, 1827, his mind was more definitely than before turned toward mission work. Hearing that the Continental Society of Britain sought a minister for Bucharest, he offered himself through Dr. Tholuck, who, in behalf of the Society, was on the lookout for a suitable candidate. To his great surprise his father gave consent, though Bucharest was more than a thousand miles distant and as truly missionary ground as any other field. After a short visit home he came back to Halle, his face steadfastly set toward his far-off field, and his heart seeking prayerful preparation for expected self-sacrifice and hardship. But God had other plans for His servant, and he never went to Bucharest

(Pierson, 1899, 52).

Due to political conditions, Müller did not receive approval to come to Romania. However, he went to England in 1829, where he met Henry Craik (1805-1866), who had lived with the Groves. Thus, Müller met A. N. Groves' sister, whom he married.

Starting in 1832 Müller and Craik preached in Bristol where they established a church, which they named "Bethesda". The assembly kept growing, as many people came to hear Müller's and Craik's sermons. In their organizing of the church and in their teaching about God, man and salvation, they were trying to understand what the Holy Scriptures said, and were devoted to much prayer and study of the Bible. This is the way by which they decided on how the church would acknowledge and name its elders, a defining matter in the Brethren movement (Conard, 1992, 38). After two weeks of Bible study and prayer, Müller and Craik reached the following conclusions, recorded by F. Roy Coad (2001, 154-155):

Müller and Craik had withdrawn into retreat from Bristol for two weeks to give themselves to prayer and meditation concerning matters of church structure. They had returned with carefully matured convictions on eldership and discipline. They considered that it was the mind of God that there should be recognized elders within the church. These elders were the appointment of the holy Spirit, their call being a personal call of the Spirit, but confirmed by possession of appropriate qualifications and by God's blessing upon their work.

The doctrine of the local church being led by a team of elders was taught and practiced in all Brethren churches, including churches in Romania.

George Müller (1906, 89-92) opened his first orphanage in 1836, where he took care of 26 children. For their support he applied the same principle as the one for his support as a preacher: he would only tell God about his financial needs, not people. The Lord rewarded his faith throughout his 93 years of life in such a way that he was able to care for over ten thousand children in his orphanages.

George Müller's faith and experience were appreciated by all Christians, inspiring and encouraging many people to put their trust in God, for both their spiritual needs and their material needs.

Another town where the Brethren movement developed was Plymouth, through Benjamin Wills Newton (1807-1899). He had met John Nelson Darby at the University of Oxford while he was studying to become a priest in the Anglican church. Jonathan D. Burnham writes about the encounter between Newton and Darby:

When Darby and Newton met for the first time, they did not do so as equals:

though they shared much in common – academic success and evangelical conversion, a commitment to Calvinism and biblical literalism – it was Darby who came as the perceived leader, the teacher. At twenty-two, Newton was still a bachelor fellow of Exeter with little experience of the real world; Darby, on the other hand, was almost seven years older, and had by this time considerable parish and ecclesiastical experience (Burnham, 2004, 62).

Newton was strongly impressed by Darby's sacrifices for the work of God. Nathan DeLynn Smith (1986, 7) points out the fact that Darby was born in a family of wealthy merchants with connections in the aristocracy. But he renounced the wealth and the fame of his family to serve the Lord as a priest in spite of his father denying him as an heir because he had not continued in his career as a lawyer. He also was never married in order to serve the Lord better.

When he came back to Plymouth, Newton invited Darby to preach in the churches there. According to Coad (2001, 61-62), Newton was separated from the state church and went to lead the Brethren church, while, many years later, "Darby continued to preach in Anglican churches, as a clergyman". After a while he also left the official church and became involved with the Brethren assemblies of Plymouth. The Plymouth preachers preached the Gospel outdoors in the villages around the town and the villagers started to name them "the Plymouth Brethren", a name which was often used later to refer to the whole Brethren movement.

Darby systematized and developed dispensationalism and the premillennialist-pretribulationist doctrine, which states that the Lord Jesus will come back to earth to establish His Messianic millennial Kingdom (Ryrie, 1995, 67-69). According to Darby, the Lord's coming will happen in two stages. First, the Saviour will come in the air to rapture the church. After the rapture, the apocalyptic punishments will be poured out on the earth during the Great Tribulation of seven years. The second stage is the Lord's coming to earth, at the end of the seven years, when He will judge the nations and establish His millennial Kingdom (Revelation 20). After the millennium, the final judgment comes when the whole creation is destroyed and God makes a new heaven and a new earth where believers live for eternity (Revelation 21-22). This conception was later adopted by the Brethren movement throughout the world (Rusu, 2011, 311-318). The Brethren churches from Dublin, Bristol and Plymouth were in frequent contact with each other. William Conard (1992, 69) makes two important observations regarding the founders of the Brethren movement:

Almost every one of the early Brethren leaders was *thirty years of age or younger* when they first began practicing New Testament church principles... They also benefitted from *good training in biblical studies*... [They] had exceptional skills and high academic training in Hebrew and Greek, as well as theology.

They could debate fine points of biblical grammar and vocabulary with the top scholars of their day.

The youth and the Bible training of the leaders were favourable factors in the rapid expansion of the Brethren movement in its first years. Unfortunately, this development was slowed down by a painful schism that took place in Plymouth between Newton and Darby. This controversy destroyed the peace and spiritual progress of the Plymouth assembly. Jonathan D. Burnham correctly evaluates the fact that the schism did not appear particularly due to doctrinal differences but more because of personality differences between Darby and Newton. He wrote (2004, 147):

Perhaps more important than these distinctions, however, was a difference in temperament and outlook between the two men. Newton was becoming far more independent. This naturally led to a change in the nature of their relationship. Darby had grown accustomed to his role as Newton's mentor and teacher, and he had nurtured the Plymouth assembly as a father would nurture his own children. But those children (Newton in particular) were rapidly reaching maturity.

Unfortunately, this conflict was devastating because it did not remain local but extended to the whole Brethren movement, leading to the birth of two different movements: „Open Brethren”, and “Exclusive Brethren (also named „Closed Brethren”).

The Beginnings of the Brethren Movement in Romande Switzerland

The greatest contribution to the establishing of the Brethren Assemblies in Romania came from the Swiss missionaries. That is why it is important to discuss the Brethren movement in Switzerland, which started with the spiritual revival in Geneva at the beginning of the 19th century. Initially the movement developed independently from the Brethren in Great Britain, but later it came in contact with them through the preachers who came from England.

Similar to the Brethren in Great Britain, the Swiss Brethren did not come from a pagan context, but benefitted from a Christian inheritance upon which they founded their faith, adding a few particularities. The theologian Alfred Kuen, a member of the Free Brethren Assemblies, makes a very good synthesis of the Christian inheritance existing in Switzerland when the Brethren appeared.

“The Brethren” benefitted from all the efforts made hundreds of years before

and received the inheritance of their predecessors. Among those we quote: 1. From the *Waldensians*¹ they inherited their love for the Bible, the Bible study for the laymen and the principle of individual evangelism. 2. From the *Reformers* they took the three leading principles: *Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide* și *Sola Gratia*... 3. From the *Anabaptists* and the Menonites, their successors, we learned the importance of a minute loyalty towards the Word of God and the relationship between baptism and a Church of believers. 4. From the *Pietists* the Brethren took the priority of individual conversion, the importance of sanctification and of the Lord's Supper taken among God's children. 5. ... the *Moravians* left us the desire for a communion with believers of all denominations and the vision of missionary work. 6. This vision was later transmitted to the *Methodists* who added evangelism in our western countries and small group meetings. 7. The *Revival* of the 19th century focused on the Lord's coming and the priesthood of all believers (Kuen, 1984, 15-16).

It is remarkable how Alfred Kuen describes so concisely the fundamental characteristics of the Brethren movement, as well as their origin in the spiritual revivals that preceded it.

In Switzerland the Brethren movement started through the study of the Bible in small groups of students. Paul Perret, a Swiss missionary and teacher from the Free Brethren Assemblies, writes that the beginning of the movement took place between 1810-1820, when F. Bost led a Bible study group in Madeleine attended by Academy students, including his son, Ami Bost, as well as Jean-Guillaume Gonthier, H. L. Empeytaz, Henry Pyt and Emile Guers (Perret, 1966, 34). They founded the society, "The Friends", which was dissolved three years later due to the opposition of reformed pastors. The English Methodist businessman Ed. Wilcox also joined this group after he had moved to Geneva in 1816. He helped the students understand the path of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tim Grass (2006, 67) mentions the fact that many Brethren from England "looked to Switzerland for a model: biblicist, Calvinistic, suffering, faithful, and assured". He also adds that "the Swiss evangelicals owed a great deal to foreign input at crucial moments. Robert Haldane's lectures on Romans in Geneva during 1817 were a factor in the emergence of the *Réveil*" (Grass, 2006, 67).

Another Englishman, Henry Drummond, took part in this ministry and thus, in the same year, this Bible study group became the first Free Brethren Assembly in Switzerland, taking part together in the Lord's Supper, according to Perret's writings (1966, 36).

1 The name *Waldensians* or *Valdesi* refer to the followers of Pierre Valdo. He translated the New Testament and he initiated, around the year 1173, a protestant movement known in the first years as "The Poor of Lyon".

The new church caused a lot of opposition as well as street protests where people shouted not only against the believers but also against the Lord Jesus Christ. The army was needed to prevent the shedding of blood. More churches were started in those years, one in Tête-Noire, another in Bourg-de-Four, and in 1839 another church was started in Pélisserie, but it later left the Brethren movement. Jonathan D. Burnham (2004, 150) writes: „In contrast to the Plymouth gathering, the Swiss Assembly established officially recognized pastors (who were viewed as elders)”.

The believers in the Geneva area preached the Gospel, reaching Vaud County, where people had lived the same formal religious mundane lifestyle as in the rest of Switzerland. Among the preachers who worked in Lausanne we mention Ami Bost, Henry Pyt, Félix Neff and César Malan. Jacque Blandenier (1993, 3-7), a historian of the Swiss Brethren, wrote:

The main points in which their preaching was different from the „official” theology regarded the Christology, Soteriology and Ecclesiology. In other words, they were preaching an obedience to the Scriptures, the divinity of Jesus Christ and the atoning value of His death on the cross, the perishment of the carnal man, even of the religious one and the necessity for personal conversion as a response to the offer of salvation based on grace only.

As a result, many people and even pastors experienced spiritual regeneration. Jean-Pierre Bory (1996, 3-5) writes that „Félix Neff systematically visited the parishes and encouraged the pastors. He was at the origin of the most churches planted in the Vaud and Neuchâtel Counties”.

The brothers in Geneva organized Bible study groups in houses which, starting with 1821, had to face strong opposition. The officials in Vaud County banned these groups by means of a decision quoted by Paul Perret (1966, 44) as following: „All the religious assemblies of various people held in private houses are against God’s law and human law”.

Perret describes the events of 1823. In April, two pastors whose lives had been transformed by the Gospel were arrested. Their names were Alexandre Chavannes and Henri Juvet. In September of the same year, pastor François Olivier resigned with dignity. In December 1823 the three pastors mentioned above announced to the State Council that they were separated from the National Church, and a month later pastors Charles Rochat and Auguste Rochat joined them. Soon after these events, the Great Council voted in a law which banned these assemblies as being sectarian, „against public order and religious peace” (Perret, 1966, 44-45).

Bory (1996, 3-5) records that the first free assembly in Vaud County was founded in 1824 in Vevey. In spite of persecution, the movement spread rapidly, and thus 15 free churches were started in Lausanne, Yverdon, Saint-Croix, Orbe,

La Vallée, Nyon, Aubonne, and many other places. The main characteristic of these churches was their autonomy and the collegial leadership by elders.

The Beginnings of the Brethren Movement in Germany

The third group of churches that significantly influenced the Brethren Movement in Romania were the Brethren Assemblies in Germany. They had experienced rapid growth after being started in the middle of the 19th century by Julius Anton von Posek (1816-1898) and Carl Brockhaus (1822-1899).

Pastor August Jung, a biographer of Julius Anton von Posek, writes that von Posek was born in an aristocrat family in Germany whose members were either priests or officers. Anton von Posek did not want to follow any of the two careers, but he became a philologist in Berlin, where he diligently studied the New Testament in Greek. However, he was converted in 1848 when a young woman was killed by a rock that had fallen off the parapet of a cathedral on the exact place where he had sat just seconds before (Jung, 2006, 134-137).

Posek settled down in Düsseldorf, where John Darby's brother, William Henry Darby had also moved. Posek started to translate J. N. Darby's writings and became a darbyist. He cooperated with Darby and Carl Brockhaus on the translation of the New Testament, which was finished in 1855. Posek distanced himself from Darby after he visited London in 1857 and gained a better understanding of the nature of the dispute between the darbyists and the Open Brethren as well as the things that had caused the schism in 1848 (Jung, 2006, 139-140).

An important role in the development of the Brethren movement was also played by Wilhelm Baedeker (1823-1906), who took his PhD degree in philosophy. Daniel Herm writes that Baedeker had settled in England after his marriage. He was converted in 1866 after hearing the gospel preached by Lord Cavan in his town, Weston-Super-Mare. He came in contact with the Brethren movement through Lord Radstock who had communion with the Open Brethren. Baedker went to Germany and preached as an itinerant evangelist (Herm, 2006). Roy Coad (2001, 196) writes that, in one of his evangelistic campaigns in Berlin, Fräulein Toni von Blücher was converted and later worked as a missionary for 30 years, thus contributing to the spreading of the new wave of Pietism in Germany.

Baedeker also worked as a missionary in Russia, where the authorities started a strong persecution against the new converts. This persecution motivated the believers in Germany to start a Bible School, the *Allianz-Bibleschule*, which was a great blessing not only for Germany, but also for many other countries, including Romania. Coad (2001, 196) writes about this decision:

In 1905, at the height of the Russian persecution of evangelicals, a group of

aristocrats associated with Fräulein von Blücher, among them General Georg von Viebahn, founded a Bible School, the *Allianz-Bibleschule*, in Berlin for the preparation of evangelists for eastern Europe... The first teachers at this school were two scholarly men, who had each renounced positions with the Lutheran State Church on grounds akin to those of the founders of the British Brethren movement: Christoph Köhler and his son-in-law Johannes Warns.

Johannes Warns (1874-1937) often traveled in Eastern Europe and made an important contribution to the spreading of the Brethren movement through his preaching and writings. He visited Romania eight times, according to what Erich Sauer (1938, 5-10) writes in an article.

In 1919, the *Allianz-Bibleschule* was moved to Wiedenest near Gummersbach in the Rhine Valley and became a vital spiritual center for the Brethren movement in Germany and worldwide. Professors from Missionary Bible School of Wiedenest such as Erich Sauer, Ernst Schrupp and Daniel Herm are among the outstanding personalities of the international Brethren movement (Dumitrescu, 1980, 32-34).

The Beginnings of the Brethren Movement in Romania

In 1899, Edmund Hamer Broadbent (1861-1945), a missionary of the Open Brethren Churches from Great Britain, visited Romania on his missionary journey to Russia. He noticed that there were no places where the Gospel was preached in Romanian so he prayed for Romania and wrote an emotional article about Romanians' need to hear the Gospel. This moment was evoked at the General Conference of Brethren Assemblies in Romania in 1932, where Broadbent participated as well. Here is what Florea Moisescu (1932, 4-6) said:

Our joy was even greater because our old English brother, E. Broadbent, who prayed for our country even before the Brethren Assemblies came into being, has been visiting with us contributing richly to our spiritual consolidation and encouraging us to win more souls for the Lord Jesus. (E. Broadbent was visiting with his wife, too).

Broadbent's article, published in the Swiss magazine *Semailles* in 1899, had been read by Francis Berney (1869-1939), the principal of a Christian school in Tunis, Africa, and a member in a Free Brethren Assembly from Switzerland. Impressed with the Romanians' need for salvation, he moved with his family to Bucharest in the autumn of 1899. Florea Moisescu (1939, 1-3) writes about the importance of this event:

On Friday, the 15th of September 1899, brother Berney, accompanied by his sister, his wife, their daughter, future sister P[erret], as well as their brother-in-law, brother Ch. Aubert and his wife, left Switzerland and moved to Romania – as if they were following a heavenly revelation – to proclaim the three things necessary for the salvation of souls: the simple and sound Gospel free from any human teachings; the Lord Jesus, complete, perfect, after the Gospel, just as He was given to us by God the Father; and repentance, returning to God.

Berney initially preached in Bucharest to the Swiss, French, and Romanians who spoke French and wanted to hear the Gospel. As a good missionary, he soon started to learn Romanian. In 1901 he was able to preach in Romanian on the occasion of the first baptism of the new converts held in the Assembly of Bucharest. In 1902, this church was visited by many believers, such as E. H. Broadbent, the Swiss Friz Widmer (1861-1934), and Johann Bührer (1879-1964), an architect from Switzerland who later moved to Romania as well (Redacția, 1934, 33-36).

The work progressed in the next ten years until the state persecution began under the influence of the leadership that the Orthodox Church had at that time. Consequently, the foreign missionaries were expelled from Romania, but the work was continued by the Romanian believers who had understood the Gospel, including Grigore Constantinescu, Florea Moisescu and, temporarily, Ion Petrescu. Moisescu (1932, 1-3) writes that „after being expelled, Berney lived for a while either in Rusciuc, Bulgaria, only two hours away by train from Bucharest, or in Transylvania”. Thus, the Romanian elders could visit him, and Berney held Bible studies for days in a row. Then the elders would come back to their churches and share the Bible teachings with the other members.

The Brethren approach to mission was the Pauline pattern: they would plant a church in a big city, then this church would spread the gospel to the smaller towns and villages in the surrounding area. Thus, from Bucharest the work extended to the town of Ploiești, where a small group of young people dedicated themselves to the Lord Jesus. One of them was Gheorghe Giuvelea, who owned a textile factory. In 1912, Johann Bührer and his wife moved there also and worked in Ploiești and its surroundings until 1950, when he moved back to Switzerland after his wife passed away (Dumitrescu-Perret, 2002).

Another mission field for the foreign missionaries was the Brașovarea and Sibiu area where they first preached the Gospel to the Transylvanian Germans who spoke German, but later the Gospel was heard by Romanians as well. The first churches started in Transylvania were in Sibiu and Cisnădie. E. H. Broadbent and Francis Berney started a church in Râșnov, in Brașov County. These churches were frequently visited and taught the Bible by missionaries from Switzerland and Germany. The work spread to the big cities of Transylvania and surrounding villages (Oprea-Ionescu, 1994, 18-19).

According to the writings of Gheorghe Oprea, in Moldova and particularly in the Iași area the Gospel was not proclaimed by foreign missionaries but by Romanian believers from Bucharest and Ploiești. During World War I, Christians from Ploiești and Bucharest were sent as military or auxiliary staff to Moldova and started the first Brethren Assembly in Iași, where most of them had been enrolled (Oprea-Ionescu, 1994, 25).

During the interbellum period various publications were also used to spread the Gospel. The Brethren churches published many magazines which taught the doctrine or evangelized the unsaved. Such magazines were *Life and Light*, in Bucharest, with Florea Moisescu as editor; *The Good News*, which initially appeared in Bucharest, then in Brașov and finally in Iași, edited by Grigore Constantinescu; *The Good Herald*, for the Jewish community in Chișinău, having L. I. Averbuch as an editor; *The Christian*, in Bucharest, editor Florea Moisescu; *The Friend*, in Galați; and *Bethany*, in Ploiești. Brethren also published many evangelistic brochures that were only distributed in the most important centers of the movement, such as Bucharest and Ploiești, and from there to other areas of Romania. This is how faith reached Oltenia and Bârlad, through Stan Segărceanu, from Goicea, Dolj County. He had come to know the Lord while he was in the hospital and read a book, “without a title, without covers, old and torn”, which he later found out to be the Bible, as Gheorghe Oprea writes. Later, Segarceanu became a Bible peddler and preacher, being instructed in the Word of God by Berney (Oprea-Ionescu, 1994, 21-24).

A Swiss missionary who significantly helped the ministry in Romania was Paul Perret (1895-1961). Here is what his daughter, Blanche, writes about her parents' coming to Romania:

In 1922, Paul and Zelig Perret went to Romania. They first lived in Brasov with the Stückemann family... That's where they learned Romanian and that's where their daughter Blanche was born in 1924. Later, they moved to Bucharest where Perret had a part-time job with the Suisse Bank... Paul Perret was a teacher of the Bible who travelled throughout the country visiting churches and organizing Bible courses with or without authorization. He even started a choir (Dumitrescu-Perret, 2003).

Due to political conditions, in 1943 Perret and his family had to leave Romania after 21 years of missionary work among the Romanians.

The foreign missionaries had been preoccupied with training Christian workers in the newly formed churches in Romania, being aware of the fact that the Romanians would not have the freedom to preach the Gospel for long. The training was mainly done through the Bible studies that the missionaries held in churches, the regional conferences and the Christian literature they were publishing.

With a strategic mind, the missionaries selected young Christians dedicated

to God, whom they sent to study abroad in the Brethren schools, starting in 1905. Some examples are Grigore Constantinescu and Florea Moisescu, who studied in Switzerland. Viktor Kolle, Karl Schäfer and Ernest Nickecsch senior studied at the German Bible School, which was established in Berlin. After the Bible School was moved to Wiedenest in 1919, more believers from Romania—such as Gustav Nikesch, Willi Keep, Ioan Giurea, Dumitru Prişcu, Gh. Mocanu, Gh. Mardare, and others—benefitted from their studies in this school (Oprea-Ionescu, 1994, 29, 39). In this way, the Brethren churches in Romania adopted the doctrine of the Free or Open Brethren, as they were called in England.

In 1952 the Romanian authorities allowed these churches to function legally all over the country as a religious association with the well-known name of „Christians according to the Gospel Assemblies”, thus foreshadowing the Decree 177 of 1948 which founded the Christian according to the Gospel denomination.

During the communist era *The Path of Faith* was the only authorized publication which represented the official press document of the Christians according to the Gospel denomination, and it was edited in Bucharest.

The theology of the Christians according to the Gospel in Romania is evangelical, with just a few specific doctrines. Two main theological fields are specific to the Brethren movement. First, is ecclesiology, because the Brethren emphasize the plurality in leadership through elders and the autonomy of the local church. This is a characteristic that was preserved from the first Brethren Assemblies in Great Britain and Switzerland. Equally, the Lord's Supper at the center of worship is also a characteristic of the first Brethren churches (Rusu, 2011, 179-263).

The eschatology is a second theological area where the Brethren have specific doctrines, namely the premillennialist-pretribulationist dispensationalism developed by John Nelson Darby. The Brethren churches also have other specific doctrines, but they are not as preeminent as those in the area of eschatology and ecclesiology.

Conclusion

The Christians according to the Gospel churches in Romania belong to the Brethren movement and they were founded in 1899, when the English missionary Edmund Hamer Broadbent visited Romania and when the Bible School principal Francis Berney, a member of the Free Brethren Assemblies from Switzerland, moved to Bucharest. The Swiss missionaries made an important contribution to the development of God's work in the Romanian churches.

The Brethren churches from Germany also contributed significantly through the missionaries they sent to Romania as well as through the young people that

were trained at the Bible School in Berlin, and later in Wiedenest. Further, the Brethren Churches grew through the work of Romanian ministers, having their own evolution. However, the Brethren churches in Romania have remained attached to the principles of the Brethren movement worldwide.

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