

‘EARNEST TO MAKE OTHERS FREE’ J. H. Rushbrooke and Religious Liberty

INTRODUCTION

The title of this lecture is taken from a quotation at the end of Dr James Henry Rushbrooke’s address to the 44th annual assembly of the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches held in Bradford on 8 March 1939. His theme was ‘Spiritual Freedom from Constraint of Earthly Authority’. We shall return later to the content of the address, but now simply note the words with which he closed:

Is true freedom but to break
Fetters for our own dear sake,
And with leathern hearts, forget
That we owe mankind a debt?
No! True freedom is to share
All the chains our brothers wear,
And with heart and hand to be
Earnest to make others free.¹

It was primarily as a leader of the Baptist World Alliance that Rushbrooke developed and expressed a passionate concern for religious liberty. From 1905 when, as the minister of St Mary’s Gate Baptist Church, Derby, he attended the First Baptist World Alliance Congress, he became a keen supporter of the Alliance. He was a speaker at the First European Baptist Congress in 1908, and at the Second BWA Congress in Philadelphia in 1911. In 1913 he helped to organize the Second European Congress. After World War I the Alliance urgently wanted first-hand information about the situations being faced by the various national Baptist groups in Europe: Dr Rushbrooke and Dr C. A. Brooks of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Foreign Mission Board were asked to undertake a mission of enquiry. It took them three months to complete, covering the whole of Central and Eastern Europe from Finland in the north-west to Romania in the south-east. Russia and Bulgaria were the only countries which were inaccessible.² This task was undoubtedly a vital part of the formation of the internationalist and world Baptist leader-to-be, who would for many years champion the cause of Baptists around the world, meeting with kings and ambassadors, and negotiating with governments on their behalf.

But there were other significant factors in the making of the man. A primary one was John Clifford, his beloved pastor at Westbourne Park Baptist Church. Clifford’s international commitment as the first President of the Baptist World Alliance and the strong prophetic and socio-political tones of his preaching had a lasting impact on young Rushbrooke. When he entered the ministry those same emphases were soon apparent in his own preaching and teaching, as well as in his public and political activities. His personal letters often reveal his admiration for

Clifford, how much he owed to him and how grateful he was that Clifford and J. H. Shakespeare did all they could to encourage and advance his ministry. Another major influence was his links with Germany through scholarship in Marburg and Halle Universities where he was taught by Harnack, through personal friendships, and especially through his engagement and marriage to Dorothea Gertrud Weber, a daughter of a noted German painter in Berlin, Professor Anton Weber. Twice in their married life England and Germany were at war. The traumas of this, and of living through the rise and fall of Hitler and Nazism, introduced him first-hand to the ideological struggles which so often led to religious persecution and repression. It also enabled him to perceive the injustices of the Versailles Treaty and the tensions of the territorial and boundary changes it imposed, which were to be at the heart of so many European problems, and still are.³

It was no surprise when he was appointed as the BWA European Commissioner in 1920 for five years. From 1925 to 1928 he was Eastern Secretary for the Alliance. Then in 1928 he was elected General Secretary, an office he held for eleven years. In 1939 he became President for a further eight years until his death on 1 February 1947. Among the papers in the Rushbrooke Collection at the Angus Library is an unsigned tribute to him, obviously written before he became President in 1939. It states:

An outstanding feature of his activity first as Commissioner and afterwards as General Secretary has been his concern for religious freedom. Though directly representing Baptists alone, Dr Rushbrooke has never made a verbal or written pronouncement on the subject without emphasising the fact that his claim was not for any denominational privilege but for that liberty of conscience and worship which is the right of loyal and law-abiding citizens everywhere.

Such a testimony confirms that the words with which he ended his address in Bradford in 1939 were not emotional rhetoric. He faithfully practised what he fervently preached.

PRINCIPLES OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The Rushbrooke Collection in the Angus Library⁴ contains a considerable amount of primary material on this issue of religious liberty. It includes manuscripts of sermons, addresses, lectures and articles, together with numerous references in his official and private correspondence. There are some box-files of his correspondence as General Secretary of the BWA, particularly for 1938-1939, which was a period of intense activity in many countries.⁵ Other resources are newspaper cuttings from around the world, many reports, letters and articles in the bound volumes of the *Baptist Times*, and the official reports of the Baptist World Congresses, some of which Rushbrooke himself edited. This wealth of material enables us to get a clear understanding of the principles which he enunciated and of his total commitment to them. Examination of a number of documents will illustrate this.

1 The Bradford Address (1939)

Rushbrooke observed that some people were afraid of liberty because they interpreted certain actions as dangerous and unallowable licence; for example, evangelical preaching in situations where mass propaganda and 'mechanised opinion' were the norm. The totalitarian system treated human beings as cogs in the state machine, annulling their freedom and destroying their God-given potentialities. 'Against any such system and its governing ideas', he said, 'Christianity, rightly understood, stands and must for ever stand in radical and unswerving hostility'.

But he also affirmed that loyalty to Christ carried with it loyalty to one's own society and nation. 'Soul freedom' did not eliminate the contribution of Christians to the state. Frequently he had to counter complaints and accusations that Baptists were disloyal to the state, or revolutionary disturbers, or a foreign intrusion; so he was eager to urge them to show their loyalty through responsible citizenship. However, there was an important caveat. Although Christian involvement with the state was an area of critical importance, undue involvement led to patronage and coercion with calamitous results. He instanced Germany where the State controlled the Church, and Romania where an alliance of Church and State coerced minorities. He maintained: 'the church must always be free to criticize and question, while aiming to be loyal citizens and to co-operate when they feel able, from a position of freedom'.

Three other fundamental emphases appear in this address:

- a) *The claim to freedom carries with it the obligation to use it.* Not to do so is a surrender of rights. To surrender without qualification to any external authority is to shrink from Christian obligations. He even described absolute obedience to the dictates of state or church as a sin against the Holy Spirit.
- b) *The church is meant to be the fellowship of spiritual freedom.* He illustrated this by pointing to the Orthodox Church in Russia which, by its failure in this matter, had opened the way for militant atheism. Similarly, he blamed the Roman Catholic Church for the conditions of horror faced by evangelical Protestants in Spain, and criticized the subservience of Protestant Churches in Nazi Germany for the sufferings of people like Niemöller. He did not excuse Baptists either, for he was aware of the divisions and quarrels among them. No individual, caste or order had any right to lord it over God's people. In a fellowship of spiritual freedom where each man and woman had infinite and eternal worth and all authority belonged to the Lord, there was 'no room for a Fuehrer . . . even if you call him a Pope!'
- c) *Christians must concede to others the freedom they claim for themselves.* Any society which denied this would bear the seeds of its own decay. Religious freedom was a universal human right, not a privilege of our own or only of those who substantially agree with us. Therefore he would never claim for Baptists alone, nor ask for any special privilege. In fact, to seek liberty only for ourselves and our like would make us enemies of liberty in its only true

meaning.

2 His Address to the Second BWA Congress in Philadelphia (1911)⁶

The subject given to him was 'Individualism a Basis for Church Organization'. He started by saying that Baptists were irrevocably committed to individualism, that is the freedom and dignity of the individual human person. Vital religion is the free response of one's heart, conscience, intelligence and will to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. This, he maintained, was the foundation of Baptists' emphatic 'No' to all encroachments of civil power. Worldly authority, whether through coercion or cajolery, persecution or patronage, was an alien intrusion in the world of religion. He stressed that this Baptist doctrine of 'soul freedom' was an assertion on behalf of all our fellowmen of a right unspeakably precious to us. He described it as a right to be asserted 'subject only to the Crown rights of the one Redeemer and Lord'. It was essential in shaping the constitution of the USA, or standing against the inroads of the state-supported priest in English schools, or enduring hardship under a Holy Synod in Russia.

At the same Congress John Clifford gave his presidential address, devoted to the 'soul liberty' theme.⁷ To read that is to recognize the significant influence Clifford must have had on the young Rushbrooke, now the first pastor of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Free Church.

3 His Commissioner's Report to the Third BWA Congress in Stockholm (1923)⁸

Having given details of relief work in Europe since World War I and the exciting news of the establishment of seven new Baptist seminaries, he went on to say:

Quite as important as the relief work, scarcely less important than the preaching of the Gospel, and altogether in the line of our Baptist genius and history is the championship of freedom . . . I count this watching on behalf of soul-freedom well-nigh the most important and most honourable part of the duties laid upon me as your Commissioner.

The monitoring of the actions of many different governments kept him immensely busy. He reported that he was giving special attention to new national constitutions and the growing collection of laws and ordinances bearing on religion. Fortunately he was a gifted linguist, able to bring considerable skill to the urgent task of translating and assessing them. This enabled him to approach governments and ambassadors with expert knowledge. He reported that in five countries Ministers of State had received him with courtesy and with significant concessions. But he was far from satisfied. Spain, Poland, Romania and Russia left much to be desired. In many parts of Europe too many thought of liberty merely as tolerance. Rushbrooke was adamant that the two were not synonymous - a principle he was to press with great vigour when negotiating with Franco's Spain.

4 His Address at the Northern Baptist Convention, USA (1938)⁹

The theme this time was *Baptists as Defenders of Religious Freedom*. In the course of the address he expounded another fundamental principle, namely that soul liberty has a negative and positive emphasis. Usually it appeared as a denial of the authority of monarch or magistrate in the realm of conscience. But it was just as much a defence of the right to believe or not believe, to be orthodox or heretic. However much Baptists fought against error, they must also defend the right to freedom of those who disagreed with them. He quoted with approval Wheeler Robinson's claim that the twin pillars at the door of the Baptist tabernacle were evangelism and liberty. In similar vein, he quoted the farewell message which Dr Truett as BWA President and he as General Secretary gave when they returned from their tour of the Far East: 'As Baptists we cherish three great ideas: Truth, Freedom, Unity; and we rank them in that order'.¹⁰

FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE

In practice Dr Rushbrooke was involved with many nations in the pursuit of religious freedom, including the Baltic States, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, China, India, Russia and Spain. This paper deals with his efforts in relation to Spain and Romania.

Spain

In his book *The Baptist Movement in the Continent of Europe*¹¹ he described Roman Catholicism in Spain as 'in its worst form, allied with ecclesiastical greed and hypocrisy'. Ignorance, corruption, immorality and untruthfulness were widespread. The Church encouraged superstition and officially denounced private reading of the Bible as sin. Bitter persecution was the lot of those who disobeyed.

During the nineteenth century evangelical work began through the efforts of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Brethren, and the Metropolitan Tabernacle and Spurgeon's College. By the 1920s the Spanish Gospel Mission, founded by Percy Buffard of Regent's Park College and supported by the Baptist World Alliance, had developed Baptist work which was eventually shared by Swedish Baptists and the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. This was the period in which Rushbrooke became involved.

According to two articles by 'Observer' in the *Baptist Times*,¹² there had grown up a strong revulsion against the Roman Catholic Church, because it wielded strong political power accompanied by greed and corruption. The subsequent unrest culminated in the Republic of 1931. The first act of the new Republic was to grant religious liberty to all sections of the Christian Church. Roman Catholic domination ended. Many left the Church and joined evangelical churches. The Romans struggled for some years to recover lost ground, only to be crushed in 1936 when Republicans, Socialists and Communists swept into power. The aristocracy and army were hostile to the new government. The Roman Catholic Church allied itself

with them to remove the threats to its own position, and ultimately came General Franco's uprising and the Spanish Civil War. It was a confusing scene. The Republican government was not against religion as such, but opposed to the Roman Church's political activity. The Fascist rebels were fighting to restore power to the Catholics. Churches of all types were destroyed, priests and leaders were murdered, many evangelicals were shot in cold blood. A Franco victory was full of foreboding for evangelicals. Although he had promised mercy to non-Catholics it was general opinion that he would be unable to deliver religious liberty. He was much more likely to become the puppet of the Roman Church, who in turn would be only too willing to destroy evangelicalism.

In June 1937 Rushbrooke began to involve the BWA and to exert pressure for human rights and religious freedom. He appealed for funds to assist Baptists and others who were suffering severe losses. He drew attention to the plight of child refugees from the indiscriminate bombing of cities and to the many Spanish Protestants in concentration camps. A British Committee on Co-operation in Spain and Portugal was formed, convened by Kenneth Grubb of the World Dominion Press and Martyn Gooch of the World Evangelical Alliance, with Rushbrooke as an active member. By 1939 the situation was urgent. The President of the Spanish Baptist Union¹³ visited London in January to report to Rushbrooke and to appeal for help. A particular problem was that Baptist churches in territory occupied by Franco's forces were paralysed and there were many stories of deaths, torture and refugees. So in February Rushbrooke wrote to General Franco's representative, the Duke of Alba, asking for his assistance in guaranteeing protection and full exercise of religious freedom.¹⁴ He specifically related his appeal to the assurances which Franco had given and were transmitted by the Duke through the pages of *The Times*.¹⁵ A petition was also sent that the Revd Ambrosio Celma, a leading Baptist minister in Barcelona, whom Rushbrooke had known for over twenty years and could vouch for as a man of honesty and integrity, might be allowed to return from France to Barcelona to organize relief work.

Meanwhile Rushbrooke was in regular contact with the Marquis do los Santos, acting Spanish Ambassador in London. The Marquis stated that no permits could yet be granted to enter Barcelona. He then wrote somewhat ambiguously: 'Regarding your anxiety that due protection should be given to members of your church, I think that facts speak for themselves'.¹⁶ But according to Mr Vila, President of the Spanish Baptist Union, the facts were not at all reassuring. Many churches were still closed. Local authorities refused to carry out government orders to reopen them. Percy Buffard sent to Martyn Gooch a letter from Señor Zecharias Carles concerning the tragic prospect for Spanish Protestants following Franco's victories. He urged that the Committee for Co-operation in Spain and Portugal should send a strong appeal to the British Foreign Office.¹⁷ In a letter of 4 April Rushbrooke counselled caution and patience, obviously still trusting in the favourable action of the Duke of Alba.

Maybe he was influenced by correspondence he had had during February with Henry Brinton, the Honorary Secretary of an influential group convened by the Archbishop of York and known as the Council for Christian Democracy.¹⁸ It comprised nine bishops, the Dean of Winchester, the Master of Balliol, Dr J. H. Oldham, the Revds F. R. Barry, Sidney Berry, Scott Lidgett, Hugh Martin and others. Rushbrooke was also invited to join the group. Brinton wrote to him on 24 February with the draft of a letter to Lord Halifax at the Foreign Office to be signed by the Archbishop of York and Dr Rushbrooke. The letter raised the issue of the government's possible recognition of Franco's government. It did not question the right or wrong of such recognition, but upon what sort of conditions it should be based and with what inter-government relationship. Disquieting stories of persecution gave good grounds for anticipating that Franco would extort terrible vengeance on his opponents. His statements included nothing to dispel that fear. The letter urged the British government to insist as a condition of recognition on a political amnesty. It argued that it would outrage many consciences in the country if recognition was granted in a way that assisted Franco's vengeance. Henry Brinton expressed in his personal letter to Rushbrooke his concern that the government was concentrating on securing commercial and political advantages and was unlikely to raise issues of religious liberty if it would compromise that aim. When the letter was eventually sent, a reply was received from the Foreign Office, dated 27 June, stating that Halifax had not thought it desirable yet to take up the question of religious liberty in Spain. It would be wise to wait until the new Spanish government had established a stable administration.

It seems clear that Rushbrooke's caution was justified, for little was achieved through the approach to the Foreign Office. That was true even later in the year when he had contact with the Lord Chancellor. He hoped that the Chancellor might have more influence with the Foreign Office, but in November Martyn Gooch wrote to Rushbrooke saying that he had tried to persuade the Chancellor to pay an informal visit with him to the Duke of Alba and the request had come to nothing.¹⁹

I have not been able to date to trace any further details of negotiations. What is recorded here indicates the industry and thoroughness which Dr Rushbrooke devoted to the cause of religious liberty. Amid many significant achievements on behalf of suffering Baptists he also faced considerable frustrations. It is important to note the questions he raised in *The Times* when it reported the declaration of the Duke of Alba that Franco's policy was complete toleration for all Christian communions. Rushbrooke pointed out that there was more to freedom than mere toleration and put these specific questions:

Will all Christian communions enjoy -

- a) freedom to determine their faith and creed;
- b) freedom of public and private worship, preaching and teaching;
- c) freedom from any imposition by the State of religious ceremonies and forms of worship;

- d) freedom to determine the nature of their government and the qualifications of their ministers and members, and, conversely, the freedom of the individual to join the Church to which he feels called;
- e) freedom to control the education of their ministers, to give religious instruction to their youth, and to provide for adequate development of their religious life;
- f) freedom of Christian service and missionary activity, both home and foreign;
- g) freedom to co-operate with other churches;
- h) freedom to use such facilities, open to all citizens or associations, as will make possible the accomplishment of those ends, as e.g., the ownership of property and the collection of funds?

Surprisingly, Lord Phillimore replied in *The Times* of 24 November 1939 that he had full authority to state that General Franco's promise of complete toleration connoted the religious freedom so precisely defined by Dr Rushbrooke. He then repeated the questions and concluded: 'The answer to all these questions is: Yes'.

Needless to say, events did not confirm that claim. For us today the value of the correspondence is the comprehensive expression of religious liberty contained in those questions.

Romania

Baptist beginnings in Romania stemmed from Oncken's missionary work in the 1840s.²⁰ For twenty-five years he nurtured the young churches by supplying a pastor and by personal visits. Rushbrooke referred in his book about Baptists in Europe to the influence of Russians and Germans whom he described as 'Baptist colonists'. When the First European Congress was held in 1908, Romanian Baptists were represented but were still few in a small country.

Then came three significant landmarks. In 1911 Constantin Adorian, who had received theological training at the Hamburg Baptist Seminary, formed the first Romanian Baptist Church and became a strong and charismatic leader. In 1919 the treaties at the end of World War I gave Romania considerable new territories. These included Bessarabia, previously under Russia, and Transylvania and Banat, from Hungary. There were many Baptists among their peoples, who gave new evangelical and evangelistic impetus to Romanian Baptist life. But ethnic differences among them had caused problems in Hungary. The majority were Magyar communities which were accorded state recognition and gladly accepted it. The rest were a Romanian and German group who were not officially recognized and were unwilling to accept the need for it. They seem to have opposed each other almost as a matter of principle: a split which soon emerged in the new Romanian Kingdom.

In 1920 the third important change came with the establishment of the Baptist Union of Romania. Constantin Adorian was its first President. Romanians, Magyars, Germans and Russians had to come together to learn to live with their differences of culture, ethnic status, language and theology. At one stage a BWA

Commission, comprising John Clifford, J. H. Shakespeare and Dr Newton Marshall, visited them to heal divisions among the Hungarians.²¹ They reported that provisions for state recognition were inadequate for the full practice of Baptist principles.

Despite these problems Baptists grew rapidly. Their effective evangelism troubled the state, and because many of their churches were in the new territories it was felt that their national loyalty was in doubt and national unity was threatened. Meanwhile the Orthodox Church was embarrassed and began to protest openly against Baptist proselytism. Both locally and nationally the Orthodox hierarchy and priesthood were only too ready to encourage the police and the army to repress all evangelicals. They broke up services, closed chapels, flogged and imprisoned leaders, fined members, and stirred up the populace against them and the schools against their children. They even forbade burials and exhumed bodies already buried so that Orthodox priests could rebury them. Reports from some districts alleged compulsory baptism of Baptist babies.

However many appeals were made to the authorities, the new kingdom would give no legal guarantee of religious freedom. On the contrary, a state ordinance (No.15831) was issued on 1 April 1921, signed by the Minister of Cults. Rushbrooke, as Baptist Commissioner for Europe, intervened. Initially he secured from the Prime Minister a promise that in due course the ordinance would be repealed, but it never was. In 1923 a new State Constitution was approved. By annulling former Hungarian provisions, it deprived Romanian Baptists of proper recognition and they were on collision course.

Adorian reported to the Third BWA Congress in Stockholm later that year that the situation was serious and the suffering severe.²² Baptists were being accused of being in the pay of Hungary. They were presented publicly as anti-national, anti-monarchical, anti-military and Bolshevistic enemies of the state. He was convinced that a major problem was widespread ignorance of Baptist belief and practice.²³ He also paid tribute to American and English Baptists for their advocacy, and particularly mentioned the frequent visits, assistance and encouragement of Dr Rushbrooke. On Rushbrooke's initiative, Congress passed a strong resolution of protest and appeal to the Romanian government, urging it to secure real religious freedom and that no proposals opposed to this should be passed into law.²⁴

But a pattern was set which was to continue generation after generation, whether King Carol ruled, or the Nazis, or the Communists. Even in today's new democracy, so-called, the same ethnic differences erupt, and the Orthodox Church still seeks to use civil powers to coerce religious minorities. Yet Baptists have not only survived; they have grown to such an extent that they are now a major group of Eastern European Baptists.

By 1939 and onwards the Romanian situation devoured an enormous amount of Rushbrooke's time and effort. It is impossible to cover in this paper the voluminous correspondence and documents available, or the work they represent, but they can

be focused in one major issue, its threat to religious freedom and its ecumenical repercussions. The issue is the notorious Decizie No.26,208, promulgated in 1938 and signed by the Minister of Cults, Archbishop Colan of the Orthodox Church. Its effect on Baptists was catastrophic. For buildings to remain open for the use of religious associations without recognition as authorized cults, it was necessary to provide the names of one hundred (later reduced to fifty) male heads of member families. Only fourteen of the 1,602 Romanian congregations would be able to function - less than one per cent.

Rushbrooke immediately pleaded for the withdrawal of such a draconian measure. He sent a personal petition to the King. There was evidence that the King did not wish to persecute. Many Romanian citizens were known to express doubts about the policy. But neither King nor people wanted to be in open opposition to the powerful Orthodox Church, for not only was an Archbishop the Minister of Cults, but the Patriarch was also the Prime Minister. Church and Government remained unmoved. By the due date (15 December 1938) all Baptist churches were closed and remained so until 13 April 1939. When permission to reopen them was given, a major confrontation ceased but Baptist sufferings did not end. Persecution and martyrdom were never far away, and the cost to the BWA and so to Rushbrooke was constant vigilance.

A severe irritant to the events surrounding Decizie 26,208 was of an ecumenical nature. In July 1937 a World Christian Conference on 'Church, Community and State' had been held in Oxford. Among the 1,000 delegates was a group of Romanian Orthodox. The conference was intended as a mutual learning process, to recognize and respect major differences, but not to make any authoritative decisions. An official report would be sent to member churches for consideration and action. In reviewing the report (*The Freedom of the Church*) the *Baptist Times* quoted this passage:

In a State which is Christian by profession it is self-evident that the Church should be free to the fullest extent to fulfil its function. It should also be evident that where, in such a State, there are majority and minority Churches, the same essential liberty to carry out the Church's function should be enjoyed by minorities as well as by the majority. All Churches should renounce the use of the coercive power of the State in matters of religion. Membership of a minority Church should not be a reason for denying full civil and political liberty. ²⁵

Rushbrooke protested that the Romanian Orthodox delegates had supported that declaration publicly at Oxford and then returned home to set it aside and work with the State to deny Romanian Baptists their essential freedom. The report contained the eight assertions of religious freedom which Rushbrooke posed as questions to the Franco regime. The Oxford delegates described these as 'essential conditions necessary to the Church's fulfilment of its primary duty'. All these were openly flouted in Romania.

If that smacked of ecumenical hypocrisy, worse was to follow. Rushbrooke believed that one way to bring reasoned pressure upon the Orthodox Church was to appeal to the Anglican Church to make overtures to them. He sought the help of the Archbishop of Canterbury and then, during Canterbury's absence through illness, the Archbishop of York. They and the Bishop of Chichester, George Bell, were sympathetic. But Rushbrooke soon discovered that, although many Anglicans were in sympathy, none of them would range themselves publicly with the Baptists at the cost of public differences with the Orthodox. The Archbishop of York eventually wrote a most ambivalent letter²⁶ in which, while regretting the actions of the Orthodox, he felt that there were mitigating circumstances by which they were to be excused.

Several other Anglicans went further. The Bishop of Winchester categorically denied in a conference at Madras that the Orthodox Church had any responsibility for the persecution. The State had acted against Baptists because they were Communists. In any case, the Church had every right to suppress dissenting groups in Romania.²⁷ Canon John Douglas wrote to *The Guardian*, claiming that the Decree's sole purpose was to forbid propaganda subversive to the State, of which Baptists were clearly guilty. He described Romanian Baptists as 'a well-equipped landing party of an Anglo-Saxon invading church, the base of which is in America, and the present agitation in their name is not a claim for religious freedom, but a demand for licensed iconoclastic proselytization'.²⁸ The Bishop of Gibraltar, writing in the *Church Times*, expressed surprise that Baptists worldwide had taken up cudgels for Romanian Baptists and were claiming liberty for proselytism. He saw the Orthodox Church as the mother and guardian of the country, and described Baptists as an American and British bloc with whom it was strange that the Archbishop of York should make common cause.²⁹

Rushbrooke and his close associates were horrified. Amid this ecumenical mud-slinging, invitations were being sent out to churches around the world to join the proposed World Council of Churches. When Rushbrooke heard that the Romanian Orthodox Church had been invited, he wrote to the Revd Visser 't Hooft, asking whether their hostility to Romanian Baptists was being challenged and whether the Oxford declaration was to be suggested as a basis for all applicants for membership. The answer was a categorical 'No'.³⁰ This raised a crucial question: could Baptists in all conscience belong to a body where they would have to sit with those who were so ruthlessly persecuting their Baptist brothers and sisters? Rushbrooke was hesitant and some of his closest friends in England and America were adamantly against such a prospect.

Fifty-five years later it is a debate which continues, although the intervening years have brought many changes, and different issues are at the heart of the debate. Baptists around the world, now as then, hold varied views. The ultimate outcome depends on all concerned being aware of the whole story and being willing to learn the lessons of history. But that is another story for another time and another place.

NOTES

This paper was presented to the Baptist Historical Society Summer School at Aberystwyth, 2 July 1994.

- 1 James Russell Lowell, (1819-91).
- 2 April-June 1920. For details see J. H. Rushbrooke, *The Baptist Movement in the Continent of Europe*, 2nd edition, 1923, pp.199-201. It is stated here that only Russia was inaccessible, but see E. A. Payne, *James Henry Rushbrooke: A Baptist Greatheart*, 1954, p.36, where it is stated that a projected visit to Bulgaria had to be abandoned.
- 3 There is a document in the Angus Library giving Rushbrooke's views on the Versailles Treaty and its effects on the churches of Europe.
- 4 A list of the whole collection is available at the Angus Library.
- 5 The whereabouts of other BWA material and files from Dr. Rushbrooke's General Secretaryship is still to be established.
- 6 *Report of the Baptist World Alliance 2nd Congress, (Philadelphia 1911)*, pp.308-312.
- 7 *ibid.*, pp.53-70.
- 8 *Report of the Baptist World Alliance 3rd Congress (Stockholm 1923)*, pp.46-50.
- 9 This was delivered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on 28 May 1938. Slightly varied versions were used elsewhere during his tour of USA and Canada in that year. Later in the year it was published by Carey Kingsgate Press as *Baptists as Champions of Religious Freedom*, and was circulated to all ministers of the Baptist Union and to theological students in the denomination's colleges.
- 10 This was an extensive tour via the Middle East to India, Burma, Hong Kong, China, Japan, Honolulu, San Francisco, December 1935 to summer 1936.
- 11 Rushbrooke, *op.cit.*, p.189.
- 12 *Baptist Times*, 20 and 27 May 1937, pp.391 and 411.
- 13 Mr A. Vila.
- 14 6 February 1939.
- 15 27 November 1937.
- 16 10 February 1939.
- 17 These facts were reported to Rushbrooke in a letter from Gooch, 3 April 1939.
- 18 This correspondence began 22 February 1939, when Brinton wrote to inform Rushbrooke of the details of the Council with a formal invitation to join.
- 19 14 November 1939.
- 20 Rushbrooke, *op.cit.*, pp.157-63. Another useful source is Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour*, revised edition 1982, pp.350-79, with special reference to Baptists, p.357.
- 21 This actually took place in Hungary in November 1907, but the effects of the disagreements rumbled on for years, creating tensions within the new Romanian kingdom. See Rushbrooke, *op.cit.*, pp.155-6, 159-60.
- 22 *Report of the Baptist World Alliance 3rd Congress (Stockholm 1923)*, pp.51-4.
- 23 Rushbrooke also shared this view and frequently mentioned it in letters to Baptist leaders around the world. In the *Baptist Times* of 19 August 1937, when reporting a regional conference in Romania which he and Dr Truett had organized, he gave details of an ABC of Baptist tenets which he had issued for those outside the Baptist family.
- 24 The text of the resolution is in the Congress Report, *op.cit.*, Minutes, item 146, Friday, 27 July, p.xxxi.
- 25 *Baptist Times*, 4 November 1937, p.826.
- 26 20 January 1939.
- 27 Dr Charles Maddry, Executive Secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board, Richmond, Virginia, was present at the International Missionary Conference when this happened. He wrote to Rushbrooke on 7 February 1939, giving full details. Considerable correspondence ensued with Maddry and other Baptist and Anglican leaders, including the Bishop himself.
- 28 *The Guardian*, 27 January 1939. Douglas had earlier written in similar vein in the Anglican paper, *The Record*. Rushbrooke replied at once; his letter was published in *The Record*, 27 January. On 30 January Rushbrooke sent a reply to the editor of *The Guardian*.
- 29 This is discussed in detail in the *Baptist Times*, 3 November 1938, p.826.
- 30 This correspondence took place from 10 January to 27 February 1939.