

this fight with a spirit of great sacrifice; Vasile Talos is growing in moral and intellectual stature; Pavel Nicolescu is a man who stands firm like a rock; and Liviu Olah, bearing the cross on his back, is a tireless preacher who is drawing all of us after him into a deeper spiritual life. As we are all engaged in this spiritual struggle for our fundamental rights, we ask for your help.

We do not seek material things or personal advantages, but we beg you to inform as many people as possible in the West about our exact situation in Romania.

We pray for you all! A Merry Christmas with our Lord Jesus Christ and a Happy New Year!

25 December, 1976.

### Josif Ton Fasts

*The following letter, written by Josif Ton, was sent to the Council of the Baptist Union in Romania.*

I am writing this letter to you in the love of the Saviour who suffered and prayed for those whom He loved. I want to bring to your attention a decision which I have made after considerable thought and prayer before my heavenly Father for His light and guidance.

I have been deeply disturbed and pained to hear that you intend to dismiss two third year students from the Seminary. Having talked to the two concerned and others, I am convinced that they do not deserve such a penalty. On the contrary, I was persuaded that they were in fact victims chosen by you for punishment in place of the 20 students who have asked for more substantial teaching at the Seminary, including my own incorporation into its teaching staff. Although the injustice done at your hands to these two dedicated workers of God cries out to heaven, I felt powerless to counsel them in any other way than to ask them to accept the injustice, to endure the suffering, return home and demonstrate by their lives that they have indeed been treated with terrible injustice. That is what I said to one of them on 22 October 1976.

On 28 October 1976 I heard, however, that one of their colleagues, Viorel Clintoc, having been disturbed by what had happened, was led by the Lord to begin a period of fasting and prayer for the leadership of the Union which had committed this unjust act. He weeps in silence on his knees in the Seminary

chapel, pouring out his pain before God at the deplorable spiritual state into which all the students of the third year of the Seminary have been thrown by the arbitrary act of victimization against these two from among them.

When I heard of this action of Clintoc's, I exclaimed: "This boy has had to do this so that we might realize the full measure of our shame". At the same time I understood that the reproving finger of the Lord was pointing towards me and that His voice was saying: "You should not stay unmoved in the face of injustice. You, too, should suffer for these two boys who are in a sense suffering for you. You ought to be praying and fasting for those who have done them this injustice and who have oppressed them!"

I did not rush into a decision immediately, but waited to understand well all that had happened and to gain some understanding of the reasons behind the present deplorable situation in the Seminary. This is how I came to see things.

The real cause of the crisis at the Seminary is the greater and deeper crisis in which our Baptist Union finds itself at present. It is almost 18 months since the present leadership of the Union completed the term of office given to them at the last Congress in 1972. They should have made room for those who had been chosen by the brotherhood to succeed them. Furthermore, it is almost a year since the brotherhood actually elected other leaders, but still the old leadership has stubbornly continued to hang on to the helm of the denomination. They have refused to give way to

those who should have embarked on their leadership a long time ago. By invoking various pretexts of bureaucratic form and procedure, and by procrastinating and blocking any attempts to resolve the problems of the leadership of the Associations, the old leadership of the Union refused to call the Congress which was needed to ratify the new leadership.

Two weeks ago, Dr. Gerhard Claas of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) visited our country. During a telephone conversation with Dr. Claas (I was in Cluj), he told me that the preoccupation of the BWA, as far as their concern for Romania goes, was to see that the Congress was held, that the elected leadership was ratified and took their place as leaders. He told me that he had insisted on there being a round table discussion to be organized by the present leadership. The leaders should invite those who form the other camp, that is, the new candidates for the leadership as well as those brethren who are known to have different opinions from those of the present leadership. This gathering would then create the right *ambiance* for a Christian discussion in which to resolve the dissensions and renew the unity of the Baptist denomination in Romania. He said that this round table would be organized in three days (that should have been on 20 October 1976). I asked him whether he had received any guarantee that this would happen. He said that he had no guarantee as such, but he was promised that something would be done. I said that I could give him a guarantee that any such meeting would not take place. Unfortunately, I was right.

I mention this fact here because Dr. Claas has grasped an extremely important fact: that there has been no opportunity for conversation and discussion between the various factions in the conflict; therefore, we have had no chance of finding a solution in this crisis. If brothers would meet together, if they would only spend time first in silence, then in quiet prayer and finally in spoken prayer, would not that create a situation in which the Spirit of God could speak to us all and give us a solution to our denomination's problems?

This then is my conclusion on the

present situation of our denomination. The brethren are deeply divided and profoundly disturbed. The present leadership do nothing but aggravate the crisis. They do nothing to heal the situation. The injustice meted out to these two students is only a symptom of the disease. The systematic slandering of those in the "other camp" by every method and form possible is another, more grave, more tragic symptom.

What can we do in this situation? We are men who have repented: "We do not fight against flesh and blood", that is we do not fight against men; but our fight is "against the spirits of wickedness" (Eph. 6:12). So we are in a spiritual battle and have the spiritual armour of God. The greatest armour which the Son of God indicated to us is fasting and prayer. Hence my shame when I heard about Clintoc's action because I had not seen before that to fast and pray is exactly what we should be doing.

Consequently, I have decided to remain before God in prayer and fasting for three weeks, beginning on 1 November 1976. My intentions will be: to ask that God might enlighten the present Union leadership, that He might lead them to allow the two students who have been victimized to continue their studies with their colleagues, that He might show men that now is the time for unity and not division, and that He might enable a Congress to be called at which all the delegates who were chosen at the elections would be present. During this time I will not eat anything, but I will drink water as prescribed for long fasts. As long as my physical powers permit me, I will come every day to the chapel in the Union buildings in Str. Titulescu, No. 56. There I will spend the time in prayer.

I want to make it clear that, unlike fasting and praying in secret, my action is like that described in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. Through my gesture I want to call all the brotherhood to unity and love. I am not trying to strengthen one faction against another; I want to call all to fasting, and to prayer — prayer that we might forgive one another, prayer that we might begin working together again for God. I do not want any victims on either side; I

want to see complete forgiveness and reciprocal love manifested. This is why I have made this letter an open one.

Anyone who cannot forgive and love his fellow brothers as Christ our Lord loved every man, should not associate himself spiritually with this action. For its purpose is to arrive at the fulfilment of the commandment of our Lord Jesus

Christ: "Love one another, as I have loved you, so love one another. In this way will men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another".

With fullest Christian love in Jesus Christ,

JOSIF TON

Ploiesti,  
30 October 1976.

## Baptists in Bucharest Protest

*Baptists from the Mihai Bravu church, Bucharest, wrote the following letter dated 12 November 1976. In the autumn of 1976 many such open letters were circulated among Baptist congregations.*

TO THE COUNCIL OF THE UNION  
OF BAPTIST CHRISTIAN  
ASSOCIATIONS OF ROMANIA

Deeply concerned at the developments in our denomination today, we address you in the hope that, in spite of your constantly insensitive and stubborn attitude towards the disturbances and disquiet in our churches, you will finally act in accordance with the will of God and of His people in our churches. For the overwhelming majority of our church members the situation is both painfully and unpleasantly clear. You, gentlemen, do not represent anyone. Your mandate expired long ago. The elections of the Associations chose a new leadership which the Congress was to ratify later.

Honesty itself – not to speak of good Christian feeling – obliges you to take steps to respect the will of the people of God as expressed in the elections and to begin handing over the leadership in close collaboration with the members of the new Union Council. You have done nothing of the kind. On the contrary, more than ever before you have acted and still act feverishly in all kinds of ways which only devalue you even more. You are not serving the interests of the people of God, but only your own personal interests by holding on to your position as leaders in the sight of all when you are in fact no longer leaders.

Among the remarkable achievements of your leadership recently one might mention your attempt to introduce regu-

lations against the Statutes of your denomination – an attempt which fortunately did not succeed – and more recently your attempt to abuse without mercy a perfectly justified protest by the second year Seminary students against the declining standard of teaching on their courses. Even more recently, as if to cap it all, you have dismissed two of the students without giving any reason. These two students, in your eyes, were punished as an example to the others, so as to make the rest afraid to voice any dissatisfaction. But this action produced exactly the opposite result. A wave of dissatisfaction and unrest has swept over the thousands of believers in our country. Brother Josif Ton has declared a protest and is fasting for 21 days as a result. Today is the 12th day of his fast, and as each day passes you are being judged since you are responsible for the health and life of this servant of God.

We raise our voices in protest against your inhumane and unchristian attitudes. We ask:

- 1 That you all resign from office and thus facilitate the calling of the Congress.
- 2 That you start collaborating immediately with the new Union Council, which includes brothers Liviu Olah, Pavel Barbatei and Petru Belicov, and work together in preparing for the Congress.
- 3 That you reinstate the two students dismissed illegally from the Seminary.
- 4 That you quickly re-appoint Josif Ton as a teacher at the Seminary.
- 5 That you stop trying to force the entry of brother Ioachim Tunea