

a non-existent policy of the state (that is, a certain head of department, secretary of state or junior minister).

The open confession of religious conviction sounds a tamer accusation than the first, but it is more dangerous. The honest answer given to the mild-sounding question, "Tell me sincerely, are you a religious person?" becomes a confession that can be documented: "... openly admitted to be a religious person" — or in other words: "... has not yet expounded religious propaganda, but it is possible to assume that at a given opportunity he will openly proclaim his religious convictions in front of his pupils and that is essentially religious propaganda." This crime is made worse if the

person in question is a good teacher and has an attractive character.

Of course, one such report is not sufficient to merit punitive sanctions set out in written form with justifications, but it is enough to poison the air around the teacher. What head teacher enjoys a confused state of affairs amongst his staff, and what teacher cannot be found wanting by an alert inspector? The better the teacher's reputation, the greater the deterrent for the teaching community when their colleague's career is ruined and her life embittered by the fact that she [. . .] spoke as she felt.

Translated from Hungarian by Susanna Thatcher.

Reflections on Billy Graham's Trip to Romania

This samizdat "open letter" to Billy Graham was written by a well-informed Romanian Baptist who evidently took considerable pains to follow the American evangelist's week-long preaching tour of Romania in September 1985.

Dr Graham's visit, his first to Romania, took him to a synagogue in the capital, Bucharest, as well as to an Orthodox monastery and churches of several other denominations in various parts of the country. The Billy Graham Organisation's estimate of the total number of people who came to hear him was "well over 150,000" — more than any of the audiences who received him in the five other eastern European countries he has visited since 1977. Like his previous Eastern European tours, this one proved to be a source of controversy.

Just as at the beginning of any letter, I should like to introduce myself, in the hope that these lines will be better understood. I shall introduce myself in my two capacities: as a Romanian citizen and as a believer in God. From these two standpoints I shall look at Pastor Billy Graham's visit to my country in September 1985.

I learned of his possible visit to my country a long time beforehand, and wanted God to allow it, although with my human mind I was sceptical about the accomplishment of any free evangelism in these times. Nevertheless, I believed God would find the best way for one of His believing ser-

vants to proclaim Him in my land too. My scepticism went as far as saying, "Even if it is only people paid by the *Securitate* [secret police — *Ed.*] who are allowed to listen to him, it will be of great value for *them* to listen to the gospel of Christ!"

As there had been absolutely no official publicity by radio, press or television, and not even the leaders of the Christian denominations knew a week in advance what his possible itinerary would be or how he would be visiting the churches, I had to piece together the information which I found out from various towns by telephone in order to plan my own tour so that I could see and hear him and rejoice together with him and with many other brothers in Christ. Just one day before he arrived in the country I worked out his planned route. It was not easy for those of us who wanted to hear him to get hold of the petrol to travel by private car (it would have been impracticable by train), or to obtain official holiday time (we knew that we could at any time be stopped and identified so that the legality of our journey could be established), and above all to travel in cars which were allowed to be used on the Sundays he would be in the country (current laws do not permit us to drive every Sunday!). But the greatest fear in our minds was that we would not be able to get into the church or place where he was to preach.

The Lord God, through His working

which is beyond our understanding, resolved all these problems; and I was and am happy with the extent to which God allowed me to see and to listen to His servant directly.

My opinions will be set down in three parts: some consideration of the current state of Christianity in my country; my observations about the tour; and some final impressions in place of a conclusion. I believe I shall discover the conclusion with certainty only in Heaven, when I meet the Saviour and all who have served and proclaimed Him!

At almost fifty years of age and with more than 32 years' participation in the spiritual religious life of my people, I consider that Billy Graham's journey through my country has been a blessing. For me it is the greatest public miracle I have experienced in the conditions of social and political dictatorship of Romania's communist government. For me, all the events which have taken place will long remain overwhelming and inexplicable. To us, the citizens of a country with an atheist ideology, these events seem paradoxical, but the fact remains that he, Billy Graham, *did come!* I understood from the beginning that he had been invited by the government of the country, and so no religious group would be able to send him a special invitation.

The whole tour demonstrated the organisational capacity of the workers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs who, together with the Department of Cults, scored a great international propaganda success. On the domestic level, only we who are Romanian citizens were shown how well the Romanian *Securitate* control foreigners' official visits. In fact, not long afterwards, Mr Popescu, the Department of Cults director who accompanied him everywhere and who had drawn up the approved itinerary, was praised and promoted to a better job, in the diplomatic service! In this way the state politicians realised several objectives: Billy Graham was introduced to the people of various parts of the country, from several ethnic groups and from several officially-recognised religious denominations. The only direct contact he was allowed with the people was to shake hands with the few Romanian Christians who wanted to do so on their way out of church buildings.

Billy Graham is known through his writings, which have been illegally "sneaked in" to the country, to the majority of "Neo-

Protestant" believers—Baptists, Pentecostals, Brethren. A few Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics or Reformed etc. have also heard of him, probably from the news bulletins of foreign-language radio stations. Thus the majority of those who travelled from town to town and assaulted" the churches where he was speaking were members of these denominations. But their presence in extraordinarily large numbers attracted the attention of the public at large — non-Christian or Orthodox Christian — who became receptive and were present at the events which everywhere took place under the supervision of an excessively large number of *Securitate* personnel. I met them in several towns as either discreet or open observers making up the cordons which were barring access to the meetings.

My first observation about the tour concerns the concept of freedom. The official visit was free, but participation in the religious meetings was "free" in a sense that only we Romanians, who have lived through the years of communist totalitarianism, can really understand! Compared to Albania or Soviet Russia, there is religious freedom in our country! Compared to Iran, it is much better here! But we were not granted the elementary right to see him and hear him, except to a limited extent.

It seems to me interesting that the freest access we had was at the Orthodox monastery of Vorona in Moldavia, out in the country, where the impression was given that the large number of participants were . . . true Orthodox believers who had come to celebrate the feast of the Virgin Mary. In reality they were Baptists, Pentecostals and Brethren who had come from everywhere to listen to him, while the Orthodox were outside the monastery walls at the "Songs of the Wood" artistic festival which had been arranged at the same time, consisting of songs, folk dances, comedy shows, puppet shows, with guest singers and dancers from Soviet Moldavia! For this great quantities of drink and food (with a lot of meat) had been brought, so much that they declared: "We have never had such abundance for any . . . feast of Saint [sic] Mary!" The proof of this was that at the liturgy before Billy Graham's sermon almost nobody recited the prayers or made the sign of the cross, and the only singers were the priests at the microphone and the choir of nuns who had been brought in from

another monastery.

So access was free to anyone, within the limits of the places in the hall where he was to speak! At the Orthodox monastery, where Billy Graham spoke in the open air, the large number of participants were fortunate enough to see and hear him very well; while at Timișoara, where he visited an Orthodox cathedral, the Metropolitan seat in the middle of a university town, access was limited to those who succeeded in getting in three hours in advance, after waiting in front of the church since morning! The public at Oradea proved to be the most fortunate: there the hall was completely emptied of seats, admitting a very large audience, while those in the streets could listen to the loudspeakers which had been installed. When the official delegation arrived, they had to weave their way for a considerable distance through the crowds in the street.

The *Securitate* remedied this situation immediately. Two days later at Arad the official cars were protected by a large number of *Securitate* officials and three teams of traffic police so that they could reach the building, and when the delegation had gone in a padlock and chain were put on the door so that no more people could enter! The good thing, though, was that here too external loudspeakers had been installed, and the sound quality was good.

In all the other places Billy Graham visited, Sibiu, Bucharest, Timișoara, access was limited and those outside were denied the opportunity of hearing. Certainly the "best" controlled visit was at Bucharest, where access to the Philadelphia Pentecostal Church was permitted early in the morning. The right number of people were let in for the hall's seating capacity, and all the streets round about were blocked by the militia, hundreds of "Patriotic Guards" and the *Securitate*. In Bucharest, the time of the visit to St Joseph's Cathedral was advanced so much that only those who had arrived early and succeeded in getting in by the side doors were able to listen to him.

Billy Graham's visit certainly succeeded from the touristic point of view! I heard that he was taken to the monasteries of northern Moldavia, to a factory in Cluj (it seems he declined and only his son went!), to a collective sheep farm, and probably Curtea de Argeș or somewhere else — information is imprecise, since nobody was told the details, and only the official delegation went.

The most absurd thing I found out about, however, was the false hospitality given to Billy Graham and his delegation. In all the towns he was to visit the host churches received instructions to give expensive presents — not only to him and the foreign delegation but also to the Romanian delegation who accompanied him! In this way believers joyfully accepted the giving of gifts, however costly, for the sake of the foreign delegation and their message; but nobody understood why the *Securitate* officials employed at the Department of Cults, or even the denominational leaders selected by the Department to accompany him, also received expensive presents. The worst thing was that, although Billy Graham had contributed towards the obtaining of "most favoured nation" status with the USA, subsidised his own travel and paid for the right to have the tour televised, even though he was invited by the government of the country and accommodated in hotels closed to the public — immediately after he left the towns he visited the denominational leaders were informed that the entire cost of accommodation for the whole delegation had to be borne not by the government but by the believers, regardless of their denomination. This was the last straw! The sums were extraordinarily large, and we believe that the cost of accommodation at various hotels also included the expenses of hundreds of *Securitate* employees who had stopped believers from going into the churches to listen to him. The believers had therefore also sustained those who were guarding them so that they would not get near to or hear Pastor Billy Graham! It is interesting to note that, although a meeting took place in a Baptist church, for instance, the Lutheran or Reformed or Pentecostal church in that town was required to pay a share — even if all they had done was take part in the officially-invited delegation!

I shall make one more observation that I consider interesting. This concerns the average level of knowledge of our population. There was general confusion among those who did not know: I refer to the Orthodox believers who knew nothing about Billy Graham beforehand, and saw him dressed in a long cloak resembling that of a Romanian priest. As he was introduced both at Vorona monastery and at the Orthodox cathedral simply as "evangelist Doctor Billy Graham" and "Brother in Christ Billy Graham", the result was that

many of the Orthodox believers whom I asked "Who is the guest who is speaking?" replied that he was the Metropolitan of the Christian Orthodox in America. "How do you know?" I insisted. "If His Holiness the Metropolitan said 'brother' that means he is one of us, Orthodox — and he is wearing priest's clothes!" Indeed, Billy Graham never said anywhere that he was a Baptist, and consequently all the advice he gave in his sermons to remain faithful to the church and speak with priests and ask them for explanations was, in our situation worthless!

After he left the country, even knowledgeable people stated that Billy Graham was not a Baptist Neo-Protestant but a Reformed-Presbyterian, that is to say the representative of an American denomination or sect, just like many other American sects! The reason? A reduced and limited level of knowledge on matters of religious life in our country. The press, radio, television and the clergy never explain the real history of today's Christian church. The uninformed person receives a single message from our political and anti-religious newspapers: all faiths are manifestations of sects and aimed at man's undoing!

The second part of my thoughts and impressions concerns the tour undertaken by Billy Graham. All the messages I heard had an "introduction" with many social and political points, which took time away from the message of the gospel, and disappointed most of the audience. The non-Christians, hearing how he praised and extolled leaders

of a political party all too well known to the entire Romanian people, said the following: "Already this man is lying, so how am I to believe his Biblical message?" or "We know better who he is . . ." My own thought was: Did Billy Graham perhaps fail to inform himself in advance of the real nature of the "sincere, intimate relationship" between the people and their leaders? Would it not have been better to thank God publicly for the opportunity to be in Romania and preach the gospel there? Shouldn't he have been encouraging the people?

Similarly, his statement, made in Arad after four days' acquaintance with the people, in which he declared that "the Romanian people is one of the most religious in the world" is purely gratuitous, since the Romanian people, lacking free religious education, lost its spiritual compass more than 35 years ago and is proceeding, rather, towards paganism! His impression was totally false, because everywhere he went he was surrounded by Baptists, Pentecostals, Lord's Army believers etc., who knew who he was and something of his evangelistic crusades around the world. Similarly, the advice he also gave in Arad, that the place of all Romanians was in Romania and that they should stop seeking to emigrate to the USA, disappointed the audience. I heard it said, "Why is he making politics instead of preaching?"

Translated from Romanian by Paul Booth