



# Reaching and Serving the Persecuted Church

## IN TOUCH MONTHLY

1 October 2008

“Frail as summer’s flower we flourish, blows the wind and it is gone. But while mortals rise and perish, God endures unchanging on.” These immortal words of Henry F. Lyte are part of his 1834 hymn “Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven.” There is a lot of talk in our secular world today about change – usually unspecified. I’m glad we serve an unchanging God and Savior, Who changes not!

## “Which Way, Black Eagle?”

### ROMANIA

One of the more beautiful examples of Art Nouveau architecture of the early 1900s is found in the Black Eagle Palace in Oradea, Romania, home of ITMI Project Partners **Adi and Ema Ban**. Incorporated into the architecture of the surrounding complex, a passageway covered overhead with lead glass lazily winds through a nest of shops and comes to a point where one of three paths can be chosen, each leading off into different sections of the city.

Above this place of decision, a gorgeous black eagle is represented in the stained glass as flying in midair. Is he flying upward toward the sun with a renewed vigor for life? Or is he circling overhead leading lost souls to the path which leads to safety and peace? Which of the three paths do I take?

*“Which way, black eagle?”*



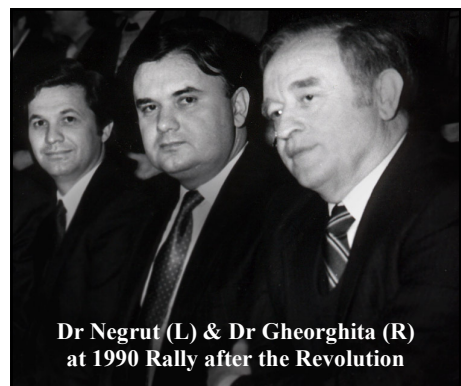
The Black Eagle of Oradea

Oradea, throughout its history, has been rich in symbolism – though the

atheistic Communism that prevailed in Romania in the second half of the last century sought to destroy meaning, purpose and significance by redefining life in purely naturalistic terms. This caused tremendous persecution against faithful Bible-believing Christians. Families were ripped apart by the intrusive policies of the government. It was better to say little, if anything at all, to anyone (including family members) in order to avoid harassment, beatings, imprisonment or death.

Even though some families drew closer to each other in these times of oppression, there was no real sense of normalcy in the family life. Under a government that questioned one’s every move, the natural bonding between parent and child could still thrive—even intensify in devotion to a degree. But communication between generations became dysfunctional in many families. Building a lasting relationship of trust was as difficult as walking on a tightrope set between two people. The rope could become as thin as a spider’s thread the closer one got, so why take the chance?

This was **the path of the older generation** under Communism and who can rightly blame them for having difficulty in relationships involving trust and communication? We must never forget those who were persecuted in Romania under Communism because of their public stand for Jesus and who “did not shrink from death” –



Dr Negrut (L) & Dr Gheorghita (R) at 1990 Rally after the Revolution

men like Ema’s father, Dr Nick Gheorghita and his fellow co-pastor Dr Paul Negrut. (Rev 12:11)

In the post-Communism world of Romania, freedom and a market economy have opened the door for rampant consumerism among Oradeans and the rest of the country. The old-generation Communists may have redefined religious symbols to suit their purposes, but the new-generation Secularists have greedily imbibed the Western status symbols with youthful abandon.

Since the 90s, younger Oradeans have been turning up the volume on the same secular humanist message that Americans have been listening to. Because of its seductiveness and deep-pocketed support base, the Secularist “song” has simply drowned out and overpowered the Gospel message in Romanian society. Without a strong voice for Christ in the marketplace and home, the resulting de-valuing of human life and relationships is seen in

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# Another “evil empire?”

Ronald Reagan was correct, though harshly criticized, for saying that the Soviet Union was an “evil empire.” Most of us agreed with him at the time – and time proved his assessment valid. Now is the time to speak out and identify another “evil” – Islam, which is far more dangerous than Communism.

America fought its first “war on terror” in 1801-05 known as the Barbary Wars. Americans saw a radical incompatibility between the Barbary system of Islamic slavery and their own budding Republic. Weary of the Islamic-Corsair pirates raiding American ships and taking the crew as slaves, President Jefferson’s answer was to “send in the Marines.” The US Navy’s Mediterranean squadron has virtually been on patrol ever since.

In his recent book, “The Islamization of America,” Abdullah Al-Araby (a Christian convert from Islam) outlines five of Islam’s many weapons used in the US against Americans: lying, sex, race, money and terror. We have written over the months on each of these weapons and how the Muslims use them.

A young girl in Saudi Arabia was brutally executed by her Muslim father in August this year after he learned that she had converted to Christianity. A Middle East business news website reported that the man, who is a prominent member of a “virtue committee,” first cut out his daughter’s tongue and held a one-sided religious debate with her. Then he burned his daughter alive. Muslims hold that their Prophet Mohammed taught that Muslims who convert to any other religion must be killed, often in extremely brutal fashion – it’s called “honor killing.”

Tolerance is touted today as the ultimate virtue, but Truth will trump it any time. “*You shall know the truth*” Jesus said, along with the promise “*and the truth shall make you free.*” This was said to a nation in bondage to Rome. (John 8:32) I believe it is also Biblically correct to say “the truth will *keep* you free.” ITMI has worked in both communist and Islamic countries – we are committed that you shall know the Truth and through Him be truly free. (Check out John 14:6)

Islam is not and has never been a religion of tolerance or peace. Before he even “discovered” his religion and singled out Allah, the “moon god” as the lone deity, Muhammad was a desert bandit, robbing commercial caravans along mid-Eastern trade routes. During his lifetime the “prophet” commanded his ruthless troops in 27 battles. Nor was there any mercy. After one victory over the hated infidels, he ordered all the prisoners of war to be massacred and their heads delivered to him. Through murder and coercion Islam successfully extinguished all other religions from Arabia.

Muslim armies gave their opponents three options before battle: (1) convert to Islam, (2) agree to accept Islamic law, domination and pay *jizya* – tax, or (3) be killed.

Within 10 years of Muhammad’s death, Muslim armies had taken Syria, Egypt and Persia [Iran]. Jerusalem fell in 638 AD; Caesarea in 641, Armenia in 643 and by 709 they had complete control of North Africa, which had been Christian for six centuries. In another two years they had subdued Spain and were headed for France. In less than 200 years after Muhammad’s death, 50% of all the Christians on earth had been slaughtered. The “Crusades” which followed were a reaction to this wanton genocide.

In resorting to force, Muslims have no problem finding passages in the Qur’an and Hadith that not only condone violence, but demand it. Someone counted 24,400 times the word “kill” and other words derived from it appeared in the Qur’an justifying “death to the infidel.” That’s us folks.

History is repeating itself. In Britain today, with just over 2% Muslim population, Shar’ia law is a parallel legal system alongside traditional

British law. This is endorsed by the Archbishop of Canterbury who stated last year that it was “inevitable.”

We need to learn from our Aussie friends ‘down under.’ The Prime Minister and the government of Australia have issued a decree that any Muslim who is predisposed to apply Shar’ia law above its national law will be deported. Period.

*Right on, Mate!*

We must not lose sight of this truth – Muslims are lost and eternally damned if they die without coming to know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Islam offers no assurance for the forgiveness of sin. Winning them to Christ is a matter of life or death – **our** life, or death. Under a Caliphate there’s no “separation of Mosque and State.” The Mosque is the State – and you do what the mullahs tell you to do.

We need to check the *tsunami* of Islamic immigration which will render this country uninhabitable simply because Muslims do not assimilate – they dominate. We need to be wary of any contender for the top office in this nation who spent the formative years of his life in Muslim countries attending Islamic schools; has three Islamic names and has demonstrated publically, both at home and abroad, that he is not a patriot of America “in its present state” and therefore seeks “change.”

What *exactly* does that mean?

**“Muslims are lost  
and eternally damned  
if they die  
without coming to know  
our Lord and Savior  
Jesus Christ.”**

October 2008

Dear Team,

We arrived back in the US last month for our annual medical check-up and found ourselves immersed in wall-to-wall election coverage that eclipses everything else going on in the world. The genocide in Zimbabwe and Sudan is off the radar screen. The victories and progress in Iraq go unreported and a major spy penetration by China's intelligence service has given the Communist's details on both targets and sources of US spying operations. The highest goal for an intelligence agency is gaining access to an adversary's codes and electronic intelligence. It gives China specific information of what is known, allowing Beijing to take defensive measures "based on knowledge, not supposition" and to "plant disinformation with confidence." This is the ultimate in *foreknowledge* advocated by the ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu.

American politics has traditionally been a blast. But it is blasphemy to make a community organizer into a messiah and terribly foolish to demean a duly-elected Governor by comparing her to Pontius Pilate. What has happened to our sense of spiritual values? Is tolerating this ugliness the result of abandoning our Christian roots and secularizing our culture? Shame.

Sadly, there are some pulpits across this great nation that will remain silent in the face of this outrage, perhaps for fear of losing their 501(c)(3) – but not me. ITMI will remain true to the Word of God. I thank the LORD for America and all the opportunities we have here. This is an election year and we are free to choose our next leaders. In the communist and Muslim countries where we have served Jesus Christ, leadership is decided by bullets or bombs rather than ballots. Pray for the candidates and plan to VOTE next month. It's our national birthright. See you at the poll.

On our trip home from Cape Town last month we were upgraded on the London / Phoenix leg to Business Class, where the seats fold out to form a flat bed. How very nice! It was a cherry on top of the whipped cream. We regard this as a specific blessing from the Lord. How else could British Air have known it was our 57<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary?

We're extending our stay in the US this time for several reasons; primarily to "wait on the Lord and renew our strength." (Isaiah 40:31) Think of it as a Sabbatical – we've been in Africa 7+ years. Please pray that we can use this time to prioritize ministry opportunities appropriate to our age group. Pray too for the ITMI Board meeting on October 11th. I value the input of these Godly men and women.



Adi & Ema leading Couples Seminar

Our lead story this month focuses on ITMI's second-generation missionaries Dr. **Adi** and **Ema Ban**. They live by faith and would be able to commit more time to this valuable work if they had more personal support to help offset the devalued dollar. Just thought you'd like to know.

Yours in His grip,



Bill Bathman

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recent statistics on abortion and divorce: Romania has the highest abortion rate in Europe (7<sup>th</sup> in the world) and a steady increase in divorce rates among couples in their late 20s/early 30s.

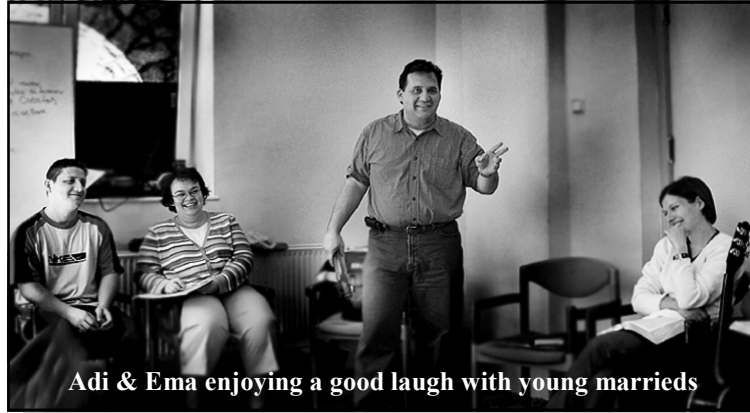
**This second path** promised freedom from a repressive political system, but did not truly liberate a people full of pent-up desires and dreams. After years of oppression, Romanians simply traded Communism for her ugly step-sister Secularism. This is why Adi and Ema's counseling ministry is so vital to those thinking of marriage. A clearer pathway must be marked out for them – one that is based on the word of God. Your prayers and financial support of the Bans are providing a **third path** as an option to these young couples.

Pre-marital counseling seminars have blessed many couples by dealing with specific issues that husband and wife should address together. Topics include: expectations, roles & responsibilities; learning to communicate, encourage & solve conflicts; appreciating spousal differences; enjoying godly intimacy; and managing family finances. A woman who attended the course said this: *"We had to answer quite a few questions we never thought of before. We were glad we had time to answer them and discuss what we each wrote down before we were overwhelmed by planning our wedding day."*

Just recently, Adi and Ema co-authored a book with David and Claudia Arp, American experts in the field of pre-marital and marriage counseling and hosts of a nationally syndicated radio program in the US called, **The Family Workshop**. Published in Romanian, the book *I Want To Get Married* incorporates

much of the material from Adi and Ema's pre-marital seminars.

The Bans also spend quite a bit of time mentoring the young marrieds in their church. In Adi's words: *"Your marriage is only as strong as your relationship with the Lord and your desire to grow together as a couple in His likeness."* Couples who gather in the Bans' home learn from Scripture how to better communicate and love each other by asking soul-searching questions which intimate Christian couples are unafraid to ask.



Adi & Ema enjoying a good laugh with young marrieds

As the years roll in a relationship, the greatest thief of intimacy in marriages is the lack of time between spouses because of increasingly isolated responsibilities of husband and wife. Isolated periods of non-communication between spouses must be always offset by periods of togetherness and open communication in Christ. And this *must* be role-modeled to the next generation of Oradeans if godly marriages are to advance the cause of Christ Jesus in Romania. Adi and Ema are passionate about this.

Couples are more open to communicating in a home cell Bible study group

than in a Sunday School classroom or seminar because of its smaller size and family-like intimacy. In fact, one of the couples from the Bans' home ministry will be starting a similar young marrieds project in Timisoara. Adi has also stressed that these home studies are merely a supplement to the building up of the Church as a body and not its replacement, something we must remind ourselves of in our own small groups here in the US.

The Bans are thankful for all those who have supported their ministry through the years and humbly ask for your continued support and prayers as they seek to grow their ministry in Oradea and throughout Romania.

Standing before the black eagle of Oradea once more, we see that while we can never go back in time to the start of our life's journey, we can make a good decision as to which path is the right road for our relationships in the present *and* future. And though the symbol of the

black eagle might be a throwback to the Hapsburg empire by a pair of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hungarian architects, the unintentional religious significance is profound: the flying black eagle often stood as an emblem in ecclesiastical architecture for John the Baptist – the messenger sent ahead of the Messiah to point the way to Him. Our mission at ITMI is to tell His story to the nations, for we know that there is **only one path** to safety and peace: our Lord Jesus Christ Who said, *"I AM The Way..."* (Jn 14:6)

*"Which way, black eagle?"* Indeed.

--Jeff Black, Tempe, AZ

### For Praise . . .

1. **The Bathman's** safe return to the US - and upgraded on the last leg of the flight!
2. **Adi & Ema Ban's** ministry to engaged couples and young marrieds in Oradea!
3. Increasing support for **Kelly & Cherise's Smith Medical Clinic Project** in Durban, SA!

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### For Prayer . . .

1. Upcoming **ITMI Board Meeting** on October 11, 2008 - wisdom & guidance.
2. Upcoming **US National Election** on November 4, 2008 - don't forget to vote!
3. Peace & stability in the upcoming **Zambian elections** following President Mwanawasa's death.

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