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First Response to the Laing Lecture 1992

David Blair

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How does one respond to the passionate plea of Paul Negrut? There is a sense in which I want to say that we should let it happen, that we should not interfere, and that we should learn to receive all that God is doing in Eastern Europe today. I think our history and culture still puts us in a great danger of a subtle form of cultural and spiritual imperialism. We need, then, to develop the concept of partnership. We must work out what it means for all the partners in the Eastern European context—both those from Western Europe and global Christians coming with Eastern Europeans—all to learn to give and to receive.

I would like to touch on three specific points which flow from some of the things that Paul Negrut has said. First, he has underscored the importance of capturing the seats of learning, the intellect, the minds and hearts of Romanian thinkers and those who will influence Romanian culture and thought in the future. This will be true for every Eastern European country. It is important for us to work strategically from the top down. I also think that Paul Negrut has emphasised the importance of working from the bottom up. In a recent trip to Romania, I was fascinated by the family I was staying with to see the interest and the absorption of the television programme 'Superbook'. So we need in our partnership together to encourage both the thinking and the doing, to encourage the work not only amongst the intellectual elite, the pacemakers, but also amongst the children and others in that society who are perhaps most vulnerable.

Second, I would like to comment on the importance and the place of Scripture in all that is happening. As we see the openness of the mind and heart of Eastern Europeans to God and an encounter with him, we ought also to see the primary need of releasing the word of God into the lives of children, young people, families, students, pensioners, and the life of the whole society. We need not only to give the Scriptures or share them, but to help people, giving them tools with which to use the Bible, read it, apply it, and live it out.

This can happen at different levels. There is a need in all our communities, West and East, to strengthen our hold on Scripture and our understanding of it. But in Eastern Europe, there is a great openness to learning Scripture, not only in the evangelical communities, but also in the historic denominations where, in places, Scripture has been set aside for tradition or for other kinds of teaching. The same is

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true for the lives of the hundreds and the thousands who are not yet Christians, who are coming to Scripture with an openness that we don't see in our country. So I believe that as the Western partners, we should be resourcing that openness and helping people come to grips with Scripture in all its facets.

Third, I would also like to underscore the importance of the indigenous nature of what is happening in Eastern Europe. Again, it is too easy to project a Western missionary mentality into Eastern Europe, to think in terms of what are effectively short term solutions, translating

and transmitting what is Western in our culture. Thus, I believe that we need to resource people to live out their own creativity. This means that we train writers, we don't just translate Western books; we train editors, we don't just send groups and teams to edit. We train people to use their craft, to use their God-given gifts, to reflect that which is already truly and authentically Christian in their own cultural context.

So let us sit and listen and receive. Let us join hands with our partners in Eastern Europe and share in the blessings of the Gospel.

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