

Current and Future Trends

In Central and Eastern Europe

Considerations for Missions in the 90's

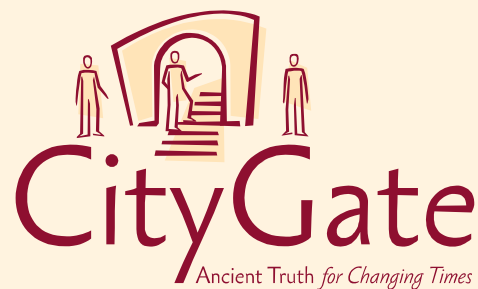
A CityGate Field Study

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CITYGATE EXISTS TO STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH BY HELPING PEOPLE
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This is the first edition of this paper. We would like to thank all who shared their experiences and helped us with their insight. We would appreciate all your comments and critique. They might help us to fill the gaps we left out and correct our unintended mistakes.

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INTRODUCTION The Rediscovery of Eastern Europe

Since the summer of 1989, the pace of change in Central and Eastern Europe has been explosive. Media coverage has raised the profile of the area to a higher level than perhaps ever before. This has led to considerable discussion of how Christians should respond. There has been a flurry of activity directed toward the region.

The increased interest and action has raised the concern of missions and national leaders who have been inundated with requests for information and cooperation from well meaning foreign Christians.

New groups coming into the area sense defensiveness from more established groups. On the other hand it is frustrating for the established mission agencies to see dear friends in the field overwhelmed by waves of newcomers with good intentions.

It is encouraging to see so much dialogue and renewed interest. It is important at this critical time to identify issues which are of long term significance. The historical magnitude of recent events draws us to immediate action. We hope that the following themes will help stimulate those who are new to the area, as well as those who have been working here for many years, to careful consideration as they seek to discern the voice of God.

This paper attempts to address questions affecting both believers and non believers. It touches on history, society, geography, religion and mission.

1. THE END OF THE BLOC MENTALITY

The diversity within the region known as the "Eastern Bloc" is finally being widely recognized. Old labels with loaded and sinister meanings are dead or dying. Terms such as "the East", "Eastern Bloc", "the Iron Curtain countries" and even Eastern Europe¹ (which has been a political term since the cold war) are almost passé. They have been to some extent dated clichés for several years.^{2,3} Now that the "Berlin Wall" has fallen, the media is looking for new labels. This is healthy. It means that the bloc mentality, for so many years a hindrance to the development of appropriate responses, can be critically examined.

New labels are appearing. "Central and Eastern Europe", "The Emerging Democracies", "Inner and Outer Europe", "The Area", "The Region", etc are just a few of these. It is interesting to note once the political concept of "The Bloc" is removed, no single name defines the geographical area.

Linguistic, cultural and religious considerations are far more appropriate than the political orientation which has for so long dominated thinking and mission policy.

1.1 Regionalism

As the Bloc mentality disappears the area will be seen in terms of regions. These will overlap. For example:

- a) Austria / Czechoslovakia / Southern Poland / Hungary / Transylvania;
- b) Romania and Moldavia;
- c) Balkan region: Bulgaria, Macedonia, Turkey, Southern Yugoslavia and Greece;
- d) North-eastern Europe: Poland and the Baltic States;
- e) Various parts of the Soviet Union will be considered as individual nations, although perhaps still within a federation. (The USSR will be considered more as a Commonwealth, than as one State.)

These are based on the following considerations:

- i) Political: Historical realities before the restructuring of Europe following both World Wars.
- ii) Cultural/Linguistic: Distinctions between the Slavic, the Hungarian, Romanian, Greek, Turkic, Germanic peoples.
- iii) Religious: Orthodox, Roman and Greek Catholic, Protestant, Islam.
- iv) Political, economic and social direction: Moscow no longer dictates all policy in the area. Several nations are looking west for economics, politics, culture, and values.
- v) Geographical:⁴ "Eastern Europe", as a whole, has moved west. In geographical terms Warsaw used to be viewed as the center of Europe. In one recent and (very) forward looking article⁵ it was stated that Armenia might join the European Community of the future. But this is no longer how the average man perceives Europe. The question is now being addressed, "Where is Europe?" Metternich said that "Asia begins at the Landesstrasse"⁶ The Russians have struggled with this question since Peter the Great tried to bring them into the western sphere of influence and the enlightenment; they must now face it.

Mission Response

Missions which come to grips with these realities, will of necessity become more specialized, and there will be greater emphasis on thorough training and cultural sensitivity. Regional issues which cross state borders will be important.

2. INSTABILITY

There will continue to be instability in Government, Economics, Social Structures, and indeed in every major area of life for several years.

2.1 Political

We hope Spring elections will bring some stability. Each country must rewrite many laws therefore this may not happen quickly.

Countries formerly a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire may stabilize more quickly than those to the east and south. For an extended period of time its bureaucracy provided a level of stability and autonomy from which the designers of the new states will be able to draw.

Old tensions concerning political boundaries will not be settled soon (if ever, given the history of these nations). Discussions on the independence of the Baltic States, German re-unification, Polish borders, and the Transylvanian question have raised anxieties throughout Europe.

2.2 Social

People can only take so much change at one time. Change must be mentally digested. A response takes time to crystallize. The pace and volume of change is already taking its toll. In the early months of 1990, many people were exhausted. They struggle to come to terms both with the present changes and future uncertainties. This is a reality both on the national and the individual level. At one and the same time people want the changes to slow down but also want them to speed up. They want to have insecurity behind them but cannot cope with the pace of change. This dichotomy is difficult to live with.

The very fabric and structure of society is in question. The communal system and egalitarian values have been deeply embedded in the society's framework. The socialist idealism of the early fifties aimed at destroying the previous social framework. It remains to be seen how deeply this has taken root.

2.2.1 Revolution 'against', rather than 'for'

People are against corruption, against oppression, against monopoly of power and communication. But they are not yet sure what they are for. There are vague, sometimes naive or idealistic notions of what it might be like to live in the rich West. Most of these notions are highly caricatured and based on limited travel experience or television programs. When they see reality and experience inevitable slow and painful growth, there will be much ground for disillusion and resentment. Many are already expressing shame at their economic position in comparison to the "West".

There has been an immense release of pent-up anger and frustration. The first object of this is the leadership, then the economic system and corruption. It is not necessarily directed against Communism as a principle, although this depends very much on the country and social group⁷.

Once the initial backlash against communism and socialism has been overcome, there may be a drift back towards the left, especially as economic disparities become wider and wider. Already in Hungary and Poland there is a new rich elite⁸.

2.2.2 Civil War

The possibility of civil war should not be ruled out particularly in Romania, the Balkans and the Soviet Union.

The potential for regional or continental war, while unlikely, is not impossible. The picture of a rump Russian state separated from western Europe by Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary; encircled by an independent Ukraine and Moldavia; cut off from access to the Baltic by small, hostile, independent states; and threatened by aspiring Muslim nations in the south cannot be agreeable to a nervous Russian General staff. Seeing the dangers, they could decide to strike while they have enough power in order to maintain Russian dominance. This has to be balanced against the ethnic tensions already apparent in the Soviet Military structure which add to the worries of the Generals but weaken their ability to take action.

2.2.3 Lawlessness

In each country there are degrees of lawlessness due to the partial collapse of the authority of the state. Everyone waits anxiously for the elections. In the USSR there is an alarming increase in violent crime and fear of the authorities is being replaced by fear of violent gangs.

2.2.4 Economic

The scope of social and economic restructuring is stunning. Its impact should not be underestimated. State companies are no longer investing as they are uncertain of the future. The work force is demoralized as they contemplate mass unemployment, which until recently was considered a capitalist complaint. There is growing frustration as people wait for economic laws to change.

Mission Response

The obvious concern of Missions is how our message addresses the problem of instability. What does the gospel have to say to those living through unstable times? What aspect of God's character and message needs to be emphasized.

This is not the time for the "total answer" package or "quick fix remedy". We face complex issues and should be looking for long term solutions combined with flexibility.

Mission workers planning to move into these countries will need to be emotionally stable if they are to do much more than survive.

Missions will need to consider how instability impacts logistical issues.⁹

3. The Re-emergence of NATIONALISM

The First World War completed the demise of the large and once powerful Empires of Central and Eastern Europe. These had already been weakened through powerful nationalist movements. Seeing their opportunity, these movements increased in strength during the inter-war period. Czechoslovakia and an expanded Romania emerged for the first time as sovereign states. Nationalist aspirations were repressed in the post-war period but are now resurfacing.¹⁰

3.1 Nationalism vs. Consumerism

Nationalist aspirations in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Northern Yugoslavia may be overshadowed by consumerism. Those countries having the possibility to obtain economic prosperity quickly may see economic issues taking precedence over nationalist ones.

In Romania, where economic growth will take longer, nationalism could remain a grave problem. Yugoslavia may face greater tension as the loose federation of ethnic groups disintegrates with each group looking towards a different source for help on the path to economic growth. Further east one could expect more serious problems to develop. The value of consumer goods is not likely to rise in the near future to the point of challenging traditional religious and ethnic values.

Now that Albania has opened up one must look more seriously at the nationalist tensions in Kosovo. What of the Turks in Bulgaria? Or the Gypsies in each country? What will their place be in the emerging system?

3.2 Nationalism and Religion

Religion plays a major part in ethnic tensions. Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs still have painful memories of the mutual butchering which took place during W.W.II. There are already signs in Poland of Catholic triumphalism over the communists. In Romania rumours circulate about the possibility of restoring the laws of 1928, which favoured the Orthodox church. This would give them control over Protestants and Catholics. National Religions, whether Orthodox, Catholic, or Islam, could become a measure of national loyalty and identity.

There are great tensions in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia as the influence of Muslim brotherhoods increase. In Kosovo and Soviet Central Asia violent crime is on the rise. Christians (of both Russian and German origin) are being advised to leave before the anticipated blood bath begins. "I respect you so I'll kill you myself with this knife when it begins," one Tadzhik told his Christian neighbour who intends to remain, "so others can't torture you to death!"

Any minority can expect to be persecuted, be it religious or ethnic. Such groups will include Protestant and Jewish minorities.

Mission Response

"In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek". Does this mean we as Christians should ignore the national questions? Definitely not. As missions specialize on particular people groups, they must consider what their strategic exclusiveness communicates to other people groups within the same State.¹¹

Missions which maintain a broader focus, will have to deal with prejudices and tensions between the Christians they work with. They must encourage national Christians to reach out to the minority groups within their own societies. What clearer picture could there be of the transforming power of Christ, than a Bulgarian Christian reaching out to a Turk as a brother and trusted friend? How moving it is to see those few Slovaks who are deeply burdened for the spiritual and physical well being of their Gypsy neighbours.

In some areas of ethnic conflict missionaries from outside might play a useful role in reaching local people in areas where National churches find ethnic tensions too great an obstacle.

Nationalism and consumerism have brought about a shift in emphasis from the study of Russian to the study of western languages, in particular English and German. Teachers of English are in high demand in many countries. This is an excellent opportunity for tentmakers. It also offers great opportunities for Christian English language schools.

4. PROBLEMS OF CHOICE

These countries are emerging from an enforced ideology where any divergence from the status quo was discouraged. Suddenly people are faced with choices in almost every area of their lives. There has been almost no tradition of democracy or freedom of choice. It remains to be seen how people come to terms with these issues.

4.1 Background

Politically, we are witnessing the first free elections in decades. Economically, the markets will become flooded not only with new appliances, clothing and foodstuffs, but different models, brands, quality levels, colours and flavours. Socially, status will be defined by completely new material standards. In the religious realm, all manner of cults, religions, and missions, are vying for converts and control.

People are used to long lines for almost everything from petrol to bread. There has been very little choice in consumer goods. People were discouraged from assessing situations or products, because it was obvious that things were not as promised, or as they should be. Vaclav Havel has said, "Whole branches of industry are producing products in which nobody is interested while we have a shortage of products which we need."¹²

Now there is already a great rise in the choice of consumer goods, but this is not yet normal. Many products are only available for hard currency, or are priced beyond the range of most citizens. Some areas have almost everything available (for a price) while others have perhaps less available than before.

How does one decide? Even in our own societies the range of choice can be overwhelming and it is difficult enough for us. But for the Czechoslovakian first going into Vienna, there is shock, bewilderment, and disorientation.

The East Germans, so numbed last October, are already hardened to the onslaught of options and are more caught up in materialism than ever.

4.2 Political

These countries are, at last, able to hold free elections. However they have very little historical experience with broad based democracy. It is not without reason that "Balkanisation" is the word used to describe the splintering of society into many smaller groups, each with its own strong - minded leadership. One sees this in the plethora of political parties contesting elections. The Czechs are proud of their own creativity and ingenuity, and perhaps they will develop a system which will become a model of decency, justice, and morality even for western nations. But President Havel is the first to admit that they have a long way to go. On the other extreme, the concept of democracy is foreign to Romania and Bulgaria. It is only a little over a hundred years ago that they came from under Turkish domination. Their successive governments can hardly be considered democratic. Everyone from the politician to the peasant, has much to learn about the responsibility of democratic government, if that is indeed the form future governments take.

4.3 Social

Under the socialist system, responsibility and risk taking were removed from most people. There was security in the masses, a shelter from the risk of taking personal responsibility. No one had to stand out and be himself; this was strongly discouraged. People were merely productive machines with no need to think. They were not rewarded, and sometimes penalised, for taking the initiative. The trauma of being required to make individual decisions is now evident throughout society. They must come to terms with the insecurity and responsibility of difficult and complex choices.

This security in the crowd is manifested in the mass responses to the Gospel at many of the crusades that are taking place. People are coming forward en masse, nameless and faceless, like at a Ceausescu rally. But stepping out as an individual is much more traumatic, and like those baptized in the first century, takes greater courage and commitment. Christians are also afraid of stepping out of the crowd. At a recent evangelistic effort on the street in Bulgaria,¹³ some national Christians were thrilled to be able to sing and preach openly. They were elated as about twenty people came forward at the invitation, and were prayed over by the group. But they froze when challenged to talk individually with those who responded. No names or addresses were taken, and there was resistance to the suggestion of any form of follow-up. Group evangelistic effort is popular, as is the inviting of foreign evangelists. But there is still a fear of taking individual responsibility.

It can be argued that the freedom and multiplicity of choice are significant factors in making life in the western world so complicated and time consuming. One does not choose between one video or nothing but rather between 50 types and models. Once the decision is made doubt lingers about whether it could be found better or cheaper somewhere else. We ask where the time has gone and the answer must be that a good part of it has gone in choosing. We are drowning in choice. This is almost unknown in the "Eastern Bloc".

4.4 The "Hoarding" Church and "Consumer" Missions.

Valid choices are made on the basis of accurate information and proper evaluation. Choice involves the weighing of one option against another and digging beneath the surface of the initial "sales pitch".

Church leaders in the emerging democracies live in "another world". They often have a different world-view, set of assumptions, values and expectations. They have little experience in discerning between ministry options. They are used to waiting for hours in a line for something they do not need, simply because it is available now and they don't know when it will be available again. "Hoarding" is one term for this.

This is one of the reasons many Christians are saying yes to almost every Western proposal and program which is being offered. They are still learning how to discern, and may be intimidated by the responsibility of choice. Experience has taught them that many promises will not materialise, and they therefore agree to as many as possible, hoping that at least one will come to fruition. This could be seen as the hoarding of programs. Presently more of these programs are taking place than they at first expected, and this is leading to burn out, superficial results, and short term commitment. On the western side poor communication and the belief that that group is the only one doing the work adds to this chronic overload.

Mission Response

We must recognize that in many issues we are not competent to advise on which choice to make. Indeed to advise might lead to serious damage. We do not have the background. We must give our friends time to make adjustments themselves. We cannot make the adjustment for them. There will be national leaders within the churches to whom decision making will come naturally but others will be crushed by the burdens involved.

The increase in stress is already creating new pastoral needs, worries and stress about every area of life. This is not a time to take the pastor away from his people. Within the church we should encourage the development of caring communities in which to deal with the problem, but within mission policy is essential that "national leadership" takes its rightful place. However this is a locally recognized leadership, not necessarily those who merely speak the same language as we do.

The problem of choice brings up an issue that needs to be stressed: the competition between Western groups. Romania is presently "the place to be". As Christians are swamped by Westerners pushing their own programs, great damage may be done. Even more than before now is the time to seek co-ordination and more integration of long-term planning. We must examine the validity of project-orientated work. Understanding, trust building and listening must precede activity. One long-term mission priority must be to develop an analytical approach to the field.

5. COPING WITH FREEDOM

People are stunned! After years of oppression they have a particular mind-set. To the question: "What is the first benefit which you have from this new freedom?" "We have freedom from fear" is often the answer. We are free to ask questions, to ask openly.

5.1 Freedom to communicate

"Dear Fellow Citizens, "For the past forty years on this day you have heard the same thing, with variations, from the mouths of my predecessors: that our country is flourishing; that so many million tons of steel have been produced; that all of us are happy; that we trusted our government; and that beautiful prospects were opening up before us. "I imagine that you did not propose that I should take this office to hear similar lies from me." Vaclav Havel's New Year Address.¹⁴

Communication is the flow of information and ideas. After years of being trapped behind the dam, the floodgates have opened.

5.1.1 Hindrances

In the past, people behind the "Iron Curtain" learned "double speak". They learned to read between the lines, to take and interpret a hint and communicate with a nod and a wink. Such subjective communication leads to the circulation of rumour and to many ensuing problems. Although on the surface it may appear that people are free to communicate, we must not ignore the influence of the habitual use of these more subtle forms of communication. People are still careful what they say. They still weigh out the situation. It will take more than a pleasing election result to restore shattered trust. In the Balkans this necessity for double meanings and subtlety dates back much longer than the recent history of communism; it developed under centuries of Turkish domination.

The freedom to communicate is hindered by inadequate infrastructures ie: postal systems which cannot handle the volume of mail; antiquated systems of payment; shortages in paper, envelopes, stamps; outdated and inefficient phone systems, etc. This increases the frustration level.¹⁵

Everyone craves information. Everyone wants to know what is happening and who is doing what. Is anyone doing something that will cross with my plans? Much of this is fear driven.

People have become used to working without writing things down - a necessary security precaution -, they are used to communicating without the telephone or any other modern communication system. They are not used to the increased pace of work or accountability made possible through the openness in communication. They must learn how to live with it.

Mission Response

Suddenly it is feasible to write to or telephone a pastor, youth leader or other Christian one is working with. Decisions that once involved a long and carefully planned trip, full of security precautions and uncertainties, can now be made after a few minutes conversation on the phone. There will be a need to slow down! Many people are working day and night in order to keep up with the change.

There is a need to teach and practice the basic Christian truths about walking in the light, listening, being objective and challenging others to be so. Management skills will also be needed; how to work together; how to work with a Board; the reasons for accountability; how to take notes and minutes; how to be open and not do things secretly.

5.2 Information overload

In Hungary one sees a vast array of magazines and newspapers reflecting every political, economic, and moral value of the spectrum. Other media such as television and radio are also expanding rapidly. In East Germany and Czechoslovakia during the Revolutions, people were glued to their television sets because they finally felt they were receiving information that was close to the truth. Lines for newspapers in Romania during the Revolution were as long as those for food. The hunger for information remains. People are learning to trust and believe the written word again. They are being stimulated and encouraged to think. This contrasts with their experience of the last forty years.

But they are being overloaded. They are drowning in a sea of information. It is impossible for them to digest everything that they are given.

Many Christians accept at face value whatever a Westerner preaches or writes. "Since something is written in the west, it carries intrinsic validity in the eyes of Bulgarians"¹⁶. This also opens the church up to heretical or extreme teachings. They have little experience in discernment.

In contrast, more conservative groups in the USSR have been encouraged for many years by Western admiration of their suffering and faithfulness. A certain arrogance has developed. Older leaders of the "uncompromised" church take pride that they alone have stood faithful to New Testament principles. Consequently there is an innate suspicion of anything that comes from the West. It all has to be strictly vetted and controlled.

5.3 Freedom to evangelize

With the lack of fear, people now show an interest in religion and ask questions. One pastor went to get his camera repaired and when people realised he was a Christian, they stopped working and asked him to talk about Christianity.

Another went to the Bank to do some church business. He ended up holding a bible study. Stories abound of prison evangelism; although one hears less about the type of message that is preached. While there is much activity in response to the massive demand for Bibles, tracts, biblical literature, less thought is given to the content of the message. Christians given the opportunity for prison visitation in Czechoslovakia suddenly realised they didn't really know what to say.

In some areas it has suddenly become respectable to be Christian. Now there is much opportunity to bring Christian influence to different strata of society e.g. in the Universities.

Mission Response

Missions involved in long-term teaching, in counselling pastors, in church planting and the establishment of educational systems and literature work need to address the question "what is our message?" This long term work cannot be done in a moment of excitement. We need to think through issues of communication. It is not enough to say we have to preach the gospel. We need to know the basic questions that people are asking. These will not be the same in each country.

It is necessary to gain a truer understanding of these societies so that we can evaluate whether the message is truly being understood, and discover how it can be more clearly communicated in the context, in a way in which it will contrast all the other information being thrown at them.

Newspapers, magazines, radio and television programs, and performing arts can all be used for the proclamation of the Gospel. Many other creative avenues for evangelism exist such as English language schools and lecture tours by Christian specialists or for Christians to take the lead in Business Management training, where Christian ethics are at the centre.

5.4 Ethics and Morality

People are quickly becoming acquainted with the bad side of freedom. First is the growth of pornography. There are already pin-ups in the press. Reports from East Germany talk of large pornographic concerns wanting to open up sex shops in all major cities. In Romania, there is now non-stop television where it was rationed before to a few hours a day. Programs are not selected according to their moral quality. What is surprising is the lack of discernment on the part of Christians as to what, and how much, they allow their children to watch.

Freedom brings bewilderment in the area of morality and ethics. Many issues must be thought through. Accountability structures must be re-established. Christians have learned how to use accounting systems which are meaningless. Since the Bank was a means of monitoring financial transactions, people either paid in cash or kind, rather than use it. They have learned how to deal on the black, white and grey market. It will be a long time before the moral effect of years of this activity will be understood. For us as Westerners certain examples are most disturbing.

i) A Christian leader recently asked a western mission group for a car. His purpose was to give it to the vice-mayor of a major town in order to get permission for a plot of land on which to build a new church.

ii) A recent report suggested that some Romanian Christians were smuggling goods through customs to sell in Poland in order to gain money with which to fund their summer ministries.

iii) In the USSR an ethical dilemma was avoided when to set up an independent publishing house as a cooperative, a group of Christians refused to give 'the Lord's money' to pay the Mafia insurance; this decision means they have not been able to function.

iv) In order to get books printed more quickly, Polish Christian publishers have paid a middle man to smooth the way.

Mission Response

The area of ethics has been neglected by missions to these regions. It must now be adequately addressed. It is not appropriate to apply a Western style absolutism, developed in a society with completely different values. However demonstrating Christian business practices and proper accounting should be a minimum.

There are many new agencies, churches, and individuals rushing into the area largely unaware of the history and nature of the problem and of the issues involved. Very few are aware of the cultural expectations of reciprocity which demand that the giver must somehow be repaid¹⁷.

There is no substitute for long term relationships which are the key to proper management of aid in what ever form it comes. This does not merely mean being friends but sharing in mutual accountability.

Giving aid to a group rather than to individuals is also a way to maintain interdependence rather than foster the independence and strong individualism which are so prominent.

The short term need for large scale importation of Bibles will soon be much reduced. If the job is done correctly the national church should be able to meet their own needs within three to five years. Missions and donors need to ask if what they are doing is creating dependence. We need to ask what the impact of giving large amounts of capital (either in the form of money, books or aid) is on the social and leadership structures of the church. It is a much bigger question than to simply complain that some of the bibles are being sold. It is not the sale of bibles that is the problem; rather it is the accounting for funds. Relationships can be torn apart. The authority of church Leaders may be undermined.

6. RELIGIOUS VACUUM

The occult has, historically, attracted the fascination of many in these countries. The curious interest in former taboos has prompted a noticeable increase in activity in the Soviet Union where healers appear on television claiming supernatural powers and confess to being directed by unknown voices.

The fascination with anything spiritual is an expression of complete disillusionment with a materialistic ideology. People are searching for meaning beyond the materialistic. This search is not limited to established religions. However in East Germany there are signs that this "Interest" is waning.¹⁸ We would be wise to discern between true spiritual hunger (from God) and a temporary interest in other ideas.

The Cults are also taking advantage of the new freedoms. The Mormons are established in East Germany and Hungary. In Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria there is tremendous interest in Eastern Religions. Ba'hai presents a third alternative to Communism and Western style Materialism. Syncretistic by nature, religions like these offer a system which has the appearance of toleration.

6.1 Decentralization of Religion

We may begin to see a turning away from large-scale organised religion. People have an increased educational level and have been influenced by secularism over the last forty years. While in some parts, the Church was the bastion of freedom and a place of refuge for those out of the political mainstream, it was also the place of compromise. This compromise, especially of the upper hierarchy, has led to a vacuum of authority, as there was neither trust in the secular authority nor trust in the religious authority. As people in the new democracies realise that they do not need permission for every act, they may well turn away from the organized Church structures which gave them their protection.

Outward pressures which unified the church have disappeared. This may mean political infighting, splintering and factionalism in the church, leading to further disillusionment with organized religion.

7. THE CHURCH - REACTION AND ACTION

In the midst of all this flux the church also has problems peculiar to herself to work through: E.g. how to deal with the secret believer who has now re-appeared and or with a renegade who was in the church but compromised? This is donatism revisited.

7.1 Church and Society

Christians must rethink the relationship between church and state, the Christian and politics, social-concern, ethics, economics, and many other areas of life where they have been marginalised for forty years. The older generation, with its pietistic roots, will possibly respond by separatism. However, the younger generation, not happy with this, will want to work out biblical answers to their relationship with society.

7.2 Leadership

Leadership within the church will be a point of tension for a long time to come. Many leaders who worked with the Government have already been dismissed. Other leaders were, for various reasons¹⁹ more interested in the internal politics of the denomination.

It is important to recognize that we speak to our peril, of a National leadership as if this body were a clearly identified group of people recognized as such by the local church. Real caution is needed to see who really speaks on behalf of the churches. Taking sides in the emerging debates would be a mistake. It will be sometime before the issues are clarified.

People are scrambling for position. Many are afraid they will be left on the sidelines of history. This is true within the religious as well as the secular world. Those who have been involved in the past in unofficial positions or distribution networks fear that they will be marginalised.

The "divine right" of the political or the denominational leader will be challenged. The concept of the "Pastor as King", where the communist model of leadership, by domination and control, was carried into the church even by many non-compromised Pastors. This leadership model, which has been rejected by the people, will also be rejected within the Church. As people discover that they no longer need the permission of the State or the Pastor they will cultivate their own ministry.

7.3 Denomination splintering

Denominations once dominated by heavy-handed leaders will also find themselves splintering as the outside pressure which kept them together dissipates. This will also be true of the inter-denominational relationships.

In the short term the new freedoms and insecurities will act as a new external pressure. However, as people adapt to the new situation this pressure will also decrease.

Western denominational bodies are beginning to take up links which have been dormant for many years²⁰. They will bring with them teachings and values which are unfamiliar to the majority of theologically conservative people. This will introduce new tensions and divisions of loyalty.

The hunger for academic achievement in the theological arena will bring a new dynamic to the churches of Central and Eastern Europe. This, in the long term, will result in splits in several directions: between the liberals and conservatives; between the pietistic and the socially engaged.

7.4 Local splintering

Christian groups are no longer forced into alliances and unions. There is less State pressure on individual congregations to toe the denominational line. This will lead in the short term to more independent action on the part of local churches. They will plan and run their own events, concentrating on what they are doing at the expense of co-operation with other churches within and without their denomination.

Old denominational rivalries are reappearing as churches receive confiscated property back.²¹

It is to be hoped that there will be more involvement of the congregation in church affairs. It is also hoped that the trend of local church isolation will not last long, but that soon churches will recognize the need and benefit of cooperation.

7.5 Ministry and Mission

Rumours abound of nationals who are setting up new organisations and new structures. This has a very unsettling effect on those with similar dreams. Many people naturally have new, fresh visions, but very unrealistic expectations. There are many all embracing plans where often one or two people, or a small group, will try to accomplish everything from video and literature work through to counselling, radio work, evangelism and so on.

One common denominator is the desire to control. Be it either through the Evangelical Alliance of the country or another grouping, this desire to control reflects either the pastoral concern of the group to guard against corruption or bad influences, or is a reflection of the old models of behaviour.

This also means that there is and will be a great increase in mis-communication and tensions as these issues are worked out.

There will be initial church growth, in Bulgaria, Romania and the Soviet Union, and a revival of interest in the Roman Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. There could well be an increase in the growth of the church in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary but this is likely to be slower. The first reason for this is the inability of the church to grasp the issues of the day and secondly because of the state of their own thinking and theology.

Mission Response

There will be a greater need for specialisation as the church is able to take on more of her own responsibilities, both for education, evangelism of the country and for the supply of equipment. There will be a reduced need for a 1st world missionary presence. There will, for a certain time, be a need for missionaries doing evangelism, acting as a bridge between the church - which is somewhat isolated culturally - and the rest of the world. However, this will be a temporary need.²²

i) In the long term, missions must foster **development of skills** for which there has also been no role model. National workers need training as writers, in publishing, accounting, and marketing.

ii) There will be an **increase in national missions**, as national churches and groups of individuals discover their own missionary call and responsibility. This is only appropriate and should be encouraged, It would, however, be a mistake to support them to such an extent that they are shielded from the hard knocks and miss the lessons which those bring.

iii) There will be an increase in **issue-oriented** ministry. There are many areas in which Christians were not able to have an impact. There is a need for people to come and share their experiences, and so to learn together. Prison ministry, ministry to the blind and the deaf, drug addiction and alcoholic counselling, all require a high degree of expertise. This is an area where a humble sharing of ideas developed in Western societies, but adapted, could bring a major benefit to the church.

iv) Many East German mission departments will be joined into their counterparts in the new German nation. However, for some years the mind set of the people of that region will be vastly different from that of their West German neighbours. This is an area where missions ought to be far more sensitive than the business and political structures are likely to be.

v) New opportunities for training for nationals must be weighed carefully. Removing pastors, at such a critical time, from their country to the alien West creates a gap between them and their people. The traditional 3-year training in isolation for ministry in Western Europe is not necessarily the best preparation for a pastor. Can Western Christianity provide the necessary models for a Pastor from the emerging democracies? Selection is a critical issue here. There are many people who would like to come but are they suitable and is a language ability the major qualification.

8. MISSION INITIATIVES

8.1 The Rediscovery of Eastern Europe

Massive media attention has given fund raisers a field day. But increased awareness and openness has opened the floodgates to incredible numbers of western visitors.

Are we aware of what we are doing? Have we heard of the pastor in Romania who had 20 visitors to stay in one night²³ or the pastor in Bulgaria who had someone visiting everyday for 2 months? Their time is consumed with endless visits rather than the need to pray through a proper response to the situation. The Baptist Church in the Soviet Union received over 200 "requests" from the West, telling how they could help. A man in Prague showed a stack of 30 visiting cards from missions and ministries who had complete packages to offer.

Some increases in number of visitors can perhaps be distinguished as follows:

i) Missions with years of experience are now inundated with requests from old and new supporters alike seeking addresses, contacts and ways in which Christian people can now go in and do their own thing²⁴.

ii) Private and organised Christian tourism in the area is on the increase: alongside trips to the Holy Land and Oberammergau are offers of hands-on experience with churches in "Eastern Europe" - blatantly items of curiosity as never before. Adverts detail: meet real Christians!

iii) Missions which previously have not evidenced interest in this difficult area are now plunging in with both feet. Regularly one reads of new appointees whose brief is to develop 'our mission's links' and 'establish our work in x y or z in Eastern Europe'.

iv) One-man or one-woman missions are emerging, usually with conservative and/or dated views on how best to help. These often work in association with small or extreme church concerns and seek to propagate their own particular ideas. This is doubly dangerous as many of these people are responding to assumptions about the area which are not accurate.

Mission Response

If the democratization process continues, interest will decrease and missions will have to settle down to the hard task of real missionary work. Many long for the day when the circus is over, the final curtain falls and we can get back to work.

Inordinate fatigue and stress is now common among local church leaders and mission workers. One church leader died from stress-related causes. More than one pastor commented in jest that he just might vote communist at the next election.....

The newcomers may try to re-invent the wheel. Already national Christians are reacting to ignorance and arrogance of some Western visitors. One translator refuses to work for certain insensitive Western speakers. As this trend matures, we foresee an eventual refusal of paternalistic aid-giving mission.

8.2 Cheque Book Aid

Churches, missions, denominations, businesses, individuals - the response from the West has been by and large financial, without reflecting on the long-term impact. The clash of cultures between East and West is great and dangers abound. This will make a long-term, missiological night-mare if care is not taken now. Western values, measured in short-term goals and financial benefit, against the long-term needs of the region, are an explosive mixture.

Another effect of this financial aid is that people are attracted towards things: methods and equipment, rather than towards people and towards God.

Church Reaction

i) Money is made the centre of mission activity. Money is of course important but hard questions about how creative local alternatives might be found must not be ignored in the pressure "to get the job done" or "to seize the hour". Zeal is commendable only as long as it honours God.

ii) There is an implicit assumption that any problem can be solved (and every problem has a western answer), as long as enough money is thrown at it.

Mission Response

Western missions should respect and protect the right of the church to develop its own answers to the situation, and in a culturally sensitive way allow local leadership to take its rightful place. Such answers take time to develop. This time is used up by many other distractions.

We need to ask the question when giving our aid, are we taking these factors into account? Are we giving our friends time to adapt? Or are we denying them essential time with our plans and dreams? Where is the place for the measured, long term approach as opposed to the "knee jerking" which is common in "crisis" situations? Such situations are sometimes used to meet the needs of the donor community. Are we raising expectations too high in the recipient community? Emotionally driven giving will peak unless the momentum of political change keeps the area in the headlines. The recipients who have, to some extent, looked upon the west with an unrealistic "streets are paved with gold" mentality are having these inaccurate views confirmed. The numerous photocopyers will need supplying and repairing long after the original donor has gone to the next exciting place to work. Will they, in two years, be serviced by the people who sent them?

Money is of course needed, a great deal of money but there needed to be more co-ordination. The greatest need would be for some kind of clearing house for information about this. Some way to provide co-ordination without the political control which would be feared.

Missions also have to adjust the new situation, and can feel threatened by the rise of new missions, national efforts and the new programs of others.

8.3 Duplicity of Activity

In his helpful directory²⁵ on "East European" Missions Mark Elliot lists many names and addresses. This list raises the question about duplication and validity of ministry. However we have to remember the size of the field and scope of the work. Duplication of work rarely happens on the field, although this is where most people would assume that the overlap occurs. The occasional scare about a book that has been translated four times is usually told by people who are out of touch with the daily reality of work on the field. The Literature Information Service (LIS) run by Eastern European Bible Mission (EEBM) as a service to members has been a great help. The literature catalogue in each language of the area has over 3500 titles in it.

Much more duplication occurs in the administration and fund raising on the home front: the multiplicity of magazines, meetings and effort needed to keep people on the field. If there could be co-operation here, this would be a most significant break-through. On the field there is already a great deal of co-operation as people are at the sharp end, where co-operation is vital.

8.4 Normalisation and cooperation on the field .

In recent years there has been a turning towards what one might call a more normal missionary practice in contrast to giving emergency aid. There has been an emphasis on teaching and meeting long-term needs and of partnership and co-operation with the Church.

The popular old image of missions to "Eastern Europe" as secret Bible smugglers is inaccurate and a great caricature. Effective co-operation has existed for several years. Of course, this could not then be made public. Some of these groups had no public face and had to carry the burden of the few groups who have made a bad name for mission in the area. There are established missions²⁶, involved in an effective but quiet work over the years. Such groups are sometimes accused of not knowing what the situation is, of being 'cloak and dagger' of non - co-operation and many other things. However Long-term co-operative efforts include:

a) **Eastern European Seminary (EES)** - a consortium of twelve missions in co-operation to provide Christian education on several levels for the churches. Many Nationals testify to the help that has been given by this work.

b) **Project CARE** - a recent response to the new developments, it is a co-operative effort of several missions focusing on evangelism.

c) **International Literature Associates (ILA)** - five missions working together to establish publishing houses run by national boards in each country. They emphasize literature for the educational needs of the church and evangelistic tools.

d) **Eastern European Mission Research** - now renamed Mission Forum has been meeting for seven years and comprises some fifteen missions who exchange information, discuss trends and research methods appropriate to missionaries on field. They have developed a database of information on literature, bibliographical and other information relevant to the needs of missions to the area. It is doubtful that anything like it exists among missions anywhere in the so-called 'open' world.

Mission Response

Some types of ministry will phase out, indeed some have already phased out, (the need for Bible smuggling). The need for direct aid must be continually evaluated.

There was always a need for the understanding of the culture. This will not decrease. As more missions move into the countries to live there will be a much higher need for the cultural understanding.

One mission role will be to help the church understand her own place in the cultural world.

9. CONCLUSION

In conclusion we foresee that there will be a year or so when this area of the world will be in the spotlight. After the elections and if "normalization" continues there will be a decrease in interest in the area. Many questions remain and the answers to these lie to some degree, in what happens within the Soviet Union.

Subsequent long term patterns will emerge. There can be no standard strategy for these countries. Repeated re-evaluation and analysis will be vital if our response is to be effective.

In five years and in ten years time we will have a very different view of these regions. Now, more than at any time, is the time to ask ourselves **what fruit does God want to see grow in ten years time, because it is that kind of seed that we need to plant now.** Now is not the time merely for bold fund-raising gestures. Do our instant solutions honour God or express our belief in his Sovereignty? **It is not only what we plant but how we plant it that effects the fruit that is growing.** We must make sure that we are not applying the values of this world or we will reap what we sow.

¹ See Radio Free Europe article East European Economics at a turning point Vol. 1 Number 18 p 40 May 4 1990, Regional topics " The term "centrally planned economies" itself will soon lose its operational meaning. So could the notion of "Eastern Europe" as a separate political and geographical entity. East Germany, for example, is about to be absorbed into West Germany. And it will scarcely make sense to label Czechoslovakia "East European" When Prague, now open to the Western world lies farther west than Vienna"

² Are there 3 Europes? Newsweek March 23 1987

³ Can Mitteleurope find itself? Economist Sept 16 1989

⁴ Radio Free Europe article East European Economics at a turning point Vol 1 Number 18 p 42 May 4 1990, Regional topics " "There are no compelling reasons for maintaining a separate regional unit indefinite. The benefits of sub-regional (Central European and Balkan) comparative advantage would of course be tapped within the EC framework"

⁵ Adam Smith Institute. Wider still and wider, Europe and the East London 1990, Dr Madsen Pirie, Peter Young, Prof Norman Stone.

⁶ The Habsburg Monarchy 1809-1918 Penguin books A.J.P. Taylor 1948 This was the main high way leaving Vienna heading east.

⁷ There is discussion in Czechoslovakia about the possibility of banning the communist party. Many students in Romania have rejected Communism categorically while the workers support the Iliescu Government.

⁸ The Hungarian Observer Vol 2 no 12 1989 "Converts to convertibility" p 19 - 21. This article describes the growing rise of an elite whose source of wealth is Convertible currency. As long as Comecon countries have a soft currency this will be a problem. It is an issue which has to be faced by missions also. As long as nationals are paid in convertible currency they will not be able to be self-supporting. They will also have no reason or incentive to develop wealth creation schemas. This will leave them in infancy. It is essential that Peristrioka reaches into the church.

⁹ Many missions are frustrated by their experiences in Romanian relief projects. They receive contradicting answers every day while trying to set-up warehouses and establish official organizations. Promises are broken and commitments go unfulfilled. Instability is not the only reason for this, but is a major factor.

¹⁰ The Fall of the House of Habsburg Edward Crankshaw, has a very good discussion of this issue.

¹¹ The Hungarian Observer vol. 3 No 5 1990 Christianity's answer to nationalism.

¹² New Year Speech, Vaclav Havel, British Embassy Press Section, Thunovska 14, 118 00 Prague 1, CSFR.

¹³ Taken from a report from a recent trip to Bulgaria

¹⁴ New Year Speech, Vaclav Havel, British Embassy Press Section, Thunovska 14, 118 00 Prague 1, CSFR.

¹⁵ Adam Smith Institute. Wider still and wider, Europe and the East London 1990, This article claimed that the Department responsible for the privatisation of Polish industry which comprises 80% of all production, had only one telephone line, no fax machine and no photocopier.

¹⁶ Quote from missionary worker in Bulgaria.

¹⁷ A very good paper on this is "Mission Financial Practices and Church Growth in Yugoslavia", Mike Johnson, Sept 1988. available from the addresses at the front of this paper.

¹⁸ Some Lutheran pastors in a recently reported conversation complained that attendance at church had declined markedly from the heady months at the end of 1989. They said that people are more interested in material well being.

¹⁹ For a description of the some of the sociological reasons for this see "The Effects of Persecution on Church and Mission in Central and Eastern Europe" Marsh Moyle, CEMF Sept 1989 available from the addresses at the front of this paper

²⁰ This is due to the fact that people could not legally do much more than pay official complimentary visits. Many of them did not want to be involved in "Illegal activity" and were publicly against those who were involved.

²¹ This is already happening in Poland and Bulgaria where churches that were forced to use the same building are separating. This is a source of bitterness as the group which has to leave has often spent a lot of money over the last years to help pay for repairs and upkeep.

²² By temporary we mean at least five years. This does not refer to the areas where there are no or very small churches. There is a good argument to be made that Church planting will be the major thrust of missions in 10 years.

²³ It would be impossible to count the number of visitors to Romania in recent months. These include of course non-believers who are bringing in aid. This aid was really needed but there are only so many people who they can communicate with. This has been very disruptive and many believers are complaining about the lack of co-ordination and consideration while at the same time they are very thankful for the genuine relief and care that has been shown to them.

²⁴ Zdużenie CityGate, for example, now has several calls a week requesting contact addresses or information. This is a small mission. Many of the larger more well known missionary societies report much higher figures.

²⁵ East European Missions Directory. Mark R. Elliot. Institute for the study of Christianity and Marxism. Wheaton College. It is helpful but potentially misleading because it can give the impression on a superficial reading that there is more activity than there really is.

²⁶ The work of the Eastern European Seminary (EES), International Teams (IT), Operation Mobilisation (OM), Greater Europe Mission (GEM), European Christian Mission (ECM), Light in the East (LIO), Zdużenie CityGate, Open Doors (OD), to name but a few.