

Outline and Overview of Research conducted in Romania 2002-2007 A Case study for the ICAP Conference in Green Lake, WI May, 2011

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In this presentation, I will give an overview of my PhD research and some important findings. I want to highlight how research can facilitate engaging local church and civil society. I will briefly discuss the how children at risk can act as 'theological pointers' as developed in my thesis.

Since my time today is limited, you will need to scan through the outline as I cover the more salient points.

Faith-based Organizations and Evangelical Churches in Romania: An Investigation into Partnership in reference to children and youth in crisis between 1990-2004

An abstract of the thesis is available from OCMS website or contact me.

1. Personal and Intellectual background for the study

- 1.1. Children's home and experience there
- 1.2. Strong background in the life and social sciences and conversion as adult – but I understood the 'dark side'.
- 1.3. Mission as action, little energy devoted to critical reflection on practice – Thailand and Cambodia.
- 1.4. What is meant by 'at risk' or 'in crisis' – current usage.
- 1.5. Incidental, 'so that' approach, what I came to call the 'prostitution of poverty'

2. Partnership between FBOs and churches – 15 years of field experience

- 2.1. Different solutions from different agencies – church and agency tensions
- 2.2. FBO's use language like 'log frames, community poverty assessment, well being indicators, domains of transformation' what does all this language mean?
- 2.3. Churches use language of God, Christ, redemption, salvation, life in Jesus
- 2.4. What factors hinder or help FBO-church collaboration to assist children

3. Why Romania?

- 3.1. Crisis with children – generally known as 'failed state policy'
- 3.2. As many as 200,000 children had been placed in state run institutions
- 3.3. Many Western agencies responded after 1990 in aftermath of 'revolution' – I found over 400 when I did the research.
- 3.4. A significant evangelical population 4% Baptist, Pentecostal – 1,800 local churches in 1990 – 2,400 in 2003.
- 3.5. I could locate no systematic research to measure or access the scale of impact of FBO-local churches working with children since 1990.
- 3.6. Gap in missiological literature concerning church, child and mission.

4. Perceptions, objectives, research questions

- 4.1. I held (hold) at least three assumptions concerning local churches and FBOs
 - 4.1.1. Churches and FBOs are an expression of Christ's body as in Rom. 12:4-5 where each member contributes according to their gift - but all members belong to one another
 - 4.1.2. Human resources are grounded and found in local churches
 - 4.1.3. Local churches are embedded in the communities they serve and remain after FBOs have come and gone.
- 4.2. I had very little understanding of Romanian evangelicalism and this became a major part of my first phase of research.
- 4.3. I had preconceived ideas about 'holistic mission' – including vertical and horizontal dimensions of the gospel – obligations to God and obligations to neighbours and enemies – these assumptions needed testing and verification in the Romania context.
- 4.4. Recognized the tensions between advocates of 'church growth' Missiology and 'transformation as mission' again these tensions had not been analysed or tested in the Romanian context in reference to children at risk.
- 4.5. RESEARCH QUESTION: What factors enabled or hindered international and Local FBOs and Romanian evangelical churches to collaborate in their ministry with children at risk in the time frame 1990-2004?**
- 4.6. Six sub questions were answered in the thesis read the last 2 – P.8-9**
- 4.7. Originally conceived of the study as a impact assessment – efficacy – what is working in Romania for children
- 4.8. I had a LOT TO LEARN!

5. Methods and Methodology

- 5.1. Qualitative Mixed Method –
- 5.2. Three phases of research were designed and carried out
 - 5.2.1. Sampling, interviewing (n=60) selection of cases
 - 5.2.2. Case studies (n=11) , focus groups and more interviews (n=66)– careful creation of categories for selection – opened a range of issues. Grounded theory as means to analyze the data, participant, practitioner research.
 - 5.2.3. A final stage with a different approach to analysis – testing and questioning theological and missiological analysis

6. Overview of Key Findings from field work

- 6.1. Major shift in my perceptions of the issues – pragmatism colour my approach in early phases – saw much of this in both FBO and church as I was doing the research.
- 6.2. Coming to terms with Assumptions –I started assuming that FBOs and Churches wanted to cooperate and social concern would be important to both sides.
- 6.3. Assumed if FBO and church do x, y, z, they will generate certain outcomes.

- 6.4. I took the words 'Holistic and transformation' as general terms, but I learned they were used in very imprecise ways.
- 6.5. Positive and negative outcomes for both FBO, church and child (Chapter 5-6 see my outline)
- 6.6. **Identified a Significant issue** – which children deserved care from FBO – which children for church – was the child a pointer to the Kingdom of God or was the child an object of mission?
- 6.7. Shift in field work and research from what is 'working' to causality and influence – why were certain churches partnering with FBOs and others were not?
- 6.8. What sorts of churches were most likely to respond to children in crisis – was there a theological rationale?

7. Analysis involved several phases:

- 7.1. Both FBOs and churches had agendas for children – both claimed to take the EVANGEL seriously
- 7.2. Churches were more concerned with eternity and salvation – FBOs were more concerned with helping children who were dealing with pain in the present world.
- 7.3. Churches were committed to theology of redemption/salvation as primary narrative – FBOs were committed to a more humanistic "holistic" view of the child and child development.
- 7.4. I could find very little meaningful integration of what I came to call Side A and Side B.

Side A (concerns from Above) represented God's actions toward humanity and our response. Church-based perceptions and interventions were focused on 'saving' souls of children for eternity, bringing children into a relationship with God, and reflected a serious concern for the transcendent nature of God.²¹

Side B (concerns from Below) represented human actions in the present towards children. FBO perceptions and interventions were focused on the physical and psycho-social realities of children, 'saving them from suffering' by addressing moral formation, education, community and human development, family, and health.

The Argument

I argue that FBO and church partnership in Romania must begin to engage in more missiological reflection and suggest 'child theology' and Christology provide clues as a way forward.

If 'Side A' is not meaningfully integrated with 'Side B', then churches may remain pietistic and concerned only with vertical dimensions of the gospel for children. FBOs tended to leave the work of Side A to the churches. If 'Side B' is not meaningfully integrated with 'Side A', it may result in the FBOs delivering effective social services for children but embracing a secular eschatology. Churches tended to leave Side B to the FBOs.

Part of the challenge is a ‘re-visioning’ of holistic mission for children in the Romanian context. I also argue that holistic mission must be inclusive of families and members of local churches.

I re-examined the case study data asking this question; ‘What is the evidence that God is working in both the human and divine dimensions in partnership?’ This led to the creation of two axial categories that embraced the data and factors shaping partnership. They are represented here by two inclusive disjunctions.

1) **Structural responses to children**– what are the possible organizational means to help children in crisis? In Romania this has been polarized between ‘FBO’ and ‘local church’.

FBOs as mobile organizations -----Local churches as embedded organizations	
An organizational systems approach	Local churches rely on faith and scripture
Mission that relies on FBO as structure	Mission that relies on local church
Outcomes measurable ‘in this world’	Outcomes are eternal and beyond this world

2) **Who is ultimately responsible for the action and intervention?** This was a question of meaning, who or what is the cause of the problem and is responsible for the solution.

Human solution – key actor: Man -----Divine solution – key actor God	
Reliance on social science	Reliance on bible and faith
Human health and physical care	Sin, redemption, conversion of soul
Child well-being and psychosocial indicators	Love, mercy and life in Jesus as indicators
Horizontal dimensions of the gospel	Vertical dimensions of the Gospel

Cases were plotted in a ‘four quadrant’ model and I created a heuristic lens to include both axial categories and synthesized the central categories.¹

The core category for the thesis was identified as ‘embracing normative tensions in partnership’ implying that tensions can be understood because it is possible to identify certain norms. Embracing requires not ignoring or attempting to abolish tension, but living with uncertainty and ambiguity while following God and honouring His intentions for children.

The use of terms like ‘holism and integration’ in mission with children logically include the idea relationality and encompass both tension and discontinuity. Theological learning and struggle is integral to embracing tension in partnership. Categories of certitude and entitlement can be exchanged for fidelity to Christ, mutual embrace of the cross and

¹ This heuristic is the result of several schematics and data displays (see methods). This is the sort of reflexive and progressive thinking that arises from ongoing interaction with data in qualitative methodology it informs both method and analysis and as I see now very important to pushing through on research.

deeper koinonia.

In this manner partnership can move forward, not stagnant but full of life and freedom, something like the child - she is moving, she is fragile, she has every potential for both good and bad. Children act as theological pointers.

Significance and Contribution of this research

The significance and contribution lies in three areas: 1) to studies with children in crisis in general and faith-based responses in particular, 2) to the study of evangelical missiology² and theology with children in the Romanian context, and 3) to the study of FBO-church partnership with application to other counties in Eastern Europe with an Orthodox majority.

Bunge points out 'issues related to children have tended to be marginal is almost every area of contemporary theology' (2001:3). Concerning evangelicals in Eastern Europe, Volf says they must 'develop a theology that is sensitive to the needs, struggles, and aspirations of the churches and peoples in these countries' (1996:28).

Mission to children in crisis is an emerging field of scholarship in evangelical missiology.³ FBOs continue to increase their efforts to assist marginalized children around the world. The research makes a contribution to and draws from 'Child Theology' (Willmer & White, 2006) which suggests a fresh reading of texts such as Matthew 18:1-4 as important for understanding the kingdom of God in reference children.

This thesis encourages Romanian evangelicals and FBOs to continued reflection on the evangel in reference to categories of sin and the humanity of children; it is critical that they move beyond 'theological confessional assurances' that currently inform their actions and interventions with children.

FBOs sometimes claim that local churches are reluctant to respond to the most marginal children. This research challenges those FBOs to ongoing engagement with the local churches, working together to clarify theological rationale in their partnership. FBOs and churches in this study and elsewhere must work with realistic horizons of expectation when they pray 'thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is

² Missiology has been further defined by Tippett in reference to local churches as: 'the academic discipline which researches, records and applies data relating to the biblical origin, the history, the anthropological principles and techniques and the theological base of the Christian mission. The theory, methodology and data bank are particularly directed towards ... the growth and relevance of congregational structures and fellowship, internally to maturity, externally in outreach as the Body of Christ in local situations and beyond, in a variety of culture patterns' (1987:xiii).

³ Oxford Centre for Mission Studies now has several scholars working with the question of children in crisis. There are now graduate courses offered in North American mission training institutions concerning mission to children, including Wheaton College Graduate School, Fuller School of Intercultural Studies, Biola University School of Intercultural Studies. The Malaysian Baptist Theological Seminary in Penang is offering a two year Masters course in 'holistic child development'.

in heaven' as they embrace suffering children. If it is true that children in crisis serve as a type of 'barometer' for dysfunction in society, then how evangelical churches respond becomes a barometer of their willingness to engage with their society.

This study raises questions about FBO 'managerial missiology' and its implications for churches and children. By giving first-person voice to Romanian pastors and leaders of local FBOs, the research is offered as a contribution to Romanian evangelicalism which is still emerging from its communist past. The findings and analysis generated in a local context provide specific missiological and theological suggestions that may have application in neighboring countries. FBOs with activist agendas descended on Eastern Europe and the CIS in the 1990s. The study will be useful for comparative purposes with others from post-communist Eastern Europe and Russia.

My goal was to create a contextual account of selected FBO-church partnerships which was sensitive to each side's assumptions, values, perceptions, interventions, and organizational actions. It is my hope that those working with both churches and FBOs who are concerned for children in crisis will find insights in this research to inform their future collaborations and actions.