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**REPORT ON MY TRIP TO
THE EMANUEL UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA (ROMANIA)
March 7-17, 2007**

As I entered the building of Emanuel University for the last time on Friday night, the sounds of singing hit me. There, in a first-floor lounge area, was a group of perhaps 30 students sitting and singing praise choruses to God, earnestly and unselfconsciously. It was a sound that could be heard throughout most of the building. The sounds eventually died out, and, as I walked by later, I could see them praying earnestly together. I realized that this scene captured in a nutshell two of my favorite aspects of my trips to Romania: passionate singing and fervent prayer. Both are integral parts of life for the students I meet each year at Emanuel.

This was my 13th trip to Emanuel, beginning in 1998. In many ways it was like last year's trip: the modernization of life in Romania continues apace, and Dan Botica, Emanuel's young Old Testament instructor, and I strengthened our collegial ties (this is his third year there). But, there were unique aspects of this trip, as well.

As before, I spent a day in Budapest, Hungary, resting and sleeping off the effects of jet lag. Upon arrival in Oradea on Saturday evening, Dan and his two boys, Christopher (age 11) and Adrian (age 6?), met me and took me across the street to the gigantic SelGros store, a sort of Sam's Club that opened two years ago, to get some supplies and change some money. ATMs are now everywhere, and credit cards are widely used, whereas, on my first trips, one could only use cash, and only get it at a very few banks downtown. The SelGros sits on land where, on my first trips, a peasant's hog-slaughtering operation sat; it was a tiny operation, with nothing else around it: a couple of huts and some fencing, all sitting on 1/8 acre or less in the midst of wide-open fields, and the stench wafted across the campus regularly. Now, international trucks lumber by on their way to all parts of the European Union and shoppers line up at "Sam's Club" to get everything from food and clothing to CDs, auto parts, and lawn chairs.

Romania joined the European Union on January 1 of this year, and the effects are obvious. For one thing, the border crossing in each direction involved only a five-minute wait, down from the 30-40-minute waits that were routine in the past. At its worst, a border crossing could last an hour or more, and it involved four tense stops, two on the Hungarian side and two on the Romanian side, including luggage searches; I often thought of Brother Andrew smuggling Bibles through exactly such checkpoints during the Cold War. Another effect of Romania's integration into the outside world is its upgraded roads. Whereas in early years, we would rattle across bone-shaking, potholed roads, now many of the main streets have been newly repaved in the last 3-4 years, and there is even a bypass around the city. Unfortunately, the bypass passes *directly* next to Emanuel University, and so there is 24-hour-a-day truck traffic, grinding their gears and hitting their air brakes at the new round-about next to the school. Incongruously, the bypass is only a single lane in each direction—incongruous because this is part of the "Trans-European Highway," after all!—and, at points, it deteriorates into a rutted road over which it is impossible to navigate at more than 5 mph. Nevertheless, the ride to Emanuel Baptist Church, for example, which used to be a bone-crunching half-hour ride, now is perhaps 10 minutes away on much smoother streets and roads.

I taught three classes this time, totaling close to 30 hours. One was Old Testament Theology II with the fourth-year class that I'd had last year for OT Theology I. Another was an abbreviated OT Theology I class with the distance students, who are established pastors, on campus for two-week "Intensive Weeks" (very much like Bethel Seminary's InMinistry program, but without the online component). The third class was OT Theology I with second- and third-year students. I enjoyed all three classes, and look forward especially to seeing the last group again next year for OT Theology II. They were a warm, enthusiastic, and engaging group.

Beyond the classroom teaching, I attended the school's mother church on Sunday morning, the 3000-member Emanuel Baptist Church. It is the largest church in Romania, and one of the largest, if not the largest, in Europe. As usual, the service lasted for two hours, including a one-hour sermon from Dr. Paul Negrut, senior pastor and president of the school. In the evening, I preached at a "village" church about an hour away, in Marghita. Marghita appears to be more of a small town, than a typical village, and the church there is new: bright lighting and an upbeat, cheerful tone in its service, with 60% of its people under 40 years old, it appeared, including a large youth contingent. It was an encouraging time with this congregation, and the young pastor (who graduated from Emanuel last year) and his wife had us in for a "quick" meal: a full, three-course spread of delicious offerings!

I spent most evenings with Dan and Carmen Botica, it seemed. One evening, they had me into their home for a wonderful meal replete with many different Romanian delicacies. Another evening, I took them out to a nice restaurant of their choice. On two other evenings, I was part of their ministry outreach. Wednesday evenings, they lead a Bible-study group at the church of university students from the state school in town (University of Oradea). Last Wednesday, they invited the students into their home for a barbeque, and I brought a message to the group afterwards. On Friday evening, they asked me to address the youth group at Emanuel Church, for which they serve as sponsors, which I was happy to do. Dan has now completed his Ph.D. dissertation at Hebrew Union College, and will travel to the U.S. in May for the final review and his graduation.

A year ago, Linda Bergeon, a Bethel Seminary student, had spent the spring quarter at Emanuel University, and she had had an important ministry during that time. One highlight of my trip was to see the fruit of one of her endeavors: two new computers for the library for which she had raised funds. They have immeasurably eased the task of Carmen Botica, the library cataloguer, and her colleagues, and it was fun to see the machines and their delight in them. They seem to be the envy of the campus!

As usual, I was refreshed in spirit to see the enthusiastic faith of the Romanian Christians with whom I came into contact. The singing at the school—whether in chapel, in the hallways, or even in class, during break times—is spontaneous, joyful, full-throated, and always a great blessing. Prayer is an important part of life, usually a time of open prayer in which many people pray and others regularly chime in with the fervent sounds of "*amin!*" ("amen") and "*te rugăm noi*" ("we pray thee"). At Emanuel Church, for example, there were 3-4 times of open prayer during the first hour, lasting 5-10 minutes apiece; it was very moving to hear the impassioned pleading with God in the pray-ers' voices as they importuned him to be present among them and to hear and answer their prayers.

That being said, among the biggest challenges facing the Church in Romania are the lures of Westernization and materialism. Churches are finding it harder to recruit volunteers for short-term missions, for youth-group sponsors, for work of any kind in the church. Material wealth is evident everywhere, from clothing to cell phones to laptop computers and more. Western-style advertising is rampant, and not only the American type, but the (typically racier) European variety.

Another troubling issue facing the Church is the new law passed in January that evangelicals fear will restrict their ability to evangelize. A major effect of the law seems to be to establish the Romanian Orthodox Church as the favored church in the country, if not the state church. *Christianity Today* has a story in this month's issue (online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/march/23.20.html>). The story quotes Dr. Paul Negrut, who is also the president of the Romanian Baptist Union.

It remains to thank various people for their support in undertaking the trip. At Bethel Seminary, I thank Dr. Leland Eliason, Bethel's provost, for releasing me to go to Romania again this year. I also thank my colleagues and students here who have asked about and prayed about my trips. I thank Erica Olson, my teaching assistant, and Scott Strand, Bethel's instructional technology wizard, for making the arrangements for help in maintaining my courses while I was gone. And, I thank Bethel Seminary's Faculty Cross-Cultural Travel Grant Committee for granting funds that have helped make this trip possible.

At Emanuel University, thanks go to Dr. Paul Negrut for his continued open invitation to come to Oradea. Thanks also go to Dan and Carmen Botica for their hospitality and many helps rendered during my week in Oradea, as well as Sebastian Vaduva for making various arrangements for me. Thanks also go to the Emanuel Fund for providing additional funds for the trip. And, thanks go to my students in all three classes for a warm welcome and a most enjoyable week together looking into God's Word.

Finally, on the home front, I again thank my wife Jan, who each trip sends me off and is left with responsibilities of home, children, dog, church, and much more, and yet who is very affirming of this ministry.

For those interested, I will be posting photos from the trip on the "Romania" page of my Web site: www.bethel.edu/~dhoward.