



CANADA

**Langham**[®]
PARTNERSHIP

Spring 2023

Istvan Pasztori-Kupan, Langham Scholar,
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LANGHAM PARTNERSHIP IN THE BALKANS

On March 3 2023, Langham launched the *Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary* in Prague, Czech Republic, for the twenty-nation region stretching from the Baltic states to the Balkans, which is in many ways experiencing a post-Communist renaissance.

Dr Peter Penner became CEEBC Coordinating General Editor after the passing in 2021 from Covid-19 of Corneliu Constantineanu, when the commentary was only two-thirds finished. Corneliu's legacy was immense – a Langham Scholar and author, member of Langham's international board, and founder of the ground-breaking Faculty of Evangelical Theology at Arad University in his native Romania, a model now for other regional universities. Today, other Romanian Langham Scholars are training the next generation of pastors for one of the fastest-growing churches in Europe: Danut Jemna (PhD, Cluj University, Romania) teaches at Pentecostal Theological Institute, Bucharest; Silviu Rogobete (London School of Theology) at West University of Timisoara; and Daniel Oprean (International Baptist Seminary, Prague) pastors a Baptist church and directs Langham Preaching Romania (see <https://vimeo.com/442094805>).

Peter Penner, the former principal of St Petersburg Christian Seminary in Russia, now lectures at a seminary in Austria. The experiences of Peter and his wife Katherina reflect the upheavals caused by Communism. During Stalin's anti-Christian persecution, both their Mennonite families sought refuge in remote Soviet Republics – Katherina's in Kyrgyzstan and Peter's in Kazakhstan. Both eventually went to Germany, where Peter undertook theological studies. (Peter has also studied at the Mennonite Brethren seminary in Fresno, California, and in South Africa.) Katherina studied at Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, BC. They met in Canada during Peter's visit as a conference speaker, and together committed to ministry in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and Central Asia.

This has given them insight into the challenges faced by Christian ministry in CEE (Central and Eastern Europe), a region with an often-violent history, for centuries caught between three empires: Muslim Turkey, Catholic Austria and Orthodox Russia. After the 1990 fall of the Berlin Wall, western ministries rushed into CEE to address the pent-up need for theological education to train pastors, less acute now a generation later. But there remained a legacy of misunderstanding as Christians had to work through the tensions and moral complexities created by life in an anti-Christian Communist society.

Peter notes that during the Communist era, all churches – state-approved and unofficial – “had to develop ways to relate to a government that partially tolerated them, but constantly tried to minimize their influence on society and individuals, especially on children and youth. This created dangerous tensions for the church as different members responded differently in their particular circumstances, and betrayals – encouraged by secret services through blackmail – were common.” This led to unresolved issues between individuals, and “smouldering distrust because many things can neither be proved nor disproved, with guilt and feelings of shame, affecting all levels and areas of church life. Only with time will churches be able to recover from this trauma and it will also need theological institutions to address these issues through lectures, seminars, and research on this time period.” However, God is building and refining His Church, despite this history.

One of the very few CEE Protestant seminaries founded during the Communist era is Osijek Theological Seminary (OTS) in Croatia. Founded in a Zagreb church basement in 1972, OTS has become a regional flagship school, training students from 18 nations and 9 denominations. Graduates minister in over 40 nations, have founded radio, TV and student ministries, and publish Christian literature.

Croatia's government recognizes OTS graduates as qualified to teach religion in public schools, and has praised it as a leader in Christian higher education and for its "unique contribution to society and culture". Its 80,000-volume library, including Langham-donated books, serves regional theological students. Two other Croatian Langham Scholars, Enoch Seba and Ksenija Magda, teach in the University of Zagreb Centre for Protestant Theology.



Aleksandar Apostolovski

Aleksandar Apostolovski, from Macedonia, studied under a Langham Scholar at OTS, and today is a PhD candidate at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. He acknowledges fellow-Macedonian Langham Scholar Kosta Milkov as "one of the most influential people in my life, both as a Christian and as an intellectual. He encouraged me to discover answers for myself while at the

same time knowing that I was in a safe environment. He loved me and prayed for me. Kosta and Nada were an inspiration in my life because of their passion for culture, not only interacting with but also creating culture." Aleksandar wrote the CEEBC Jeremiah commentary, a book which he loves because he too has suffered, from a life-long severe visual impairment. Given his impairment, "it is a miracle that I'm studying theology, but it is also a calling. It offers me an opportunity to fulfil my three-fold calling of researching, writing and teaching, and an opportunity to provide something of infinite value, potentially, for future generations."

The Balkan evangelical church was extremely small until 1990, but has grown steadily since, although – like CEE generally – it continues to experience ongoing pressures, including the cultural hangover of Communism, and the socio-economic impact of the "brain drain" to the west. Even Albania, whose pre-1990 regime claimed to have extinguished Christianity, now has a Langham Preaching movement. Langham Preaching's success in the region owes much to Slavko Hadžić. (His compelling story is at <https://vimeo.com/273736665>.) During Yugoslavia's horrific civil war, with a Serb father and Croat mother, he fled the Balkans for good, seeking refuge in Cyprus. There God met him, and Slavko was convicted to return to his war-ravaged country as a missionary – a calling confirmed when, after three terrible years, he finally heard from his mother, who shared that

she had become a Christ-follower! Today, Slavko oversees Preaching movements and Clubs in Bosnia, Serbia, Albania, Macedonia, Croatia, Slovenia and Bulgaria.

Effective training of Christian pastors requires excellent theological and biblical literature. During the Communist era, Christian publishing was banned, or tightly censored. Evangelical literature was smuggled in from the west or copied by hand as secret *samizdat* literature. After 1990, books published in CEE were mostly devotional and children's literature, translated from English or German. Katherina Penner, formerly a theological librarian in Vienna, Prague and St Petersburg, Russia, wrote in 2012 that "till this day relatively few works by national authors are printed and there is a heavy reliance on translations. These are often alien to the culture, even to the subculture of the church." Langham has been filling this void, publishing books by regional authors, providing library grants and supporting writers from the region. Many CEE Langham Scholars and Langham-published writers are very involved in Preaching movements, such as Scholars Dani Oprean (Romania), Kosta Milkov (Macedonia) and Theo Karnouvakis (Greece). Within a few years, the new CEEBC and its possible translations into the languages of the region, will also become a standard resource for pastors and students of Scripture throughout CEE.

Greece was the one Balkan country which escaped Communism. Langham Scholar Myrto Thecharous (PhD, Cambridge University) is Academic Dean of the



Greek Bible College. That school, established in 1973 with several evening-class students, by 2004 had a fully accredited Bachelor of Theology program. Langham Scholar Panagiotis Kantartzis pastors First Greek Evangelical Church, Athens. The Gospel first arrived here with the Apostle Paul. Today, Langham's years of investment have produced theological and biblical studies written by regional scholars, students training for ministry at regional seminaries, and preachers faithfully opening God's Word to a growing, Biblically faithful Balkan Church.



IN MEMORIAM: Rev. Dr. Canon Brent Stiller

Langham Partnership Canada is mourning the passing of Rev. Dr. Canon Brent Stiller. Brent was the beloved husband of Karen, who for many years has faithfully served Langham Canada first as a board member, and now as Communications Coordinator. Brent passed away from post-transplant lymphoma at age 59 on January 13, 2023. Brent was the pastor of the Church of St Peter and St Paul in Ottawa, a graduate of Regent College, Vancouver (M.Div.) with a Doctor of Ministry from Gordon-Conwell Seminary, Boston. Our hearts go out to Karen, and to their three children Erik (and his wife Nicoli), Holly, and Thomas. Brent is now forever in the presence of the Lord Whom he served so well.



WHY I SUPPORT LANGHAM

My upbringing, in particular my education in a Christian school, has given me an appreciation for powerful preaching, insightful exposition, and principled leaders firmly anchored in God's Word. Growing up, I was privileged to have access to theological literature through my parents and family members in ministry. Even now, living in Toronto and working professionally as a chartered accountant, I am drawn to engaging theological literature that enriches my faith. I believe we must support the dissemination of such Christian resources globally, especially where they are desperately needed but often unavailable. Unlike many parts of the world, Western nations have enjoyed

the benefits of robust preaching, teaching, and literature. Therefore, I see it as vital to foster teaching, preaching, and literature, sensitive to the world's many different cultures, yet grounded in Gospel truth. This also helps equip us to be better neighbours in our workplaces, communities, and organizations, and to witness to our wonderful Lord. Wilberforce and Newton, two men I admire, recognized the study of Scripture as a lifelong pursuit with incomparable benefits.



Aaron Sun

THE CHURCH IN NEPAL

Nepal is best known as the country of Mount Everest. Although predominantly Hindu (81%), with a significant Buddhist minority (9%), the growth of the evangelical Church is astonishing: from about 2,000 in 1970 to over 800,000 today.

As a mountainous, inaccessible country, Nepal was closed for centuries. The Gospel first arrived with medical missionaries, but evangelism remained illegal until 1961. Christianity was dismissed by many as a western import, appropriate for lower-caste people, who discovered that the Christian faith offered a freedom they had never known in Hindu culture.

Several factors accounted for the Church's rapid growth after 1990, including greater political openness. However, ongoing suspicion regarding Christianity actually helped the young Church: identifying publicly as a Christian was costly, so nominalism was rare. Converts were young, enthusiastic and sincere. Moreover, with so few missionaries, it was Nepalis themselves who evangelized their nation.

For many years, Nepali converts trained in India, then returned as church planters to Nepal. So, in 1978 the Nepal Theological College was founded in Kathmandu, to ensure the long-term health and growth of the Church. Today the College offers several programs in Nepali and English, including a three-year Master of Theology consortium program with Asia Graduate School of Theology Nepal, and is accredited by the Asia Theological Association.

There are new challenges in Nepal, including Hindu revivalism. This sometimes means intense family pressure exerted on new believers, and the negative influence of the caste system even within the Church itself. Cults are spreading rapidly as Nepal opens to the world. Pastor Kumar Das, of Bible Living Ministries Nepal, says: "The Church in Nepal is growing very fast but we do not have trained pastors and leaders. We are facing hardship in the theological area, so the Church



Karuna teaching at the Nepal Theological College.

has to develop training centres and train many pastors and as well Christian leaders."

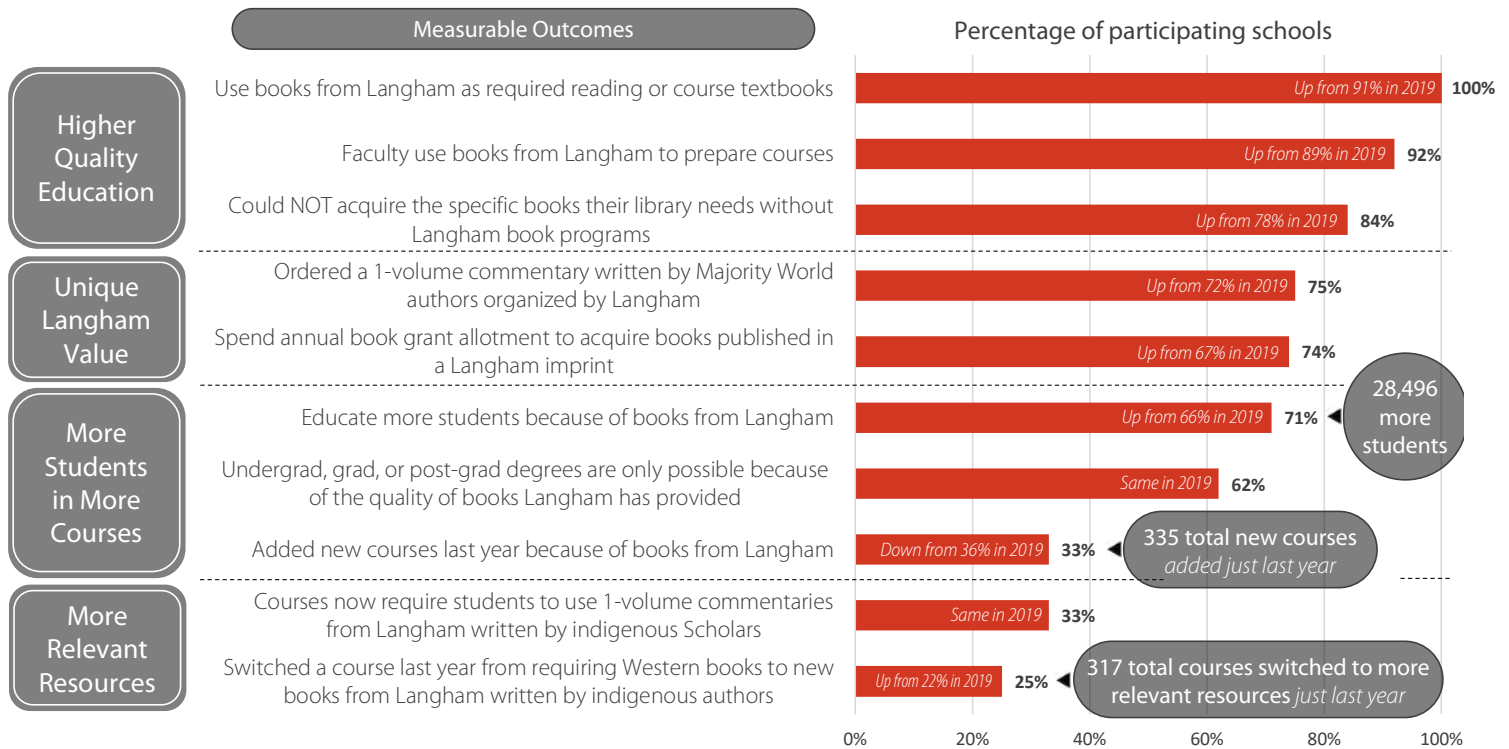
Recognizing this need, Langham Partnership has committed to Nepal through the Preaching program, conducting Levels 1 and 2 Preaching seminars for over five years. Langham also provides literature, including the *South Asia Bible Commentary*, and works with Nepali theological schools by providing books for their libraries. Several years ago, Karuna Sharma, a teacher and women's dean at the Nepal Theological College, received a Langham Scholarship to study at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. Only a few Nepali women have pursued theological studies, and Karuna is the first to pursue a PhD in theology. She has much to give the Nepali Church, in which a majority are women. Karuna is a mentor and motivator for many in Nepal, training lay leaders from various churches, especially in providing counseling to people in need and in crisis.

It is very encouraging that a team of Langham Canada supporters has together committed to support Karuna's program. Through our support of Karuna, we are helping to build the Nepali Church.

BOOK PROGRAM IMPACT: How does Langham Improve Theological Colleges?

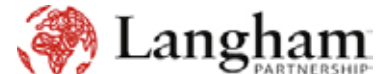
1 out of every 2 new books Langham sent is now required course reading at 691 colleges where 19,841 staff are training 212,748 students to lead the Majority World church.

In FY2022, Langham Literature supplied 14,635 Bible-centred books to 691 Majority World (MW) colleges across 79 countries to help students grow and mature in Christ. 11,154 of these books were supplied to colleges free of charge through the Library Grants program. 1,952 books were given in large library grants that meaningfully increase the quality of the library, and 810 books were part of local language grants to schools who need books outside the English or French languages. Langham collected impact data in FY2023 to learn how years of supplying books has improved theological education in the Majority World. Here are the results.



FACT: 15,878 courses require books provided by Langham out of the 41,944 total courses at 691 participating institutions.

SOURCE: Independent research firm, Excellence in Giving, gathered book data from 425 schools in FY2023.



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