

IN MEMORIAM



Corneliu Constantineanu
(1967 – 2021)

It is difficult to describe how shocked and deeply moved we were to hear that a beloved pastor, university professor, and internationally renowned Christian leader, Corneliu Constantineanu, had passed away on March 17th, 2021. He passed away connected to a ventilator in the emergency ward of the university hospital in Timisoara, Romania.

As far as we know, Corneliu was late in seeking medical help for having difficulty breathing and was diagnosed with acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), the inflammatory lung edema that is impossible to survive without a ventilator.

By that time, more than 930,000 people were infected with COVID-19 in Romania, 831,000 of whom have since successfully recovered. By March 25th, 22,835 people had died and among them was our dear friend and colleague, Corneliu Constantineanu. He spent 18 years at the Evangelical Theological Faculty (ETF, later VETU) in Osijek before returning to his homeland with his family.

He was an amiable and sociable man, a pastor at Speranza Pentecostal Church in Timisoara, as well as a very resourceful and successful leader of the postgraduate Studies of Public Theology and Pentecostal Studies at the Arad University's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. He was a first-class scholar, an excel-

lent preacher, and above all an authentic and humble Christian. I remember how he impressed not only our coworkers from western countries but also Zagreb Roman Catholic professors Bonaventura Duda and Ivan Golub, as well as Belgrade Orthodox professors Radovan Bigović and Radimir Rakić.

I first met Corneliu at the large Elim Pentecostal Church in Timisoara. Having been their honorary member, I have had the privilege of witnessing first-hand its fantastic growth from 300 to more than 7,000 members. Invited by their pastor of apostolic mission and anointing, Teodor Codreanu, ETF opened a center for the part-time study of theology in Elim, right after the collapse of the Communist regime in Romania. Hundreds of lay preachers and interested boys and girls came flocking to our overbooked lectures.

As a young Biotech engineer, Corneliu stood out in the group as a curious intellectual who always had extraordinarily engaged and sometimes provocative questions about the relationship of faith and reason, intellectual credibility of Christianity, and especially about implications of theology for spirituality.

Sometime later, Corneliu moved to Osijek so he could continue with his full-time studies and use our large library. He was always reading, almost devouring books, and working on his theological and spiritual formation. Everything he did was done with his whole mind and heart, and he excelled at it all.

After graduating *summa cum laude*, he earned his internationally accredited master's degree, also with the highest grades. His prizewinning master's thesis called, *Epanghelia: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of "Promise" in the Pauline Corpus* was later published as his first book (Osijek 2005). In the meantime, he became a lecturer and then the director of a library where his diligent and self-denying wife Ioana worked. In Osijek, they had two beautiful daughters, Anamaria and Carmen, who are currently attending universities in Great Britain. I used to joke with Corneliu and say that we need to "Slavicize" him so that he would be known in Osijek as KK, Kornelij Konstantinović. We finally agreed to continue with the Romanian original in "CC major."

From the very beginning, Corneliu showed leader potential and so we named him our Academic Dean. Following his doctorate, he became our director of internationally accredited graduate studies. He has often remarked that his international career started in Osijek and that he was exceptionally thankful for many influential visiting professors. In particular, for the renowned John R. W. Stott, whose Langham foundation enabled his doctoral studies in Oxford and Leeds and opened many other doors to international associations and engagements.

Dr. Constantineanu was a globally recognized scholar and writer, which is further confirmed by the response to a great number of articles published in the most reputable scientific and professional journals, but also by eight published books and journals he was the editor of. The most famous among those is his doctoral thesis, *The Social Significance of Reconciliation in Paul's Theology*, which

was published, albeit slightly altered, in the renowned series by Bloomsbury, T&T Clark in 2010.

Together with Christopher Scobie, Corneliu was the editor of one of the best journals about modern Pentecostalism that was first published in Slovenian as *Binkostniki v 21. Stoletju: Identiteta, Verovanje, Praksa* (Ljubljana, Podvig, 2016), and then in English as *Pentecostals in the 21st Century: Identity, Beliefs, Praxis* (Wipf and Stock, 2018), as well as in Romanian. Together with Marcelo Macelaru, he co-edited two journals at ETF: *Bible, Culture, Society: Postgraduate Explorations* (Osijek, 2009) and *Theological Pilgrimages: Collected Faculty Papers* (Osijek, 2009).

VETU delegated him to the Editorial council of the *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology*, whose member he remained until his passing. He wrote several significant articles and discussions for Kairos.

After earning his doctorate, Corneliu became an enterprising and multifacetedly active Langham Scholar. Among other things, he organized several successful Langham seminars about preaching in different Romanian cities, thus contributing to the continued education of preachers in his homeland but also creating a greater camaraderie and more fruitful cooperation between Baptist and Pentecostal pastors.

His vision of promoting contextually relevant Christian thinking included the gathering of the best young, and some not so young, theologians. As well as the Biblicists of Central and Eastern Europe to write a large, Langham-sponsored, Bible Commentary for the context of Central and Eastern Europe. For this grand project, he recruited several lecturers and coworkers from VETU. The project was so well-conceived and its contributions are so excellently written that the Editorial Council decided to keep Corneliu Constantineanu as its chief editor, although he is no longer with us.

Corneliu and two of his colleagues, under the guidance of Miroslav Volf, gathered about forty well-known Christian leaders, theologians, and scholars from all continents and edited an impressive ecumenical journal containing almost 900 pages called, *First the Kingdom of God: A Festschrift in Honor of Prof. Dr. Peter Kuzmič*. In the last few days, I have been reading Corneliu's chapter again, along with his moving dedication (pp. 673-705). I feel that everything he wrote there about me I should write here about him. Thank you, Corneliu.

Corneliu Constantineanu was a leader, a man with a vision of a new and more just world. Within theological sciences, he specialized in New Testament studies with a special emphasis on the Epistle to the Romans. He used Romans as the foundational assumption and turning point for the reconciliation not only in the vertical dimension (with God through Jesus Christ) but also in the horizontal one among peoples and nations.

In the last ten years or so, I have been gradually retreating from the leadership of some international entities, commissions, and councils and have started seeking someone to pass on the baton. Whenever I have been asked to suggest someone from my part of the world who would take my place in some of those offices, I had suggested Corneliu. He took the baton with enthusiasm and competence, and I am especially grateful for that. I first suggested him as the representative of Central and Eastern Europe in the entities of World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), and especially in its Theological Commission which I have personally presided over in its most productive time. While he was still the Dean at VETU, we delegated him to the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE). He was active in the Central and Eastern European Association of Mission Studies (CEEAMS) from the start, and together with Peter Penner and Anne Marie Kool he founded and led Osijek Doctoral Colloquium (ODC).

Dr. Rosalee Velloso Ewell, the chief executive director of WEA Theological Commission, has stated regarding his passing: “Despite his many accomplishments, Corneliu was a true servant of God who lived with great integrity, always witnessing to the good news of the kingdom of God with joy, strength, and humility. His unmistakable laughter will be sorely missed. All of us in the WEA pray for Corneliu’s family, his friends, and collaborators who are left behind and who now seek ways to carry on the work he started.” Bishop Dr. Thomas Schirmacher, Secretary General of the WEA, emphasized Corneliu’s great contribution to the transformative understanding of the Gospel in the wider Romanian and global context. Schirmacher also pointed out how much he will be missed at his University in Arad, as well as in the wider social community in Romania.

Dr. Frank Hinkelmann, Vice-Chair of the WEA International Council and President of the European Evangelical Alliance, has written that he regards Corneliu Constantineanu one of the most prolific evangelical theologians in Eastern Europe, with a special gift for networking and motivating people for communal projects. “His wisdom and experience was greatly appreciated by many of us and he will be greatly missed.”

Dr. Ruth Padilla DeBorst, Networking Team Coordinator, International Fellowship for Mission as Transformation (INFEMIT – which was co-founded by her father Rene Padilla and me), expressed her gratitude to Corneliu for working at INFEMIT for over a decade. She called him “a passionate, creative and dedicated pioneer in theological education” who brought laughter and depth, energy and perspective and fruitful dedication to God’s work across all meridians.

Professor Alexandru Neagoe, President of the Areopagus Centre, Timisoara, Romania wrote: “Corneliu was a man of remarkable academic and managerial skills... We are confident that the life and example of Corneliu will continue to be a landmark and a source of inspiration for many of those who have known him.”

Most recently he pioneered important postgraduate programs in Christian public theology at the Arad State University in Romania and mentored students at various other institutions around the globe.

Among his many publications, one needs to point out that he was the main initiator and general editor of the aforementioned *Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary* and co-editor of the monumentally important *Mission in Central and Eastern Europe: Realities, Perspectives, Trends* (Regnum Press).

Corneliu Constantineanu was solemnly commemorated at the Ecclesia Church in Arad, with eulogies by some of the most well-known Christian leaders, as well as the Dean and the Rector of Arad University. Two of our colleagues and Corneliu's partners, Marcel Macelaru and Daniel Oprean, did a wonderful job organizing and leading the commemoration, as well as the subsequent burial a day later at the Heroes Cemetery in Timisoara. VETU was represented by our Council member, bishop of the Reformed Christian Church in RH, Mr. Peter Szenn. Thank you, brother bishop.

Several days later, VETU held a commemoration in Osijek via Zoom, where we showed a short film about Corneliu with live participation by thirty of his coworkers and former students from different countries.

Commenting on this unexpected and, from a human perspective, premature death, Dr. Christopher Wright, Langham Partnership Global Ambassador and Ministry Director, published a poignant biographical and scientific portrayal of Corneliu Constantineanu's life and work, called *The Loss of a Giant*. Every one of us who have known Corneliu and have fruitfully worked with him for decades would have gladly cosigned this article. *Requiescat in pace*.

Peter Kuzmič