

# TO WIN THE HEARTS AND MINDS: EVANGELICAL MISSION ACTIVITY IN ALBANIA AS GLOBAL CULTURE WAR

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## I. Introduction

As the ideological influence of Marxism is disintegrating in most regions of Eastern Europe, evangelical missions from the West, particularly from North America, have proliferated. New strategic political and religious alliances are being formed in the ideological vacuum created in these societies that are undergoing rapid and extensive reorganization. Emerging interest groups are engaging in struggles for positions of influence. There is a global "culture war"<sup>1</sup> going on in Eastern Europe, and Evangelicals from the West are among the contenders in it.

Albania has experienced one of the most dramatic collapses of both Marxist ideology and the related institutional infrastructures. In the resulting ideological vacuum, representatives of new ideas of all kinds, both good and bad, are being drawn from every conceivable ideological and geographical direction. In addition, Albania is experiencing a resurgence of activity and influence by the historical religious groups--Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim. This dramatic influx of evangelical mission agencies and personnel from the West into a context of religious resurgence and competition makes Albania an ideal environment in which to conduct research into the nature of current evangelical missionary enterprise in Eastern Europe.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony provides a theoretical approach for the analysis of the ideological and competitive dimensions of contemporary evangelical mission within Eastern Europe, specifically in Albania. ". . . Gramsci can inspire fresh thought in historians from a variety of intellectual traditions. . . . Gramsci's work . . . provides a theoretical framework and a vocabulary for understanding historiographical problems that have asserted themselves with special force during the last fifteen years."<sup>2</sup>

Gramsci's theory is a dynamic approach to religion. It illuminates the manner in which social groups use the power of ideas to initiate societal change according to their specific vision of the future. This theory will be used to test widespread assumptions about the nature of North American evangelical missions, especially in Eastern Europe, as being, under the cloak of Christian mission, the promotion of such American ideals as democracy, voluntarism, individual rights, and free enterprise.<sup>3</sup> My own hypothesis is that these widespread assumptions are essentially accurate.

In order to test the assumptions and my own hypothesis about evangelical missions, using Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, during the summer of 1994 I conducted two periods of research among member organizations of the "Albanian Encouragement Project" (AEP), an umbrella organization for Evangelicals in Albania operating an administrative and coordination office in the capital city, Tiranë. Membership in AEP requires the acceptance of the "Lausanne Covenant," the definitive statement of evangelical missions that emerged from the International Congress

on World Evangelism held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974. There are currently about sixty-five member organizations with over 300 long-term missionaries working in Albania, almost all from North America and Western Europe. In addition, approximately 100 other evangelical missionaries from the West, who are not members of AEP, are presently active in Albania.

In Albania I conducted extensive interviews with thirty-five key AEP missionaries and with representatives and leaders of the Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim communities. I also presented and used a questionnaire to test the conclusions of this research with thirty-eight representatives of the AEP member organizations at their annual meeting in Switzerland in October, 1994.

I will begin with a brief summary of Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony as it applies to the study of evangelical mission, then make some observations about how Evangelicals are currently struggling for hegemony in Albania. Finally, I will draw some conclusions based on the application of Gramsci's theory to the evidence from the field research.

## II. Gramsci's Theory of Cultural Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci, who developed the concept of cultural hegemony, was an ethnic Albanian, born and raised in Italy. This brilliant leader of the Communist Party, for a time a member of the Italian parliament, was thirty-five years old when arrested by Mussolini's political police. Sentenced to twenty years in prison in Turi, Italy, he survived only ten. During these ten years of declining health, refusing any special treatment, Gramsci wrote his most important observations about cultural hegemony.

The theory of cultural hegemony is at the heart of Gramsci's arguments. Although his translated writings contain no precise definition of cultural hegemony, one characterization of hegemony that is seen as central is the ". . . `spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is `historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production."<sup>4</sup>

Gramsci noted that, if a particular vision of the future is held by a group of people committed to and confidently communicating that vision, such a group wields a powerful influence within society. These ideas are inevitably in competition, or outright conflict, with ideas held by other groups committed to a different vision. Hegemony, then, is about the triumph of certain socially held ideas over others, ideas that catch the imagination and catalyze increasing numbers of people in a society who eventually change the course of history. What is especially insightful in Gramsci's theory is that these ideas are not the results of blind forces of history or economic determinism but are deliberately generated and propagated by people who have "faith" in the vision by which they live, whether they be Marxists or Christians, and who intentionally seek to win the hearts and minds of people to this vision.

Gramsci recognized that adherents of religion make up such a group of people committed to a vision. He admired the cultural power of organized religion, even while disagreeing with its presuppositions.<sup>5</sup> He viewed religion as being one contender among many competing cultural forces for the hearts and minds of people. Gramsci believed that religion could be a reactionary force, preserving the status quo, or, in a fundamental break with classical Marxist theory, it could be a revolutionary force of liberation and social change on a popular level.

For Gramsci, transcendence is an historical, material as well as an intellectual-moral achievement. This . . . allows Gramsci to identify in the religion of the people a revolutionary capacity, as exemplified by the anti-establishment `heretical' movements in the Middle Ages, by the Reformation and even by the Protestant ethic and its entrepreneurial spirit.<sup>6</sup>

A key feature of cultural hegemony is the role of the "organic intellectual." Organic intellectuals are leaders who envision the future and articulate this vision in a way that connects it to the pre-existing aspirations and longings of the common people. This is an educational function. Empowerment of the common people by enlightening them to their own historical significance is central, for "it is this attainment of historical awareness, the realization of what is the right course for himself and for the society in which he lives that makes the role of the intellectual all-important in Gramsci's theory of revolutionary change."<sup>7</sup>

Although Gramsci believed that "all men are philosophers," the "common sense" of the masses is insufficient for the critique of society, for it is "not critical and coherent but disjointed and episodic." Political education is necessary if the popular common sense can be transformed into critical understanding. "Thus Gramsci believed that, with leadership provided by organic intellectuals from within their own class and by other intellectual allies, workers and peasants would be able to construct oppositional conceptions of life that would become popular and hegemonic."<sup>8</sup>

Organic intellectuals not only articulate the vision but also embody it, and they organize groups of people who live according to it. Organic intellectuals are

able to organise social groups and direct them throughout all their activities. . . . [This occurs] through the concept of 'hegemonic apparatuses' (schools, churches and media) which are the instruments for the exercise of hegemony and through which organic intellectuals become organisers. These organisers (organic intellectuals) are the agents of this practice. They are the ones, according to Gramsci, in charge of elaborating and spreading organic ideologies and who will have to realise the moral and intellectual reform.<sup>9</sup>

Gramsci assumed that in the democratic West, where there is a "free market" of ideas, this commitment by the people on a popular level must be voluntary in order to succeed in winning hegemony and permanently changing society. It is necessary then, for committed groups of organic intellectuals, the vanguards of the new order, to win the hearts and the minds of people by persuasion rather than by coercion. When this occurs, and as increasing numbers of people in a given society voluntarily accept the vision of the organic intellectuals and become committed to the ideals articulated by them, a "historic bloc" is created that becomes capable of winning the ideological war against the competition within society. "Thus, in contrast to the state, understood as the apparatus of government, stands civil society. In contrast to the moment of force and dictatorship there is the moment of persuasion and consent."<sup>10</sup>

This process of voluntary ideological change is, according to Gramsci, the only change that will triumph and endure within society in the West, for these ideas do not remain ". . . individual fancies, but are embodied in collective and communal modes of living."<sup>11</sup> Thus, ideas embraced by individuals who collectively create new historical blocs impact all of society as they are integrated into public policy, national culture, and institutional structures.

A key element for the successful emergence of new historic blocs, according to Gramsci, must be the engagement in "conscious planned struggle." This is not simply an issue of "capturing" the state. The power of a new historic bloc within civil society is its persuasive ideas and arguments. The initial persuasive power of these ideas and arguments, as Dwight Billings has pointed out,<sup>12</sup> is contingent upon the social support (or "plausibility structures," in Peter Berger's terms) that they have at the outset and are able to win. Gramsci argued that, initially, the acceptance of new ideas within society depends less on the "rational form in which the new conceptions is expounded" or on the "authority . . . of the expositor" than on "faith . . . in the social group to which [they] belong." Although the common people may not be able fully to understand the arguments of the new ideas, they accept them and remain convinced that the arguments are sound, for "so many like-thinking people can't be wrong."<sup>13</sup>

Although Gramsci limited his theory of cultural hegemony to Western Europe, recently others, such as Stephen Gill and David Law, have sought to apply Gramsci's ideas internationally, demonstrating "that it is possible to conceive of hegemony and the formation of historic blocs on a world scale."<sup>14</sup> They write, "Cementing this order [U.S.-centered international capitalism following World War II] was what we term a new international historic bloc of social forces, centered in the United States. This bloc originated in the outward expansion of the social forces associated with . . . an American 'multinational bloc.'"<sup>15</sup>

The observations of Gill and Law are especially helpful, for, in addition to the accumulation of capital as a hegemonic force, they point out other factors that contribute to Western global hegemony, such as the ideological climate on a global level converging with the accumulation of hegemonic "assets" possessed by the West, such as information, technology, English language, education, and media. These together not only allow the coordination of North American hegemonic activity around the world but also represent the power of the ideology that drives it.

It would seem that the hegemonic assets accumulated by and centered in the West make possible the coordination of a particular kind of hegemonic activity around the world--evangelical mission. We will now

examine the agendas and activities of evangelical missionaries in Albania in light of these central concepts within Gramsci's theories of cultural hegemony.

### III. Christian Religion and Cultural Hegemony

The hegemonic nature of organized religion was clearly understood by Gramsci. John Fulton points out that Gramsci saw

religions as political realities. This reality is not always of a conservative kind, and socialists can even in modern times find allies with religious movements and persons. . . . In any event, religion is always political for Gramsci. It is part of the interior character of religion as a total praxis, a form of power and activity in society. It is this praxis character which marks it off from philosophy and renders it both similar and dangerous to socialist praxis. In summary, Gramsci finds elements of belief, commitment, culture, and power in all active conceptions of the world, principally in religions, but in a superior way in socialism.<sup>16</sup>

Gramsci's analysis of religion is based both on his observations of the Roman Catholic Church in Italy, struggling to preserve its position of hegemony and the status quo that supported it, and on his limited awareness of popular, religious/revolutionary movements in history. Had Gramsci lived to see contemporary evangelical mission activity in Eastern Europe, he would have had further evidence with which to strengthen his arguments about the hegemonic, competitive, and potentially revolutionary nature of religion, especially of evangelical mission.

Sociological and historical studies support the portrayal in the Gospels of the revolutionary character of Jesus' announcing the Good News of the Reign of God. It was a message that, when accepted, caused social divisions. ("I am come to bring a sword.") It was attractive to some and threatening to others. The message of the gospel seemed to be attractive when it corresponded to and fulfilled the pre-existing aspirations, hopes, and longings of the common people. It was threatening when it countered pre-existing aspirations, hopes and longings of other social groups and institutions, especially those of the powerful religious elite who dominated religious thought and life and who were seeking to protect or establish their privileged hegemonic position within the social order.

The Gospel parables comparing the Reign of God and its expansive power within the world to that of the mustard seed, of leaven, and of the net attest to the observation that mission is a potentially revolutionary hegemonic force within culture. This is observable in history, for, within cultures where the gospel has taken root, churches have formed. The hegemony of this new historical bloc as it grows increasingly challenges the hegemony of existing social groups and institutions, including religious ones.

The parallels between Gramsci's version of the Marxist mission and evangelical versions of Christian mission are striking. Both presuppose the ultimate triumph of their vision. In spite of their confidence about ultimate triumph, both recognize the necessity of deliberate, participatory, and competitive activism in order to win the hearts and minds of the people to the vision to which they are committed. Both recognize the significance of their struggle.<sup>17</sup> Both advocate change and transformation. The central ideas of the Reign of God in the Gospels, like the central tenets of Marxism, offer a view of the world and a vision for the future that are both powerfully attractive among those segments of society that are longing for fundamental social change and powerfully threatening to other social groups and institutions that have a vested interest in preventing this kind of change from occurring. Both experience powerful, organized resistance. Finally, there are versions of both the Marxist and the Christian visions that transcend nationalistic interests.

Power has become a sensitive issue for promoters of mission since the era of colonial missions, for there is an awareness that the alliances made between those with religious and nationalistic ambitions often created the antithesis of the Reign of God, as such alliances still do. The theory of cultural hegemony, however, gives the opportunity to examine the competitive and ideological nature of evangelical missions in terms of its practice rather than its theology and to evaluate its relationships among other competitors. This we will now do.

### IV. The Hegemonic Presence of Western Evangelicals in Albania

Evangelical missionaries from the West are a hegemonic force in Albania both by virtue of the cultural assets they possess and by virtue of their deliberate strategy of mission. They are powerful both intentionally and unintentionally. In this section I will identify several sources and examples of this unintentional cultural hegemony

that Western evangelical missionaries in Albania enjoy. These include the missionaries' representation of Western culture, the missionaries' embodiment of a westernized gospel, and the pragmatic organization of structures that evangelical missionaries create for their enterprise.

#### A. The Representation of Western Culture

The cultural hegemony of Westerners in Albania today is a corollary to what evangelical missionaries there describe as "openness." Although these missionaries give a variety of explanations for the current Albanian openness they experience, within the theoretical framework of cultural hegemony it can best be described as the ideological vacuum created by the disintegration of the monopoly of Marxism. Following the collapse of the old system, several things occurred. Albanians who had secretly hungered and thirsted for "righteousness" as they imagined it suddenly could do so openly. In the moral ambiguity and ideological chaos following Marxism's collapse, any new idea was perceived to be better than confusion, better than Albanian ideas, and better than old ideas. Foreigners--especially from the West and representing immediate solutions--imported ideas, and new ideas were immensely attractive.

Most evangelical missionaries with whom I spoke recognize the problems in this kind of indiscriminate openness. Evangelical missionaries must compete with other Westerners for the hearts and minds of Albanians, often, from their point of view, unfairly. Being without critical or historical tools, Albanians often were, and still are, open to those ideas that promise the most in the least amount of time. Under such conditions, Evangelicals tend to see Mormons as having an initial advantage over Methodists, soft drink bottling plants over Christian bookstores. Openness for missionaries means an open market that includes attractive "false" ideas.

In spite of this competition of Western ideas within Albania, all foreigners from the West, especially from North America, presently have a competitive advantage over non-Western foreigners, for they represent a culture that epitomizes popular Albanian concepts of goodness, progress, and prosperity. These popular concepts, fueled by years of general deprivation, are assumptions about the West, especially about North America, that derive from media images, relatives in New York, and fertile imaginations. Evangelical missionaries from North America belong to the "international historic bloc" of social forces, centered in the United States" mentioned above.

The general attractiveness of Western--especially North American--culture on a popular level makes evangelical missionary presence hegemonic, for these missionaries unavoidably represent and embody the powerfully attractive culture from which they come. However, this causes a dilemma, for Evangelicals perceive many features of North American culture, such as hedonism, individualism, and materialism, to be antithetical to the gospel they attempt to communicate. Thus, North American evangelical missionaries are at once reluctant and powerful representatives of North American culture. My research showed remarkable consensus among missionaries; they see their cultural hegemony that originates in the magnetic appeal of North American culture as being both an asset and a liability in their efforts at communicating the gospel effectively.

While North American Evangelicals are inevitable representatives of North American culture, they are not deliberate, conscious promoters of it. The overwhelming evidence from my field research is that North American evangelical missionaries are generally more critical of American culture, including the American evangelical church, and more optimistic about Albanian culture than any other North Americans in Albania whom I interviewed.<sup>18</sup>

#### B. The Embodiment of a Westernized Gospel

Evangelical missionaries from North America embody a gospel that has both been shaped by and shaped American culture. They perceive that some of the features of North American society in which they believe strongly are values within the gospel message that have been integrated into the public values and institutional structures of North American society. Evangelical missionaries consider these values and ideals, such as democracy, justice, freedom and equality, to be good, not only for them but also for everyone else in all parts of the world.

This powerful overlap of the gospel they embody and the culture they represent creates a unique competitive advantage for the North American evangelical missionary for winning the hearts and minds of Albanians. I would like to cite three ways that I observed evangelical missionaries in Albania exercising this unintentional cultural hegemony.

1. Missionary self-respect and confidence. There is almost unanimous agreement among missionaries that, within Albania, they feel relevant, effective, and even privileged. This self-respect and confidence by a particular group of North Americans is powerful, even magnetic, within a chaotic, changing, and humiliated society. Missionaries feel more confident about their ability to have a positive impact on Albanian culture than on their own. This confidence arises from being both a missionary<sup>19</sup> and an American.

2. Respect of Albanian culture and optimism for Albania's future. The evangelical missionaries I interviewed were overwhelmingly positive about Albanian culture. As a whole, there is an attitude of realistic optimism among evangelical missionaries. Groups of Westerners who share respect for a demeaned people are powerful. Optimism about the future of a society that is suddenly free to hope again increases the power of visionary groups within it. This contagious and powerful optimism seems to be based on convictions about both the gospel (it will triumph) and culture (Albanian culture can, like American culture, be positively impacted by gospel values).

3. Embodiment of hope and vision. Evangelical missionaries, as a group, demonstrate a kind of prophetic attraction within Albania. The prophet, or the organic intellectual in Gramsci's scheme, is one who is in touch with the longings and aspirations of the common people and who can articulate and demonstrate a corresponding vision of the future in a way that focuses these aspirations in new directions. Evangelical missionaries, as prophets, embody change and hope. They stand in solidarity with the common people, communicating their positive views about, and faith in, the potential of ordinary Albanians, by inviting them to join in their faith communities and to assume responsibilities within them.

This powerful presence again can be seen as originating from gospel ideals, such as the priesthood of all believers, and from the North American cultural value of the inherent worth and potential of every human being, regardless of status.

#### C. The Pragmatic Organization of Mission Structures

The final feature of unintentional hegemony is the pragmatic organizational network of AEP. The communication and networking infrastructure, originally developed out of necessity within the context of Albanian infrastructural collapse, today eclipses anything done by any other organization in the country. What makes AEP unique is that it is a network of diverse organizations with a common general goal, rather than a monolithic, centralized bureaucracy. This is both perceived to be, and actually is, a powerful entity within Albania. It allows local adaptations in every locality and rapid responses to changes occurring within Albanian society. It gives the possibility of an amazing voluntary solidarity within general social fragmentation. In a society whose infrastructure is in shambles, where there is a distrust of neighbors and bureaucracies, voluntary organizational networking and technological interdependence are in themselves hegemonic. This organizational structure represents a convergence of the basic ideal of Christian unity within the Gospels, as well as the pragmatism of American organizational genius.

#### V. Evangelical Missions in Albania as Global Culture War

In addition to the hegemony that North American evangelical missionaries in Albania possess by virtue of the hegemonic assets identified above, my research shows that missionaries believe in and exercise what they see as "appropriate cultural hegemony" for themselves that is intentional, competitive, and strategic. This hegemony is seen to be appropriate when it derives directly from the power of the gospel within culture or indirectly from those parts of Western culture that have been shaped by the values of Christianity. The missionaries to whom I spoke believe that they can appropriate and maximize this "appropriate hegemony" in ways that will help to set the direction for the emerging evangelical Albanian church, ensuring that the gospel shapes the cultural reformation of Albania, moving the nation in the direction of freedom and democracy. The following four main areas of deliberate hegemony were identified and affirmed by the majority of AEP representatives:

##### A. The Promotion of the Concept of Religious Freedom and the Struggle to Prevent the (Re)establishment of Religion

Religious freedom, defined as the separation of church and state and the nonestablishment of religion, is seen by North American evangelical missionaries as a gospel-derived principle that has been incorporated into American public values. Religious freedom is promoted by all evangelical missionaries as a necessary component of

democracy, freedom, and the success for the gospel to affect Albanian culture in a way that would ensure its reaching its full potential. The promotion of the concept of religious freedom by Western evangelical missionaries is an important feature of the global culture war for two reasons.

First, it is important in terms of cultural hegemony. The idea of religious freedom is extremely appealing to many Albanians, for it corresponds to their assumptions about the West, its freedoms, its stable democracy, and its economic success. The hearts and minds of many Albanians are predisposed to freedom. The intentional use of the concept of religious freedom places evangelical missionaries from North America in a clear hegemonic advantage within Albania today. It appears that no other religious representatives can function as organic intellectuals among the victims of monolithic ideology as well as Evangelicals from North America who represent with such deep convictions the value of religious freedom.<sup>20</sup>

Religious freedom is also extremely important strategically for the future of the evangelical mission enterprise and the ongoing expansion of the Albanian evangelical church. Within the context of religious freedom, in the absence of a religious monopoly, Evangelicals believe that they have a fair chance to win the hearts and minds of growing numbers of Albanians to their version of the gospel. There is remarkable confidence among evangelical missionaries in Albania that, under the conditions of religious freedom, they will gain an increasing share of the "market." They are convinced that only in the context of unfair competition--that is, if religious "monopolies" are allowed to be re-established in Albania--will Evangelicals fail to compete successfully. The communication of the gospel by Evangelicals in Albania involves a principled and strategic opposition to religious monopolies of the historic religious groups in Albania.

It is in this current ideological struggle to define and promote religious freedom within Albania that the hegemonic and competitive nature of evangelical mission is most apparent. The opposition of Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim religious communities of Albania is predictable, for the leaders of these communities recognize their own relative disadvantage within the struggle for the hearts and minds of Albanians if they are forced to compete in a religiously "free market." While some leaders of the historic religions of Albania understand and appreciate the basic incompatibility of modernity with religious establishment in principle, their own strategy for reestablishing their position of cultural hegemony is to win the people over to support governmental control of religion in some form or another. This battle is currently raging, and it remains to be seen who will win this crucial one in the culture war, for all sides, recognizing its long-term importance, are prepared to expend enormous resources and efforts with the hopes of winning.<sup>21</sup>

#### B. Organic Unity within the Organizational Diversity as Foundational for a New "Historic Bloc"

Unity within diversity is at once a Western democratic ideal (e pluribus unum) and a feature of the gospel (Rev. 7:9) that the majority of evangelical missionaries in Albania utilize powerfully. The organizational and organic unity among the diverse mission organizations of AEP is unique, not only within Albania but also in almost every other area of the world. Evangelical missionaries recognize that their cultural hegemony within Albanian society will be greatest when this organic unity in diversity occurs, for, besides helping to solve practical and immediate problems, it provides a demonstration of the effectiveness of the gospel in achieving what missionaries claim it will do: It unites all people into a new historic bloc that will potentially grow and reproduce the organic unity of the mission organizations. This seems to demonstrate that neither denominational nor national imperialism is the bottom line for evangelical mission in Albania, and it points once again to the global character of the vision of the gospel in the world.

Evangelical missionary cooperation across denominational and organizational lines involves sophisticated communications systems both within Albania and overseas, information-gathering and information-sharing, the coordination of joint service projects, and the planning of events. A united front is also maintained for the purpose of cultivating positive and influential relationships with the Albanian government. This unified front in dealing with government is seen to have potential advantages for the missionaries themselves, resulting in such concessions as official recognition and tax exemptions. More importantly, this unity is seen as enhancing the evangelical missionaries' ability to influence decision-making by the current government for the good of all Albanian citizens.

As the infrastructure of Albania develops and as such technology as radios, FAX machines, and telephones become widely available, making cooperation appear less necessary, the strategic advantage of cooperation within organizational, denominational, and theological diversity that has characterized AEP since its creation has recently

begun to be rationalized in new ways. AEP member organizations are becoming aware that, if they begin to work independently, their impact within Albania will become fragmented and defuse, opening the opportunity for the reestablishment of religious monopolies by the historic groups that have at their disposal tremendous organizational power and external financial resources. AEP member organizations have recently made clear commitments to build and strengthen the network of communication, information-sharing, and cooperation during the next few years. This unique strength of Evangelicals will likely remain a powerful and attractive feature of the evangelical missionary community within a modernizing society that is recovering from repressive ideological control and that views with suspicion any alternative that threatens to monopolize society through a centrally organized ideology.

#### C. Empowerment of the Growing Albanian Evangelical Church as an Emerging Historic Bloc

The value of the inherent dignity and potential of the individual on which Western democracy is based is seen by Evangelicals to be compatible with the understanding that humans are created in the image of God. Western evangelical missionaries are uniquely equipped, both culturally and theologically, to empower Albanians by integrating them into their churches; sharing their knowledge, optimism, and vision about Albania with new members; and equipping ordinary Albanians to serve and lead within the congregations. There are many examples of many kinds of empowerment being done by evangelical missionaries. They have researched and publicized the life and work of an Albanian evangelical leader from the last century, Gjerasim Qiriazhi; they have worked to revive the Evangelical Brotherhood.<sup>22</sup> Evangelicals are involved in ambitious educational projects, organizing a range of options for Albanians from elementary schools to graduate programs.

Evangelical missionaries have facilitated the formation of an Albanian Bible Society. Lamin Sanneh consistently argues that, contrary to those who would assert that modern mission represents new forms of colonial subjugation, one of the central activities of contemporary missions, the translation of scripture into the vernacular, represents empowerment, for it contributes to a society's critical self-understanding, critical understanding about the culture of the missionaries, and possibilities for making informed choices about its own future.<sup>23</sup> Gramsci realized that "every language contains the elements of a conception of the world."<sup>24</sup>

Ordinary Albanians participating in evangelical congregations, provided with a new language by evangelical missionaries, become capable of conceptualizing their world in new ways that challenge the status quo. The emerging local church--comprised of individuals empowered by hope, encouraged and educated to lead, with a new way of conceptualizing the world--becomes a new historical bloc within Albanian society. This kind of empowerment is seen by North American Evangelicals as appropriate cultural hegemony that will potentially impact all of Albanian society positively.

#### D. Promotion of a Vision of a "Good Society" with the Albanian Government and Public

The vision of a free and just society wherein individuals take responsibility is a vision compatible with both Western culture and the gospel that evangelical missionaries represent. While the majority of those I interviewed saw their activities in Albania as contributing to a cultural reformation that would help establish a "good society," in which freedom, democracy, and justice would be enjoyed, most evangelical missionaries were outspoken against an uncritical promotion of North American culture as providing an appropriate model for Albanian society. Instead, there was widespread affirmation of the ability of Albanians, with the growing influence of Albanian evangelical Christians, to build their own version of a free and just society. Evangelical missionaries believe that they are playing a key role in laying this foundation, not only by working to establish the evangelical church in Albania but also by sharing resources, knowledge, historical perspectives, motivation, and international connections with the Albanian government and public.

#### Conclusions

The evidence gathered from the research data does not support my original hypothesis nearly as strongly as I had expected. In fact, the results necessitate a revision. My conclusions can be summarized as follows.

Evangelical missionaries from North America have a vision for Albania that includes religious freedom, some form of democracy, an effective and equitable economic system, and a moral foundation on which these can rest. Evangelical missionaries are convinced that evangelical Christian faith, embraced and adapted by the emerging evangelical church of Albania, is key for the future of a good Albanian society that will benefit everyone. Their

vision, then, not only goes beyond denominational agenda, but it also includes Albanians of all faith traditions and of no religious beliefs at all.

North American evangelical mission activity in Albania, instead of being an enterprise driven by nationalistic impulses, is driven by a vision that transcends national boundaries and interests, a vision at odds with features of every culture, including many aspects of North American society.<sup>25</sup> This vision motivates Evangelicals to wage an international culture war as an extension of the "culture war" being waged with decreasing success within America against the dominant "post-Christian" culture. This global culture war is essentially the same in Eastern Europe as in America, with one main difference. Eastern Europe, where the cultural hegemony of Marxism has collapsed or is greatly weakened, is perceived to have within it areas of opportunity, not only to wage cultural wars but also to win them, something that no longer seems possible in the West.<sup>26</sup>

Although there is the sense of ultimate triumph, Evangelicals recognize the necessity of active participation in the struggle in order to implement their vision of the gospel within human culture now, everywhere in the world, for they are convinced their version of the Good News is good for everyone in the same way it is good for North Americans. The culture war, understood in terms of Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, is a struggle on a global scale against the competition, both religious and secular, for the hearts and minds of everyone.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Within the limited scope of this essay, an adequate treatment of the concept of "culture war" is not possible. My understanding and use of the term here comes from James Davison Hunter's thesis in his Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America (New York: Basic Books, 1991). In very broad terms, Hunter's thesis is that a struggle for influence within American culture, or a "culture war," is being waged between coalitions of people generally divided by their "orthodox" or "progressive" impulses. The categories "conservative" and "liberal," "religious" and "secular" are other ways of viewing the coalitions struggling to define America.

2. T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," The American Historical Review 90 (June, 1985): 568.

3. Dana L. Robert documents the consistently negative interpretations of evangelical missionary enterprise at the hand of many historians: "The idea that Protestant foreign missions were a tool of nationalism and, by extension abroad, imperialism, proved to be an irresistible thesis that has generated numerous monographs from the late 1950s until the present" (Dana L. Robert, "From Missions to Mission to Beyond Missions: The Historiography of American Protestant Foreign Missions since World War II," International Bulletin of Missionary Research 18 [October, 1994]: 148).

4. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. and trs., Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci (London: Lawrence & Wishart; New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 12.

5. "Socialism . . . for Gramsci, was something all-embracing, a secular religion, and above all a new culture. . . . [Gramsci admired] the way in which the Roman Catholic Church had survived and maintained its influence for centuries, and believed that for Socialism to achieve a comparable success it too must be based on a faith which would influence every aspect of life of its adherents" (James Joll, Antonio Gramsci [London: Fontana, 1977], pp. 25-26).

6. John Fulton, "Religion and Politics in Gramsci: An Introduction," Sociological Analysis 48 (Fall, 1987): 204.

7. Joll, Gramsci, p. 90.

8. Dwight B. Billings, "Religion as Opposition: A Gramscian Analysis," American Journal of Sociology 96 (July, 1990): 8.

9. Joseph A. Woolcock, "Politics, Ideology, and Hegemony in Gramsci's Theory," Social and Economic Studies 34 (September, 1985): 206.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

11. Roger Simon, Gramsci's Political Thought (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982), p. 58.
12. See Billings, "Religion as Opposition."
13. Hoare and Smith, Selections, p. 339.
14. Stephen R. Gill and David Law, "Global Hegemony and the Structural Power of Capital," International Studies Quarterly 33 (December, 1989): 477. This article demonstrates the applicability of Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony globally and to completely new fields of study.
15. Ibid. p. 478.
16. Fulton, "Religion and Politics," p. 202.
17. As Lamin Sanneh points out, "mission is a history-making force" (Lamin Sanneh, Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process--The African Dimension [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993], p. 181).
18. These included a number of Peace Corp volunteers, military advisors, business persons, and U.S. government representatives.
19. The assumption by evangelical missionaries of their "right" to represent the gospel in every culture is clearly articulated in the "Lausanne Covenant," to which all AEP member organizations commit: "We believe the gospel is God's good news for the whole world, and we are determined by his grace to obey Christ's commission to proclaim it to all mankind and to make disciples of every nation" (from "Introduction" of "The Lausanne Covenant," International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, July, 1994).
20. It is worth noting here that all of the North Americans I interviewed in Albania--government, military, Peace Corps--agreed that religious freedom was important for ensuring that the future of Albanian society would be good.
21. On November 6, 1994, a referendum on a proposed Constitution for the country that included a guarantee of religious freedom was voted on by Albanians but failed to pass.
22. The evangelical missionaries involved in these projects have strong commitments to the autonomy of the Albanian evangelical churches.
23. See Lamin Sanneh, Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989, 1990); and idem, Encountering the West.
24. Jackson Lears, "Concept of Cultural Hegemony," p. 269.
25. It may be argued that there really is very little difference between promoting a North Americanized gospel and promoting North American culture and that evangelical missionaries who admit to engaging in the former while denouncing the later are only deceiving themselves. The point is that the North American evangelical missionaries with whom I spoke do not perceive themselves to be promoters of American culture. This is in contrast to some mission endeavors around the world in the past and with the activities of some other kinds of North American groups (military, business, and governmental) in Albania at present.
26. It is not possible to elaborate here on what is meant by "winning" the culture war. It is sufficient for purposes of this essay to summarize what most missionaries described when asked for their vision for the country of Albania to which they thought their presence and activities in Albania were contributing. These almost always included democracy, freedom of religion, an economic system that was equitable and produced enough, and moral reform.