

# STRIKING COLORS

by Benny Joldes

**D**o Romanians have perceive colors in a particular way? In Romanian history, many empires conquered the country (the Turks, the Tatars, the Austro-Hungarians). For this reason, it can often be difficult to define what is really Romanian. Traditional Romanian folk costumes feature mainly red, white and black, and sometimes blue. Some might think publications featuring these colors will be more acceptable to Romanians, but designers take a different view.

At Grafoprint, one of the major design companies in Timisoara, Romania, Mircea Zamfir, head of the Design and Prepress Department, says "We have to cope with old mentalities, but there is actually no limit to the color palette we use in our publications."

"You need to have at least one striking color that will catch the eye," says Zamfir. "Romanians think that more color is more appealing."

Zamfir does not use color indiscriminately, however. "On something official," he says, "more than one color will not look nice. For symbols, or company graphics, we use a sober graphic, with a gray or blue background and only one strong color."

## Denominational differences

Use of color and images varies, however, according to the denominational bent of the material in question. Within the Orthodox Church, with 87 percent of the population, it is common for books and magazines to have a religious icon or a traditional symbol on the cover. As a result of the use of church paintings, the color range is very large, from bright colors to simple dark colors.

The same happens with publications produced for Roman Catholics, which account for five percent of the Romanian population. The intent is to maintain a link with tradition.

In contrast, Jehovah's Witnesses use a bright color palette, with a

strong mixture of photos and drawings. Images cover more than 60 percent of their printed material. More pictures make their magazines more interesting and appeal to readers.

Protestant and evangelical printing tends to have a more limited palette. Rather than relying on sacred art, Protestant publishers tend to use photos of flowers, landscapes, churches, or people. Evangelical publishers believe that images from real life enable readers to more closely identify with the material and make it easier for readers to choose a book or a magazine. In children's books, illustrations are often used to support the different Bible stories and even to tell the story aside from the text.

## Influence of Western culture

Romanians tend to accept almost everything new and many publishers are following the format of publications in the West. Publishers who translate foreign books often use the same design as the original.

Magazines feature an equal percentage of text and graphics. Whenever possible, publishers print a photograph of somebody famous on the cover. Designers work a lot on the cover because they say the cover sells the magazine.

A market economy demands new strategies that place the accent on the consumer. If the image Romanian readers see is attractive, then the material will sell.

"The use of striking colors seem to work for now," says Zamfir. Publications have to "conquer" many types of readers, and a colorful design has a major role in achieving success. ❖



Above, a Protestant Christian book, *Occult Tendencies and Practice in Contemporary Christian Life*, typifies Romanian evangelical designers' reliance on landscapes.

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