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Reimagining Europe

Long after the UK had joined the European Union (on New Year's Day, 1973) it was not uncommon to hear Brits tell me they were 'going to Europe for their holiday'. To be fair, when I started visiting the Scandinavian countries, I heard people using similar language. I was completely thrown, however, when friends from Italy, Spain, and Greece, also told me they were 'going to visit Europe'. This was confusing! Where did they think Europe was?

Other contributors to this edition of Vista have noted similar confusions about the nature of mission in Europe. Some see it as something done by Europeans in other places, not *within* Europe. African Christians, on the other hand, challenge their European sisters and brothers to think of Europe as precisely a mission field. They are shocked at Europe's descent into secularity and are not afraid to describe Europe as a post-

Christian continent. Others might consider Europe a 'dark' continent.

But, if this is so, is Europe uniformly dark? What happens at its edges? Does the light that (apparently) shines more brightly in Asia or Africa, spill over into the parts of Europe that border these continents? More particularly, *which* Europe is darkened? The metaphor of 'people walking in darkness' is certainly biblical, but its use needs a little more care than is often shown in some of the examples found on mission agency websites and in their literature.

While some of our European contributors agree with the diaspora perspective, several of them express hopeful views. They acknowledge the challenge of secular humanism to the Gospel but point to signs of God at work, challenge Christians to bridge the cultural gap between church and European society, issue a call to make disciples of younger generations, and, as Alex Vlasin suggests, urgently find new ways to 'voice the gospel'.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

EDITORIAL

Visions of Europe

Each of us has a perspective on Europe which is unique and valuable, but it is not the whole picture. To see what is really happening with mission in Europe we need to see Europe from different points of view.

The last issue of Vista sought to identify the voices that were often missing from the conversation on mission in Europe: young people, women, Central and Eastern European voices and migrant perspectives. So we invited authors from each of these groups to provide their own unique perspective on mission in Europe.

The lead article by Darrell Jackson introduces the theme and encourages us to embrace the tremendous diversity of Europe as we reimagine how to do mission in contemporary Europe.

Luke Greenwood provides a young people's perspective and reminds us that beneath the secular veneer of global youth culture lies a deep spiritual hunger. Evi Rodemann highlights some of the challenges and injustices that Christian women endure across Europe whilst pointing to exciting initiatives that women are championing.

Alex Vlasin calls for Eastern and Western churches and agencies to listen to each other and work together, an appeal that is picked up by Harvey Kwiyani whose African view echoes many of the same points.

As editors of Vista our prayer is that this latest issue might help to balance the one-sided perspectives on mission in Europe today.

Jim Memory

Evangelical authors, writing about Europe, have used a wider variety of biblical imagery over the last decade or so. David Smith (*Mission After Christendom*, 2003) suggests that Europeans are like the disciples on the Emmaus road, who have forgotten the Christian story. Jeff Fountain has described Europe as a 'prodigal' continent. Others, including Duncan Maclaren (*Mission Implausible*, 2004), suggest that belief in contemporary Europe is implausible. The mission of the church in Europe is to make faith credible through vital communities of Christians who live and demonstrate the plausibility of the beliefs they profess. The loss of Notre Dame cathedral, in Paris, was described by Mark Thiessen, in the *Washington Post* (24th April, 2019), as a reminder of the need to rebuild the European church using 'living stones' (1 Pet 2:4-5).

Broadening the imagery helps, but so too will expanding our vision of what constitutes Europe. If deciding which countries count as 'Europe', and which don't, is a tricky business, then it might be more helpful to talk about Europe in the plural, to accept that there are probably several different versions of Europe. This might then explain why there are some versions of Europe that we like and others that we don't.

The sheer diversity reflected across the forty-seven member states of the European Council can be confusing, and is often seen in the wide differences of political history, language, religious

heritage, cultural identity, climate, proximity, regional variation, political vision, economy, geography, industry, and so on. Lumping all 47 into the same 'dark continent' category seems either clumsy or lazy, and possibly both.

Of course, there are barely indisputable facts that European mission agencies and churches must face and, to be honest, many of them are painfully all too aware of the facts.

The 2017 Pew Research report (*Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2017, p.5-6) noted that 'Central and Eastern Europeans display relatively low levels of religious observance' although it also reports that 'religion has reasserted itself as an important part of individual and national identity', and 'solid majorities of adults across much of the region say they believe in God'. Maybe it's better to say that Central and Eastern Europeans are not god-less, rather that they are not too concerned with what God might expect of them. This is the background for comments in this edition from Alex Vlasin, for example, that the churches of these regions often see themselves as insignificant, under-resourced, and subsequently determined to work in East-West partnerships.

In Western Europe, the Pew Research report *Being Christian in Western Europe*

(2018, p.7) describes European Christians as mostly non-practising rather than non-believing; 'most adults surveyed still *do* consider themselves Christians, even if they seldom go to church. ...non-practising Christians [...] make up the biggest share of the population across the region. In every country except Italy, they are more numerous than church-attending Christians.'

**“non-practicing Christians [...] make up the biggest share of the population across (Western Europe)”
Pew Research**

Across Europe, the greater majority of people who identify as 'Christian' are simply de-churched. Many of them were baptised as infants. Many of them are geographically close to a church

where Sunday worship still happens. But, sadly, they've forgotten the Christian story; they've strayed from churches that have disillusioned, ignored, or betrayed them; they no longer find Christian faith plausible; they find Sunday worship boring, irrelevant, or unengaging.

Do these facts alone make Europe a 'dark continent' without distinction or difference? The biblical passages that refer to people 'walking in darkness' also refer to the light shining upon them. Wherever we imagine Europe begins and ends, even though it may be darkened, the light of Christ still shines there. De-churched Europeans may stumble in the darkness but the light of Christ has not been extinguished.

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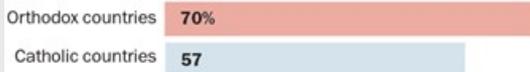
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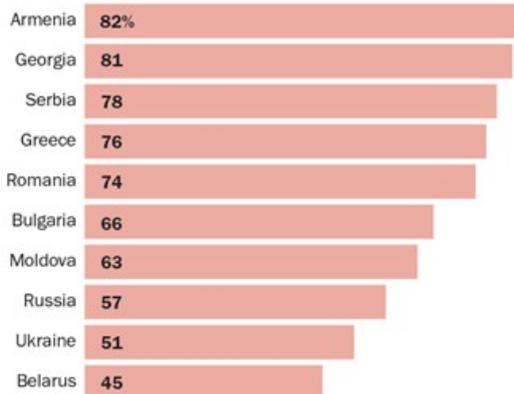
Strong association, especially in Orthodox-majority countries, between religion and national identity

% who say being Orthodox/Catholic is very or somewhat important to truly share their national identity

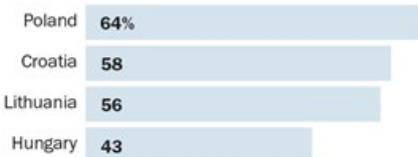
Median results of surveyed countries



Among those in Orthodox-majority countries, % who say being Orthodox is very or somewhat important to truly be a national of their country



Among those in Catholic-majority countries, % who say being Catholic is very or somewhat important to truly be a national of their country



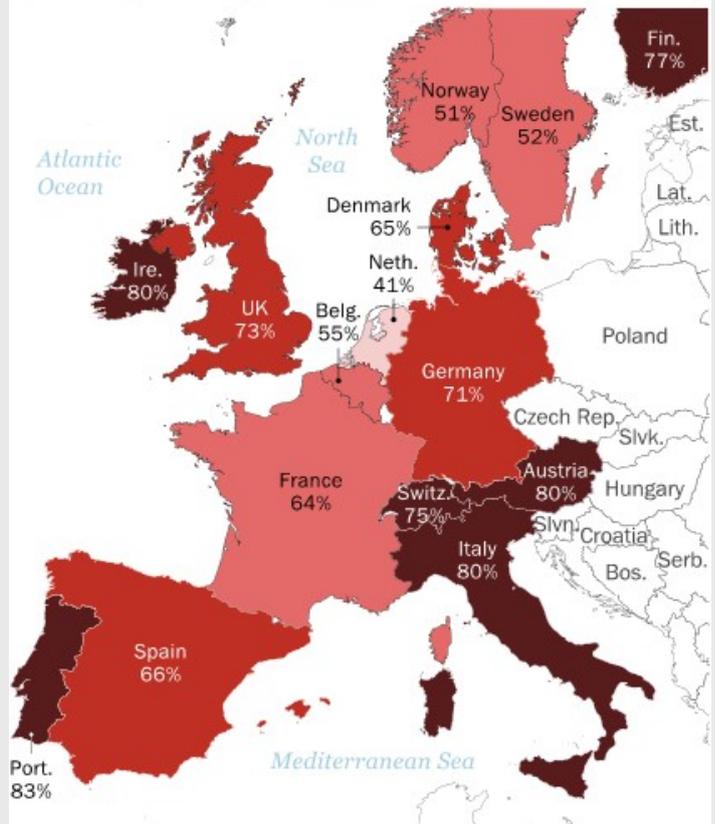
Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details. "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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Majorities across Western Europe identify as Christian

% who say they are Christian

0-49% 50-64% 65-74% 75%+ Non-surveyed country



Note: Respondents were asked "What is your present religion, if any? Are you Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else or nothing in particular?" Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details. "Being Christian in Western Europe"

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Sources: "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe" (2017) <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/> and "Being Christian in Western Europe" (2018), Pew Research Centre <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/>

It's possible that missionary efforts that are only directed towards re-kindling the light of Christ through planting more new churches, misunderstand the nature of the missionary challenge in Europe. We may not like some of the ways that Europeans have chosen to work together (the EU, for instance?), and we may think these should be located on a scale somewhere between strange to oppressive, but when God's people found themselves in similar situations, we read that they learned to 'sing the Lord's song' in strange lands and though this was painful, they persisted. The early church also learned to live as pilgrims in a foreign land, a world that was not

their home. This required a major reimagining of the world in which they had previously lived as fully engaged heathens and loyal subjects.

Maybe a deeper understanding of Europe will help missionaries avoid making a common mistake. That is, the mistake of assuming that they understand Europe without really studying and finding out more about it. Every one of the contributors to this edition of Vista shows the hard word of thinking carefully about Europe. They collectively underscore the need for new visions of Europe, for a reimagining of the Europe that we thought we knew. It might be dark in places but to consider it dark

everywhere is unimaginative and shows a lack of vision and understanding.

Christian missionaries in and to Europe are called to engage the Gospel with a more appropriately imagined Europe; a Europe that is wonderfully yet frustratingly diverse. Europeans might believe they are Christians, but the central missionary challenge is to be the body of Christ in such a way that Christian faith is seen to be plausible, memorable, and transformative! To believe that is possible requires us to reimagine Europe!

Darrell Jackson

THE SPIRITUAL HUNGER OF A SECULARIZED EUROPEAN YOUTH CULTURE

LUKE GREENWOOD

A study released in 2018 entitled “Europe’s Young Adults and Religion,” by British professor of theology and sociology of religion Stephen Bullivant, demonstrates one of the most crucial issues for mission in Europe today.

In the Czech Republic, 91 percent of young adults categorised themselves as religiously unaffiliated, while in the UK, France, Belgium, Spain, and the Netherlands between 56 percent and 60 percent said they never go to church and between 63 percent and 66 percent said they never pray. According to Bullivant, many young Europeans “will have been baptised and then never darken the door of a church again. Cultural religious identities just aren’t being passed on from parents to children. It just washes straight off them”.

Youth For Christ released another eye opening study, focused on Gen Z (12-18 year-olds), showing that only 32% of British teenagers believe there is a God, and of these, only 18% would be interested in finding out more. This is a staggering reality facing the future of the church and it’s mission.

The current urban generation, connected by consumerism, social media, and the entertainment industry forms the largest global culture to ever exist. It spans from Europe to South America, from Asia to the Middle East, holding the same values, listening to the same music, watching the same movies, and sharing the same posts.

This global culture is largely influenced by one predominant worldview: secular humanism. God is dead and we are at the centre. In this relativistic culture we are god,

and consumerism is our religion. This is a generation that does not look to the church for answers, as it believes it to be a dead and empty tradition of the past. Either there is no God, or if He is there, He doesn’t really interfere with our lives.

And yet the God of the Bible is on a mission and His heart is broken for this lost generation. The message of His love—the gospel—is for everyone, and it is not right that young people today don’t get to hear it because we’re not making it accessible to them. They don’t come to us, so we need to go to them. As Jesus’ church, we need to realise the necessary changes in mind-set and lifestyle, and the need for a paradigm shift in missions.

The hope and opportunities come as we see clear signs of God in action, reaching out to the hearts and minds of this generation. There is a deep awareness among young people today that something is missing. This generation is spiritually hungry. This is evident when we listen to the cry resounding throughout the pop-culture and social media around us.

“The current urban generation...forms the largest global culture to ever exist”

British indie rock artist, Florence Welch, talked about this in a TV interview about her 2018 album *High as Hope*. She described her awareness of a needy love she had been trying to fill. “Something outside of me needs to fix this. . . . It’s like, I can date the solution, I can drink or take the solution. . . . this record is a recognition of ‘Oh, you can’t!’” When asked about her hit song “Hunger” Florence explained, “I was thinking about something bigger than romantic love. . . . The song kinda came from that idea - what was I looking for that is outside myself?”



Photo: Steiger Europe

This is the key question we should all be asking. The current predominant mindset tells us there is nothing beyond what we see around us. We’ve been brought up to believe that all we need can be found within ourselves. But if we’re honest, we know Florence is right. We need something bigger.

Most of this global generation are interested in spirituality but not formal institutional religion. The shift in culture towards individualism and personal choice has changed how society views God and religion. We define our own belief system and mix beliefs and ideas to fit our preferences. Religion falls among the many options and categories in our consumer habits. And at the end of the day, we are left with the unsettling sense that no one really knows what to believe in anymore.

There is a cultural gap between this globalised youth culture and the church. But bridging cultural gaps has always been at the core of the missions movement. It was modelled by Jesus’ incarnation, Paul’s mission to the Greeks, Hudson Taylor’s

mission to China, and many others throughout the history of missions.

Missions has traditionally meant going to a distant land to learn a new language, eat strange food, and adapt to foreign cultures, but arguably the largest mission field today are the very cities in which we live. We need to practice the same flexibility and cultural adaptability to share Jesus in our own neighbourhood in this time when our faith has been pushed to the margins and is now seen as strange and alien to the culture around us.

Jesus' teaching on salt and light gives us clear guidance on how to be in the world yet not of it. Jesus calls us to be distinct (salt that has not lost its taste) and influential (that your light may shine!). The problem is that sometimes we, the church, are too salty. We're so salty that no one can eat the food. We're so different that no one can understand us; we seem alien to the world around us. In fear of the world, we shut ourselves up in the ghetto and lose our relevance; we have no influence.

In other cases, we fall to the other extreme. We become the pop church, the hip church, with an influential voice. Our light shines bright, but we have lost our saltiness. We become the same as the world around us, losing our values and identity, losing our distinctness, our focus on the good news of Jesus. This commercial Christianity is filled with quick solutions and easy answers but has no power. Some reject it as just another product on offer, while others consume it but experience no real change. We need to stop offering a cheap Christianity to a generation that is tired of consumerism. We need to leave the ghetto and preach again the genuine and radical message of Jesus.

The mission opportunity here is huge, if we are willing to engage with and



Photo: Unsplash

speaking truth into the cultural scene of this urban generation. Jesus has called us outside the church, to the streets, clubs, festivals, and places where people need to hear the truth. This generation might be steeped in relativism, but there is a deep spiritual hunger. We can look at the mindset around us and the apathy towards Christianity and be fearful to speak, afraid to offend. But if we show people who Jesus really is, and his victory on the cross, then the power of God moves and people want to know Him. The loneliness and heartfelt need for belonging and true community in this generation is another opportunity for missions today. We all know how hard it can be, especially for a young person, to just walk into a church. So in the same way we boldly speak truth we must also be willing to make disciples in this

scene. Learning to follow Jesus needs to start in the context people come from. This is becoming all things to all men. Not only did Paul go to the Greeks to preach Jesus, but he spent time with them, often years. He lived among them and showed them what it meant to be a Greek who followed Jesus.

We need to build bridges of discipleship, welcoming people into community and relationship without the formality of a program. A young believer learning to follow Jesus in the scene he comes from, learning to be salt and light to that world, becomes a missionary from day one as he continues to be engaged in his own environment and relationships, leading others to faith.

Luke Greenwood
Director, Steiger Europe

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Many women across Europe face incredible challenges due to their gender. Sadly, the church often contributes to these as well. Reflecting on some of these here will also highlight some beautiful initiatives where churches and networks are determined to encourage every girl and woman to live their God's given calling, for the sake of His kingdom.

Europe has a population of about 740 million, with slightly more women than men, though the ratio is close.¹ In Eastern Europe however we find a larger difference between the male and female population, often due to greater life expectancy of females.²

Our churches in Europe portray a similar picture to that of Eastern Europe, with women in the majority. The report by the Sophia Network states that women make up around 65% of the UK Church.³ This might be very similar to the overall European context.

Being in the majority however means very little due to the limited output of these women in European churches and in missions work. They often feel overlooked and face various challenges. Europe is geographically, spiritually, socially, economically, culturally diverse and therefore women's experiences are not homogenous. Neither is the church context homogenous. The listed challenges here are not the same in each country but portray some of the barriers and issues women face as they endeavour to bring and live Jesus.

Gender-based sexism and violence

One of the issues women worldwide but also in Europe face is gender-based violence. The UN estimates that 35 percent of women have experienced either physical and/or

sexual violence (not including sexual harassment) at some point in their lives.⁴ This was also identified as the third biggest obstacle in the survey undertaken by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and the Lausanne Movement who had interviewed nearly 500 Christian women leaders globally. As a result of this survey and the first ever consultation "Rise in Strength", these global leaders published a statement, "Call to all Christians" in several languages.⁵

Adding to the violence, 1 in 10 women in the European Union report have experienced cyber-harassment since the age of 15 (including having received unwanted, offensive sexually explicit emails or SMS messages, or offensive, inappropriate advances on social networking sites). The risk is highest among young women between 18 and 29 years of age".

In 2018, the Sophia Network published the results of their Minding the Gap survey which had been the largest survey ever undertaken among women in the UK church. Over 1200 responded and two-thirds of them had shared that they had experienced sexism through their calling being questioned and being limited to traditional roles.⁶

Gender injustice

When mentoring and talking with women in ministries across Europe, they often mention that their voices are not taken seriously or they don't feel heard. If they sit in meetings, they are not expected to contribute. If a leadership position becomes open, in many cases a man is chosen. Not necessarily because he is more qualified but because he has the "right" gender. We girls often hear

that we exist to run the family and support our husbands in their calling. And we hear this from men and women alike.

Looking towards Eastern Europe, according to Girls Not Brides, 7% of girls in Macedonia are married before 18 and 1 in 10 in Albania.⁷ Girls and young women are seen as house workforce, needed to raise children, so they are married at a young age with their husband selected by family.

There is often a division of labour which we also find in the church. Girls do the children's ministry, women's ministry etc.; men do the pulpit stuff.

A lot of women in Western Europe struggle with juggling work, marriage and children. In Central and Eastern Europe, women often have to take care for the financial situation of the whole family, meaning they have to work hard, and some have two jobs.

Patriarchy falls into this category. It is a common thread through women's experiences and manifests itself in different ways. Advertising and media expose her constantly to patriarchal norms, which often reduce women to a collection of body parts with an unrealistic beauty idea and exists for male pleasure. As girls grow up, they come to understand that no matter their achievements or qualifications, society views her worth based on physical attractiveness in the eyes of men.

This leads often to the statement, "I do not feel good enough". In the largest survey of girls in the UK, 2 in 3 of girls aged 7-21 years old feel that they are not good enough.⁸ When girls in church and ministry are asked to take on leadership, to preach etc., often their response will be, "I am not good enough".

What are some church and mission responses?

In the midst of so many different challenges for Christian women in Europe we see multiple initiatives on behalf of women. But not simply on behalf of women, but of women in church and missions.

The Girls Brigade across Europe⁹ is an example of encouraging girls at young age. For over 126 years, it has invested in girls, helping them discover life to the full and equipping them in leadership; thus affirming that their gender is no coincidence or a mistake committed by God.

Well-known Swiss evangelist Andreas Boppart started an initiative in 2019 to encourage women to preach and lead. Seventy women attended the first seminar in May 2019 “Raise your voice”. He was their champion and trainer. This year Naomi Dawson, a young leader herself and now working with IFES, started a Facebook group¹⁰ for women who are passionate about evangelism where they can mention their opportunities for preaching and prayer.

What we can do together is to provide visibility to these women who are called and are stepping out and provide opportunities to teach, lead, serve. Natalie Collins from the UK, together with others created a platform, Project 3:28 (based on Galatians 3:28) which provides conference statistics and a database of female speakers.¹¹ More and more conferences try to balance the gender of speakers and have a ratio for women to attend and teach. To aim high, with slow success.

We as women need to champion each other but also need men to champion us to fulfil our missions. Before I became a CEO for a European youth missions network, I



Renovo 2019: a retreat for women leaders from the millennial generation

was desperately looking for a female mentor in leadership. The few I encountered were not willing to walk the journey with me. I promised God that I would not let this happen to the next generation of female leaders in church.

Five years ago, four of us girlfriends started a weekend for younger female leaders from across Germany, gathering about 25 ladies each time. The experience was very inspiring, sometimes comforting, and always encouraging to persevere and follow the dreams given. This year I started a European format called “Renovo” where Claire Rush and I gathered 18 younger women from 11 countries. The response was fantastic and we plan to repeat this.

Mary Lederleitner in her most recent book highlights 95 voices of global female mission leaders who she interviewed for “Women in God’s Mission – called to serve and lead”.¹² Women have always advanced God’s mission through history. They are used by God to continue doing this today, facing the various obstacles and being willing to pay the price.

The task ahead of us is to encourage women and men to work together in equal partnership. We are in this together seeking to see Europe once again being changed by God. For this, it needs all of us. Young and

old. Male and female. Not just to encounter the injustices, violence, sexism in church but together to fulfil our highest calling in Europe. The Great Commission in reaching Europe will not be fulfilled unless women and men work in partnership for the Gospel.

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Evi Rodemann with Claire Rush

When analysing the cross-cultural mission of the European Churches, one might see different characteristics. We will share a few observations from a Romanian perspective.

1. The need for inclusive language

Defining the concept of “mission” is never an easy task. Nevertheless, the different interpretations of its terminology create gaps in understanding and serving in mission. For Western European churches mission could be translated as: “Let’s go to other countries to serve.” However for most Eastern European countries missiology is merely similar to theology. The result is visible in the latter’s lack of passion and prioritisation of missionary work, and the former’s ignoring the needs of local involvement. Using the same words does not lead to the same meaning for all the European countries. Diminishing the connection with the source of mission, the heart of God manifested in the love for people, decreases the desire and motivation for mission. Integral and holistic mission should be better explained and more promoted among all churches in Europe.

2. Unity in diversity

It is true that churches in Eastern European countries have a small voice in mission and perhaps some think they have nothing to say anyway. But what if their voice is expressed differently than the ones the Western Churches are used to hearing? Would it help to look at their heart and strong desire to serve rather than their publications (or lack of them) and participation in European mission consultations?

Moreover, their official church leaders may not always support mission but regular church members are more committed to sacrifice for it. How can the church members be empowered to serve and how can their leaders be encouraged to be open to invest more in global mission? A key way could be to invite them to come out of their comfort zone through going to them out of the comfort zone of pre-set mission agenda. Listening to them and valuing their contribution in mission might help them make the necessary steps while enabling the western European missionaries demonstrate unity in diversity.

3. The presence of youth in mission

Eastern European churches still incorporate a large youth presence in comparison to the Western European evangelical churches. These people are eager to be involved in mission. Moreover, all across Western Europe there are many churches made up of people arriving from Eastern European countries. The average age of the membership in these churches is 30. Therefore, these churches need to be encouraged to be involved in mission work and help develop biblical understanding of mission. Generally speaking, they are used to regular prayer and bible reading: values which youth from all over Europe need to learn as the basis for mission. Efforts to pollinate among these youth groups might eventually be worthy for missionary efforts, especially with the arrival of other young people from non-European ethnic groups which need the Church in order to encounter Jesus.

What are the challenges and opportunities for the gospel?

Admit it or not, we all depend on each other in mission. Churches in Eastern European countries have been greatly impacted by the presence and the work of Western European missionaries.⁴ Would it be possible to return that, especially with the great challenge the Western European churches face today in the arrival of a new immigrant wave from non-European countries. Could the wave before that, the immigrants from Eastern European countries help? Are the Romanian and Ukraine Diaspora Churches able to engage in cross-cultural mission alongside the Western Europe? What does it take to turn this challenge into an opportunity?

A possible answer could be to organise meetings in the local communities where all these churches are first invited by a community of God and then work



The Jilava Prison where Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand was imprisoned for many years. Photo: Alex Vlasin

together for His glory. Another possible idea could be to open the mission and theological schools to train the Diaspora church members and offer opportunities they never had in their home lands. Partnering and exchanging resources, knowledge and passion might open new opportunities to witness to the new arrivals.

For many years the church in Western Europe was engaged in social action and poverty relief type of mission, presented to the Eastern European countries and its churches. While this is very important, in some cases the message of the Gospel was overshadowed by these activities. Perhaps it is time to put more effort into presenting the message of the good news and be a life model for the churches where, until now, their life saving goods have focused on helping the communities travel through rough times and poverty. The voice of the Shepherd and spiritual care might now be more important than physical food. Signs of love need to surpass the basics of daily survival and thus move to the care of emotional and spiritual life. Too many broken marriages and emotional suffering happens today all across Eastern European countries with not much help from the church. Therefore, there is a great opportunity to assist churches and families in their daily struggles with addictions, burnout or creating a balance of life and family.

Another big challenge is the fear the church displays in mission today. For many years the Western European churches demonstrated a great deal of courage crossing the Iron Curtain and other such obstacles. What can bring back that zeal? Churches in

Eastern Europe might fear to lose the resources coming from the Western European churches. Is it possible that the church is becoming timorous? Is this situation increasing as churches across Europe face the reality of encountering believers from other faiths? Partnering together in mission could help both enthuse the zeal and enlarge the potential the churches across Europe have today.

Where are you seeing signs of life and hope?

Even though the church in Western European countries might be view as weakening, she still has the life of Christ and His power. The long legacy and experience of mission work from Europe to other continents of the world constitute an immense privilege and force for the advancement of the Gospel.

Very seldom do churches from the West and the East work together towards such goals. However, they should complement each other, contributing in a partnership that honours the Lord and advances His Kingdom. There is no reason to be shameful or fearful. This Western Church is an example and a model for the Eastern European countries.

They have the knowledge (books and research) and the experience so much needed in the mission field. On the other hand, the strong desire to present the gospel around the world with the values and the practices of the churches in

Eastern European countries might bring hope to the entire Europe.

Hope comes only if all work together, hand in hand, to overcome obstacle and challenges. There is a lot of progress to be made. The life and hope in mission comes from unity and “bold humility”, as David



Photo: Alex Vlasin

Bosch put it. Serving together should not be limited to the needs within Europe but continue to intentionally witness and ministry beyond its continent.

God broke the chains communism used to stop Christians spreading the Word in Eastern Europe. Today, we pray that He will break the chains that stop churches becoming missional.

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RETHINKING MISSION IN EUROPE: AN AFRICAN CONTRIBUTION

HARVEY KWIYANI

I am an African. I was born and raised up in Southern Malawi. I have worked in Europe and the United States for the past twenty years. I came to Europe in 2000 to teach at a now defunct school of ministry in Saint Gallen, Switzerland. For various reasons, what I did then—ministry that eventually took me to several countries around Europe—was not called “missions.”

Many of the people I worked with did not understand that an African can be a missionary, let alone serve in Europe. So, I worked as a Christian youth worker for three years before deciding to seek training that would enable me to be effective in mission among Europeans. I would acquire that training in Britain and in the United States where I studied while continuing to serve in mission. My work started out as a short-term mission service in Switzerland. Twenty years later, I am still here, and I am gravely concerned about the state of mission in Europe.

Indeed, living in Europe for this long time has afforded me an opportunity to observe and experience both the overwhelming impact of secularism on the European religious landscape and the utter helplessness of most European

Christians to effectively engage it and evangelise their own neighbours. For instance, in my current line of work, I interact on a regular basis with students from several universities in Europe. I have learned that an overwhelming majority of university students in Europe refuse to identify as religious. My unpublished research on the faith of varsity-age children of African migrants in Britain suggests that less than 10 percent of overall university students self-identify as religious, and less than 5 percent of them identify as active evangelical Christians. I learned from the younger-generation of African students that many of their non-religious European mates say that they are actually two or three generations detached from Christianity and, as such, they generally associate the word “Christian” with the Bible-carrying, tongue-speaking Nigerian Pentecostals who rent their school halls for church services or the Polish Catholics who have made the Mass viable again in their neighbourhood parish. I find this situation terrifying, especially when I hear many mainstream mission conversations in Europe spend more time discussing

how to reach the Muslims in Europe or to send more missionaries to Africa and other places, paying little attention to the mission field among Europeans. We still need to discern how best to engage the post-Christian Europeans in mission.

The concern that I have for the state of mission in Europe cannot be adequately put into words. I do not agree with those Africans who want to taunt Europe saying, “Who is the heathen now?” Yet, the irony is there

for all to see. Most European Christians, in my estimation, do not even begin to understand the seriousness of the situation. They have

lived through the secularisation process and so they have been conditioned to see it as normal. It often takes foreign eyes (such as of returning Europeans or non-European migrants) to see things that seem normal to locals. For instance, upon coming back to England after over 30 years in India, Lesslie Newbigin was shocked to see that Britain had become a mission field like India — a harder mission field because, adding, “It [mission] is much harder than anything I met in India. There is a cold contempt for the Gospel [in Britain], which is harder to face than opposition ... England is a

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pagan society, and the development of a truly missionary encounter with this very tough form of paganism is the greatest and practical task facing the church.” This challenge is yet to be seriously picked up, and I am afraid Newbigin’s voice is slowly disappearing into the distant past. For those of us who have witnessed the explosion of Christianity in other parts of the world, the shock of a post-Christian and secular Europe is unfathomable. Many of us who have grown up seeing people flock to church almost every day of the week are shocked to see Europeans walk away from Christianity in large numbers. There is hope, though. God has sent help in the form of many prayerful and zealous Christians from around the world, understandably needing to learn the context, but ready and eager to engage. They do not use the label “missionaries.” Many of them are economic migrants, but they are Christians, very ready to serve God in Europe.

Given a chance to speak to mission leaders in Europe, I would emphasise three issues. First, I would ask them to begin to seriously think of Europe as a mission field. This is necessary because first, church history suggests that de-Christianised societies find it hard to convert back to Christianity. North Africa and Asia Minor are good examples. Second, the Enlightenment-shaped secularised Europeans present a unique mission field different from almost every other people group in the world. Indeed, while the rest of the world is furiously religious, Europe, being an “exceptional case” (Davie) is



“Let the Brazilians, the Nigerians, and the Koreans, and the many other foreign Christians find their place in mission in Europe.”

becoming increasingly secular. Mission among secular Europeans, or indeed, secular anybody, is uncharted territory. Even more, mission and evangelism among Europeans cannot rely on the help of colonial empires as like most of the missionary work that took place around the world in the twentieth century. To many 20th century Africans, for example, the missionary and the coloniser were serving the same purpose. For those of us working in Europe today, we need to learn how to evangelise without attempting to colonise — which, I believe is how mission ought to be done everywhere. All this is to say that if we engage Europe as a mission field, we will need a new missiology. Just like the old missionaries studied their mission fields, we need to train missionaries for Europe. We need to send missionaries to European countries.

Second, I would encourage them to consider treating mission in Europe as a spiritual endeavour that I believe it is. The key to doing this is prayer. Above everything, it is

prayer that will open the gates to shine God’s light in Europe. Plans, strategies, and visions are excellent, but they will achieve more if they are undergirded by prayer. Of course, even our social ministries that seek to dismantle systemic injustices will have greater impact when they are carried forward in prayer. Revivals happen — I am sure about this — but they happen because of prayer. We need prayer when we plant churches, when we run our food banks, when we distribute tracts on the high street, when we visit the sick in the hospital, and when we visit those in prison. We need prayer in everything we do.

Third, I would ask them to realise that to evangelise Europe, we need all Christians living in Europe to be involved. This is critical because of, firstly, the colonial history of mission and the racist history of Europe’s relationship with the rest of the world and, secondly, because the European mission field includes many hundreds of thousands of non-white Europeans and non-Western immigrants. Europeans will not reach all these people without the

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

help of the global church currently present in Europe. Let the Brazilians, the Nigerians, and the Koreans, and the many other foreign Christians find their place in mission in Europe. I would ask European leaders to patiently help the foreign Christians understand the context of Europe better, and encourage them to pray for their missional efforts. It would also help for them to open up space in their organisations to allow the foreign Christians to contribute to their sense of mission.

Unfortunately, of course, Europeans have a hard time receiving or asking for help. Many Westerners are good speakers but bad listeners, especially

“in this current context of mission in Europe will need Europeans to do some listening, and to learn to receive help from the Africans and other non-Westerners living among them.”

if it is non-Westerners speaking. Generally speaking, Europeans always do the teaching, and the Africans must listen and learn. I do think that if the man of Macedonia (of Acts 16) called for help today, he would be ordered to just go to meet Paul at Troas. But in this current context of mission in Europe will need Europeans to do some listening, and to learn to receive help from the Africans and other non-Westerners living among them. The Spirit of God will help us to do all this. It is God’s mission after all.

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The Lausanne Movement in Europe are partnering with Vista as part of the Lausanne Europe 2020 Conversation and Gathering.

Lausanne Europe are planning a gathering with the theme of *Dynamic Gospel: New Europe* in October 2020 for some 800 representative leaders “drawn from national denominations and Evangelical Alliances in every nation of Europe, from mission organisations and those whose professional work is their mission frontier, including diaspora church leaders, local church leaders, women and men, the young and the not-so-young”. But the gathering itself is just part of a broader conversation that

will seek to engage 10,000 leaders around the event “so that, for every person who attends, at least twelve others can participate in the thinking, connecting, sharing and implementation of the initiatives that will come out of it”.

Vista are partnering with Lausanne Europe 2020 by being one of the key resources to facilitate that broader conversation. The coming issues will pick up on crucial themes that were identified at the Lausanne 2020 Thinktank in January 2019.

For more information see the Lausanne Europe website below

www.lausanneeurope.org



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