

INTENTIONAL MISSION IN POST-CHRISTIAN GERMANY:
CONSIDERATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSIONARY CHURCH PLANTERS

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INTRODUCTION

Having been a church planter in Germany since 1984, I have had a first-row seat observing the many challenges and unique opportunities for establishing New Testament churches in the Land of Luther. Thoroughly grasping and understanding Post-Christian German culture will provide the setting for intentional mission. Mission is not something that occurs haphazardly, but that intrinsically grows out of one's personal relationship with the living God—a relationship that is, by its' very nature, intentional. As a third generation Pentecostal, it is imperative for me that the Church be continually reminded that the baptism in the Holy Spirit was given to God's people to equip them for intentional mission. Beginning in each believer's own Jerusalem comes empowerment from on high to take the good news of God's intentions even unto the ends of the earth.

The first part of this paper will provide extensive background information on the spiritual climate in Germany that church planters and other ministers must properly understand to effectively and relevantly serve in the twenty-first century. Second, I will overview the present spiritual climate Pentecostals and other Evangelicals face in Germany today. In spite of the present sobering reality with most churches in decline, great hope remains as men and women continue to surrender their lives to Christ. Third, this paper will offer several approaches to fostering intentional mission for effective ministry in Germany.

It is estimated today that there are approximately 100,000 Pentecostal Christians in Germany. Pentecostals in Germany must become more intentional in mission, since the vast majority of Germans have never heard a clear presentation of what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This paper will assist church planters and

ministers coming to Germany from other cultures in their quest to contextualize the message of gospel for the German people. Roland Werner, a leading Evangelical in the German Protestant Church, is supportive of missionaries coming to Germany, and his assessment for such ministry is appropriate:

Missionaries from other countries to Germany are welcome, but it is important for them to get to know the existing local structures, both regionally and nationally, and to cooperate with German Christians. This will increase their effectiveness and will make for less missionary drop-outs and isolation in the long run.¹

Intentional mission will be more effective when we come as servants who are humbly willing to listen rather than provide a host of answers from our own home culture.

¹“Germany: The Church and Missions Today,” World Pulse Archives, September 2003, <http://www.Lausaneworldpulse.com> (accessed September 24, 2009).

PART 1

THE SPIRITUAL CLIMATE OF POST-CHRISTIAN GERMANY

Brief Overview of Post-Reformation Germany

Many casual observers of German Church history, especially of the Evangelical variety, traditionally view the workings of Luther and the resulting Reformation as being a significant spiritual awakening that touched the entire German population. Winston Tjong states rightly that though the Reformation reformed theology, the structure of the newly created Protestant Church, differed little from the Catholic Church it had left behind.² History shows that when a local German count or duke in sixteenth or seventeenth century Germany changed his confession from Catholic to Protestant, so did the people living under his jurisdiction. This type of quasi conversion has left a profound mark on the German people and allows very little room for the notion of a personal free-will decision to become a follower of Christ. Many of the geographic boundary lines created between Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation are still in place today. Christian Schwarz takes serious issue with the misconception that the Reformation was a great spiritual awakening for Germany:

For the large majority of the population, the spiritual effect of the Reformation was that millions of nominal Catholics became millions of nominal Protestants. They thus came under the influence of Reformation theology – which can perhaps be regarded as progress—but the idea that this meant an upsurge of spiritual life is one of those popular legends we would do well to lay aside.³

²Winston Ayong Tjong, “Die Relevanz der Kirche in einer Zeit des gesellschaftlichen Wandels: Missionarische Kirche in postchristlichem Kontext” (Ordination Thesis, Bund Freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden, Erzhausen, Germany, 2007), 7.

³Christian A. Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church: How Natural Church Development can Transform Theological Thinking* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999), 86.

In the late seventeenth century, the spiritual renewal movement of pietism left its mark on parts of German Protestantism. Phillip Jakob Spener and August Hermann Francke gave impetus to a movement that boldly called into question the cold intuitionism of German Protestantism. Institutionalism in Protestantism for Pietists like Spener and Francke was not that much different than the Roman Catholicism they left behind more than a hundred years before. Spenner offered six proposals for reform in his *Pia Desideria*, which summarizes the intent of Pietism still practiced today in Germany:

- More extensive use of the Word of God among us. The Bible must be the chief means for reforming something.
- Renewal of the spiritual priesthood of all believers. Luther's example is correct in urging all Christians to be active in the general work of Christian ministry.
- The reality of Christian practice is more than a matter of simple knowledge.
- Restraint and charity in religious controversies. One is to love and pray for unbelievers and the erring, and to adopt a moderate tone in disputes.
- Reform in the education of ministers, there needs to be training in piety and devotion as well as in academic subjects.
- Edifying sermons were to be preached, understandable by the people, rather than technical discourses, which lacked interest and were difficult to understand.⁴

Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a student of Francke and godson of Spenner, helped spread this renewal movement worldwide, as the first Moravian missionaries were sent out from Herrnhut in 1732. Gradually, pietism and world missions became intertwined through the efforts of the Moravian missionaries, leaving their influence on John Wesley and others in England. But sadly enough, the effects of Pietism would go largely unnoticed in the general German population as a whole.

⁴Mark A. Noll. "Pietism: Spener und Francke," <http://www.mb-ft.com/believe/txc/pietism.htm> (accessed October 13, 2009).

Religious Opinion in Germany

Even though church edifices are still prominent in Europe, the Church itself as an institution has become ever more marginalized in society, especially during the past thirty years. Church buildings and religious edifices are relics of the past that give a sightseer the feeling that he or she is in a museum. David Kettle depicts the dilemma of Christianity in England, which is not unlike Germany. “The church is like the pattern on wallpaper. Religion is visible but meaning has faded, and no longer invites attention.”⁵

Survey data from the Emid-Institut shows that in 1999 only ten percent of all Germans felt that personal faith was of any significant personal value. Nine percent of East Germans felt the same way.⁶ In 2005, further research data indicated that only about one-half of Germans believe in the existence of God.⁷ These statistics are quite remarkable in light of the fact that almost two-thirds of all Germans are officially members of either the Catholic or Protestant Church. The German news magazine *Der Spiegel* best summarizes the present spiritual dilemma facing Church leaders of all denominations: “A once Christian country has now become a pagan country with a few Christian remnants.”⁸

The results of a Bertelsmann Stiftung Study in April 2009 showed that almost 60 percent of all East Germans do not believe in life after death; in West Germany only about 25 percent of the population shares this same belief. The study found further that only 13 percent of East Germans admit to having a strong personal faith, as opposed to 38 percent of West Germans

⁵David Kettle, “The Haze of Christendom,” *The Gospel and Our Culture*, 14 no 1 (2002):1.

⁶“Umfrage: Ist Deutschland gottlos geworden?” *Idea Spektrum*, 36 (1999): 6.

⁷“Umfrage: In Deutschland glaubt jeder Zweite an Gott,” Austrian Broadcasting Network, http://religion.orf.at/projekt02/news/0507/ne050726_umfrage_fr.htm (accessed August 24, 2007).

⁸“Religion in Deutschland,” *Der Spiegel*, 25 (1992), 51.

affirming the same.⁹ Due to forty years of Marxist influence, only 25 percent of East Germans today have church affiliation.¹⁰

However, interest in religion in general has grown in recent years among the German population. Due to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, with continual media attention paid to Islamic terrorism, Germans are focusing more attention on Islam. Interest in Buddhism and the countless varieties of esoteric thinking continues to greatly interest many Germans. The print media and various television talk shows often present reports and discussion on non-Christian religions.

Yet sad to say, religion might be in vogue, but interest in the Christian faith continues to wane.¹¹ The state churches themselves have not benefited from the trend toward greater religious interest, but continue to struggle with substantial membership loss and declining church attendance.¹² In 2007 only about 6 percent of the population nationwide attended a Sunday church service. In larger cities like Leipzig, Hamburg or Frankfurt it is estimated that only about 1 percent of the population attend church on a given Sunday.¹³

⁹ „Umfrage: Zwei Drittel der Deutschen glauben an Auferstehung,“ Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, April 3, 2009, http://www.ekd.de/aktuell_presse/news_2009_04_03_2_religionsmonitor.html (accessed October 5, 2009).

¹⁰ Hartmut Barend, „Evangelisation - die zentrale Aufgabe der Kirche im 21. Jahrhundert,“ Paper presented Arbeitsgemeinschaft Missionarische Dienste - Fachtagung Evangelisation in Bonn, Germany, January 2007, http://www.a-m-d.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Texte/weitere_Autoren/HB20070117.pdf (accessed October 5, 2009): 3.

¹¹ „Umfragen: Religion ist wieder im Kommen,“ *Idea Pressedienst*, April 18, 2006, [http://www.idea.de/pressedienst/detailartikel/archive/2006/april/artikel/umfragen-religion-ist-wieder-im-kommen.html?tx_ttnews\[day\]=18&cHash=28f596c9fa](http://www.idea.de/pressedienst/detailartikel/archive/2006/april/artikel/umfragen-religion-ist-wieder-im-kommen.html?tx_ttnews[day]=18&cHash=28f596c9fa) (accessed August 22, 2009).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ „FeG Vision: 100 neue Gemeinden in 10 Jahren,“ Bund Freier evangelischer Gemeinden in Deutschland KdöR., <http://www.vision.feg.de/> (accessed October 5, 2009).

Declining Numbers and Waning Interest in the State Churches

In West Germany, including former West Berlin, 2.3 million members officially left the Catholic Church in the twenty-five year period from 1970-1995. In this same time frame, 4.6 million members officially left the Lutheran Church.¹⁴ In 1970, 44 percent of the German population was Catholic, and 49 percent of the population was Protestant. In 1996 membership declines in both state churches indicate that only a total of 66% of the German population was either Catholic or Lutheran.¹⁵ It is worthwhile to analyze Protestant Lutheran Synod statistics in the state of Saxony, which gives a picture of what has been occurring throughout Germany. In 1933, 87 percent of the population were members of the Lutheran Church. Less than 60 years later in 1991 only 30 percent of the state population was Lutheran.¹⁶

The following figures highlight at a macro level the declining percentage of the German population that belong to the four major Christian groups in Germany. This group includes: Catholics, Protestants, Free Churches and the Orthodox Churches.

1950	96%
1970	83.6%
1990	72.7%
2007	63.1% ¹⁷

In 2007 the Catholic Church had just over 25 million members. In the same year over 121,000 Catholics officially deregistered from their church. In 2007, just under 25 million

¹⁴“Kirchenstatistik Bundesrepublik (alt) und West-Berlin Gesamt-Deutschland,” Bund für Geistesfreiheit München, <http://www.bfg-muenchen.de/kirstat.htm> (accessed October 5, 2009).

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Wolfgang Simpson, *Wie Christlich ist Deutschland? Eine Studie zur Situation des Christentums am Ende des zweiten Jahrtausend* (Weil am Rhein, Germany: Wolfgang Simpson Verlag, 1993), 45.

¹⁷“Warum werden in Europa so wenige Menschen Christen,” *IdeaSpektrum* 21 (2009): 17.

Lutheran were registered in Germany with 131,000 of its members officially leaving their church in the same year.¹⁸

Over the past decade many committed Christians have also left the Protestant Church to join one of the Free Churches. Former German Finance Minister Hans Apel explained why he left the church he had attended since his birth:

The Church is failing to fulfill her commission. She no longer propagates the teaching of Jesus Christ, but evades it by succumbing to marginalism (i.e., blessing of homosexual unions, ceremonies for divorced, political statements, etc.), because her clientele wishes such. The Protestant church has decayed to a comfortable blessing-church. The gospel dissolves like a piece of sugar in the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁹

Apel's comments above are characteristic of what many Evangelical Christians sense about the contemporary crisis taking place, especially in the Protestant Church.

According to Reinhard Neubauer, the Protestant Church in Germany is no longer a fellowship of people, but an organizational power set over the people. She does not seek to win people, because she already has them. Her effort is now not to lose them.²⁰ Dietrich Schindler, as an Evangelical, lists why he believes the Protestant Church is dramatically in decline:

- Non faith-based Baptism
- Membership is based on non-voluntary involvement
- Maintenance-minded pastors
- A very bureaucratic parochial structure
- Government-garnered income
- Its leaders are more concerned with popular culture than their biblical mandate.²¹

¹⁸„Statistik: Kirchengaustritte in Deutschland,“ Kirchengaustritt.de, <http://www.kirchengaustritt.de/statistik/> (accessed October 7, 2009).

¹⁹Dietrich Gerhard Schindler, “Creating and Sustaining a Church Planting Multiplication Movement in Germany” (D Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006), 18.

²⁰Reinhard Neubauer *Auslaufmodell Volkskirche—Was kommt danach?* (Stuttgart, Germany: Quell Verlag, 1994), 43.

²¹Schindler, 20, 28.

Concerning infant baptism, Schindler quotes Lutheran Pastor Klaus Eickhoff, who takes a critical view of this practice in his own Protestant Church:

The Church is slowly baptizing itself to death, because it baptizes children without inquiring into the faith of neither parents nor godparents. In this way it tempts them to lie before the altar, by requiring the parents and godparents to promise to raise their children christianly. Yet it knows all too well that many parents and godparents are not able to do so. And these in turn know that the church knows of this. What an undignified baptismal theatrical!²²

Roland Werner describes the difficult state of affairs that everyone must confront as they share the gospel in Germany: “Pervasive existential and liberal theology has reinforced the nominalism that has marked the mainline church for several generations.”²³ According to Gailyn Van Rheezen, syncretism occurs when church leaders surrender biblical truths consciously or unconsciously to the dominating worldview in their culture. “Syncretism is the blending of Christian beliefs and practices with those of the dominant culture so that Christianity loses its distinctiveness and speaks with a voice reflective of its culture.”²⁴

In observing the practices of the Protestant Church in Germany, one is struck by its close alignment with the prevailing cultural mood. The following examples show where syncretism has taken a firm hold in the Protestant Church:

- The approval of gay marriage ceremonies in the church²⁵
- The approval of gay marriage for pastors and bishops
- Carnival celebrations, similar to Mardi Gras in the United States, are held on church grounds

²²Ibid., 20.

²³“Germany: The Church and Missions Today,” *World Pulse Archives*, September 2003, <http://www.Lausaneworldpulse.com> (accessed August 16, 2006).

²⁴Gailyn Van Rheezen, “Syncretism and Contextualization: The Church on a Journey Defining Itself,” in *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents*, ed. Gailyn Rheezen (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006), 7-8

²⁵“Tagung „Religion und Homosexualität“: Kirche soll zu einem klaren Ja finden.“ *Idea Pressedienst* 260 (2009): 7-8.

- The official approval of abortion
- The approval of cohabitation
- Many Protestant leaders label Evangelical Christians as extreme fundamentalists due to their stand on biblical morality which many church leaders view intolerance
- Many Protestants are appalled that Evangelicals do not accept evolution or the Historical Critical Method in understanding the Scriptures

In the German context the preaching of the gospel is becoming ever more challenging as men and women distance themselves from a Biblical worldview. The sad point remains that the liberal Protestant Church is leading the way in German society in its exodus from an orthodox Christian worldview.

Is the Protestant Church in Germany Becoming More Evangelical?

In recent years the Protestant Church in Germany has officially endorsed effort to undertake a serious missional approach in reaching the unchurched and non Christians with the gospel. Various groups have held conferences and symposiums emphasizing the priority of mission and evangelism within the Protestant Church. In the 1960s and 1970s, such efforts would have been categorically rejected out of hand, as the social political emphasis in these decades of societal turmoil took precedent over attempting to follow the mandate of the Great Commission. For his six year tenure as the leading Protestant Bishop, Wolfgang Huber has given direction to this impetus and is convinced that there is much missional potential lying dormant in the 20,000 Protestant parishes scattered across the nation of Germany. Huber sees these parishes as a sleeping giant just waiting to be awakened and thrust into action.²⁶ The question must seriously be posed if it is already too late to reactivate a church that has willfully ignored evangelism for so many years?

²⁶Wolfgang Polzer, "So viel Mission war nie in der EKD, Zukunftswerkstatt: Ist der Knoten jetzt geplatzt?" *Idea Pressedienst* 270 (2009): 7.

Michael Diener, recently elected as Superintendent of the *Gnadauer Gemeinschaftsbewegung* (Gnadau Fellowship Movement) in Germany sees his Pietist organization as a “spiritual reform movement within in the Protestant church, which desires to see men and women become and stay Christians.”²⁷ Diener acknowledges that oftentimes at the grass roots level conflict exists between the local Protestant parish and the Gnadauer Fellowship. “We desire to work, when possible, with, but not under the local Protestant church. Wherever you read Gnadauer, the Protestant church is meant.”²⁸ Diener still expects from the Protestant Church that his fellowship will have “home rights” within the Protestant Church.

As continued attacks mount from the German media due to Gnadauer’s Evangelical stance on missions and moral issues, Diener believes that the Protestant Church will defend them without hesitation. In August 2009, *Frontal*, a leading German investigative television program, openly criticized Evangelicals for evangelizing in Islamic cultures. The reporters in this broadcast asserted that Evangelicals were no better than their Muslim terrorist counterparts in their approach to evangelism going into Islamic countries. Within a few weeks after this broadcast, due to massive protest by prominent Evangelicals, the Protestant Church issued a statement denouncing *Frontal* assertions about Evangelicals as being unwarranted and repugnant. Presently about 300,000 Germans associate with the Gnadauer Fellowship, organized into about 5,000 local groups. Most of its adherents remain members of the Protestant Church.²⁹

²⁷ „Wo Gnadau draufsteht, ist auch evangelische Kirche drin,“ *Idea Pressedienst* 273 (2009): 2.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

German Culture and the State Churches

On numerous occasions I have spoken with nominal German Catholics and Protestants who do not accept the doctrinal position or practices of their respective church, yet faithfully remain members, paying their church tax.³⁰ Why is this so? The two *Großkirchen* (major churches - Protestant and Catholic) for most Germans are closely identified with family tradition deeply rooted in culture rather than in religious conviction. For many Germans to leave one of the *Großkirchen* would be the equivalent of rejecting or denying one's family or cultural heritage.³¹

In the Catholic tradition, when a child celebrates first communion at age eight or nine, an all-day celebration for family and friends following this special mass. Many gifts are given to the child, and this family tradition is a precious moment for all to cherish. In the Protestant tradition, at age fourteen, children attend confirmation classes over a period of many weeks, which leads up to a special confirmation of faith church service.³² Here too, family and friends come together, for an all-day celebration on Confirmation Sunday and give expensive gifts. The scope of this celebration is similar to a high school graduation party in the United States. "The festive occasion on which young people confess their "faith" before a full and happy church is often followed by their entrance into passive neglect of the church."³³

³⁰The Protestant and Catholic Churches in Germany are financed through a church tax directly withheld from the salary of each member. The German finance ministry charges about 1 percent of the total collected as a service fee to the Protestant and Catholic Churches. The amount of church tax withheld is about 8-9 percent of the total income tax paid.

³¹Members who desire to leave the Protestant or Catholic Churches in Germany must go to the city hall or an equivalent governmental office to officially deregister. A service fee is usually charged for deregistration.

³²Generally one finds only a handful of people who attend a typical Protestant Church service. However, when attending Confirmation Sunday, the church will usually over crowded.

³³Schindler, 25.

From a sociological perspective, Catholic first communion and Protestant confirmation could be considered a sociological rite of passage. The young person is now attaining full social status in the Catholic or Protestant Church.³⁴ At age fourteen, German law allows young people the right to join or deregister from one of the *Großkirchen* without parental consent.

Suspicion of Free Churches in German Culture

Even though most Catholic and Protestant Church members do not attend church, they, as the rest of German culture, continue to be suspicious of other Christian groups. In a recent conversation with me, a member of the Protestant Church, admitted to not attending church, pointing out emphatically that regular church attendance seems very cultic. Erich Geldbach asserts that the *Großkirchen* place very little emphasis on church attendance and thusly are suspicious of free churches where members attend church weekly.³⁵ For the average German, regular church attendance seems very unusual.

The *Vereinigung Evangelischer Freikirchen* (Association of Free Churches –VEF) offers a platform for Germany’s free churches, to present themselves in a united way in the public eye. Due to the cultural dominance of the Protestant and Catholic churches, most free churches are perceived to be cults. Schindler defines the term “free church” as, ”an evangelical denomination or nondenominational body unaffiliated with the established Protestant Church.” The adjective “free” has historically been used to describe three issues: the freedom of each individual member

³⁴ Allan Johnson, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology: A User's Guide to Sociological Language* (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 262.

³⁵ Erich Geldbach, *Freikirchen – Erbe, Gestalt und Wirkung* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 14.

to confess his or her faith, the freedom of the church from taxation, and the separation of and state.³⁶

This negative perception of free churches in Germany makes the task of sharing the good news of the gospel for Evangelical Christians a daunting endeavor. Even with mandatory Catholic and Protestant religious instruction in most German public schools, students rarely learn that other Christian churches exist outside the *Großkirchen* in Germany. This intentional lack of education concerning free churches continues to foster the cult prejudice, propagated in German society as a whole.

Sharing one's personal faith journey causes many Germans to be uneasy, since this is not generally practiced or taught by the *Großkirchen*. Schindler cites Renate Köcher, who describes German Christianity as distant, individual, and private. "While most people belong to a Church and they would not consider themselves anything but Christians, they disdain evangelism. The Protestant church concerns itself with baptizing members rather than training disciples and calling people to repent and follow Jesus as Lord and Savior."³⁷

It may occur, when someone begins to attend a free church, that a concerned family member will contact the *Sektenbeauftragten* (theologian cult expert) of the Catholic or Protestant Church in his or her area to receive information concerning the possible dangers pertaining to that church.³⁸ Often, concerned family member will warn a family member of the dangers of attending a free church.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Schindler, 27.

³⁸The *Großkirchen* have hired *Sektenbeauftragten* (Cult Experts) who specialise in understanding the teaching of diverse religious groups and the world views of organisations outside of their own church. Primarily their function is to warn and educate church members about the dangers of such religious organisations.

Geldbach points out that in the German print and electronic media, reference will often be made to the position of the two *Großkirchen* when discussing current social and political issues. Referring only to the *Großkirchen*, implies that all other churches in Germany are non-existent or irrelevant.³⁹ Even though it is common to speak of one Protestant Church in the media, in actuality twenty-two state or territorial Protestant Church synods exist that have differing theology and ecclesiological practices, with laypersons hardly notices such differences. The primary reason free churches are hardly noticed in Germany society is due to their minimal size compared to the two *Großkirchen*.⁴⁰ At present the VEF has a total of 221,000 members, which represents twelve free churches. Approximately 150,000 Germans who belong to free churches remain unaffiliated with the VEF. Less than one-half percent of the German population belong to a free church.⁴¹ As with the *Großkirchen*, free churches in general with only a few exceptions, are slowly declining in number each year.

The Methodist Church in Germany as a free church is declining on an average of 1 to 2 percent every year. At their Central Conference in Dresden during 2008, Bishop Rosemarie Wenner related this loss of members directly to the ever shrinking German population. Wenner stated that small numbers are not something to fear, because in many European countries the Methodist Church is much smaller in size than in Germany, and those smaller churches are very much alive.⁴²

³⁹Geldbach, 11.

⁴⁰Ibid., 12.

⁴¹Jürgen Tischler VEF Researcher, e-mail message to author, October 21, 2009.

⁴²„Mitgliederrückgang: Methodisten erwarten keine Trendwende,“ *IdeaSpektrum*, November 24, 2008, <http://www.idea.de/nachrichten/frei-kirchen/detailartikel/artikel/mitgliederrueckgang-methodisten-erwarten-keine-trendwende-1.html> (accessed August 23, 2009).

As a side note, Pentecostal and charismatic migrant congregations from Africa, Latin America, and Asia are often permitted by local Protestant or Catholic Churches to use their facilities for worship services. Due to the social engagement of the *Großkirchen* to help the poor and newly arrived immigrants, such practices are acceptable. However, a local Catholic or Protestant Church would generally never allow a German-speaking free church to meet in their building, for fear of eventual membership loss to a free church. The Rhineland Protestant Synod has established a ministry department to work specifically with the needs of immigrant church groups, which mostly come from a Pentecostal or charismatic tradition.⁴³

⁴³Anna Lisa, "Foreign Protestant Churches in Europe Increases as Reverse Mission is Seen," *Christianity Today*, June 18, 2005, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/foreign.protestantchurchesin.uope.increases.as.reverse.mission.is.seen/3188.htm> (accessed October 14, 2009.)

PART 2

PRESENT CONTEXT FOR CHURCH PLANTING IN GERMANY

Free Church Planting Comparisons

“Church planting” is a relatively new term that has only been used widely in the last thirty years or so. Only in the last few decades the concept of church planting has been so popularized that “evangelism” in its broader sense seems improper. Without the greater goal of church planting, evangelism is often thought of as “irresponsible.”⁴⁴ This next section will look at statistical data of the three largest free churches in Germany, which have been the most active in church planting during the past thirty years.

These three churches include *Bund Freier evangelischer Gemeinden* (Free Evangelical Church- FEG), *Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden* (Baptist Union – BEFG), and the *Bund Freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden* (Federation of Pentecostal Churches – BFP). The BFP is by far the largest Pentecostal denomination in Germany and is the partner church of the Assemblies of God USA (AG), as AG missionaries work in close conjunction with the BFP in church planting and other ministries. These three German denominations cooperate closely together as members of the VEF and are actively involved in the *Deutsche Evangelische Allianz* (German Evangelical Alliance) at the local and national levels. The following statistical data gives a snapshot of their size and numerical trends during the last fifteen years.

⁴⁴Paul Bucknell, “Biblical Foundations for Freedom,” Biblical Foundations for Freedom. <http://www.foundationsforfreedom.net/Topics/Ministry/Wujya/ChurchPlant02.html> (accessed May 8, 2009).

	<u>Membership</u>			<u>Number of Churches</u>		
	2009	2004	1994	2008	2004	1994
BEFG	83,747 ⁴⁵	84,975	87,972	828	851	902
BFP	45,000 ⁴⁶	39,500	26,000	751	598	351
FEG	38,000 ⁴⁷	34,100	29,448	440	410	367

BEFG membership has declined in recent years due in part to conservative Russian-German *Aussiedler* (immigrant) congregations who have pulled out of the Union.⁴⁸ In the same fifteen year period the BFP experienced a dramatic 73 percent rise in membership. It is important to note that 33 percent of all BFP churches today are ethnic or international congregations.⁴⁹ This figure reflects the growing immigrant population that has migrated to Germany in recent years from the two-thirds world. Almost 70 percent of all BFP ethnic congregations are from an African background.⁵⁰ Also since the 1990s, many German independent charismatic / Pentecostal churches have joined the BFP, desiring fellowship that provides a spiritual and legal covering. In many ways the BFP has become a loosely structured umbrella organization, that makes allowances for churches and pastors with theological and ecclesiological diversity to find a spiritual home. More than ten years ago, the renowned scholar on world Pentecostalism,

⁴⁵“Abwärtstrend abgebremst: Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden verliert weniger Mitglieder,” Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden, http://www.baptisten.org/nachrichten/news_show.php?sel=200&select=Aktuelles&show=767 (accessed October 8, 2009).

⁴⁶Hartmut Knorr, “BFP Gemeinde-Statistik: Bericht vom Bundessekretär“ (report presented at the 114th BFP Conference in Kirchheim, Germany, September 22, 2009).

⁴⁷Dietrich Schindler, e-mail message to author, October 12, 2009.

⁴⁸Wilfried Bohlen, Director of Missions for the Union of Baptist Churches in Germany, June 22, interview, Leichlingen, Germany, 2006.

⁴⁹Knorr, “BFP Gemeinde-Statistik.”

⁵⁰Ibid.

Walter Hollenweger, stated, the greatest challenge for Pentecostalism to overcome is the, “tendency to segregate and separate into countless denominations. It’s happening all the time, and it really is a scandal.”⁵¹ Hollenweger would be proud of the BFP in exemplifying an ecumenical openness of spirit as it takes successfully diverse charismatic and Pentecostal groups into its’ fellowship.

The FEG has grown by 33 percent in the past fifteen years primarily due to well structured intentional church planting. The following statistic gives an overview of the number of churches that have been planted by these three leading free churches.

Total number of German speaking church plants by denomination 1970-2006:

BEFG	70
BFP	275
FEG	160 ⁵²

Of these German speaking churches planted, the following statistic shows how many were initiated directly by overseas missionaries, primarily sent out from North America. It must be pointed out that most of the other free churches in the VEF have not enjoyed foreign missionary engagement in the planting of new churches.

Number of German speaking churches planted by foreign missionaries by denomination
1975 – 2006

BEFG	9 Churches	0 daughter churches have resulted from these church plants
BFP	33 Churches	4 daughter churches have resulted from these church plants
FEG	31 Churches	8 daughter churches have resulted from these church plants ⁵³

⁵¹“The Rise of Pentecostalism: Christian History Interview with Walter J. Hollenweger,” *Christianity Today*, April 1, 1998, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1998/issue58/58h042.html?start=2> (accessed May 8, 2009).

⁵²Paul Clark, “Missionary Church Planting in Germany: A Survey of Three Evangelical Denominations (unpublished available from the Author, 2006), 9.

⁵³Ibid.

For the free churches, Germany remains a destitute mission field, where high priority is placed on planting missional churches. Only 39 percent of all communities in Germany with a population of 5,000 or more have at least one free church, leaving 61 percent all German communities with a population over 5,000 without the witness of a free church.⁵⁴ A survey conducted in 1998 in the state of Rhineland Palatinate found that 71 of 94 communities with a population between 5,000 and 20,000 did not have the witness of an Evangelical church. This same survey conducted in the neighboring state of Saarland proved to be more grim, as 34 of 38 communities with a population between 5,000 and 20,000 did not have an Evangelical church.⁵⁵ Since the 1998 study was conducted only a few additional free churches have been imitated in Rhineland Palatinate and Saarland.

The FEG has set an aggressive goal to plant 100 new churches between 2005 and 2015.⁵⁶ As of October 2009, thirty-five church plants have been planted.⁵⁷ BEFG church planting coordinator, Manfred Beutel, admits that in recent years there has been little interest in his fellowship for church planting. Beutel believes that existing churches are in a maintenance mode and extremely fearful of losing their best workers when new churches are planted.⁵⁸ Beutel and his team have developed the “Aktion Sara” program, which coaches older established churches,

⁵⁴“Orte über 5.000 Einwohner ohne eine VeF Freikirche (Stand 2005),“ Bund Freier Evangelischer Gemeinden, <http://www.feg.de/index.php?id=175> (accessed October 5, 2009).

⁵⁵Paul Clark, “BFP-Region Rheinland Pfalz-Saarland Gebetsaktion” (Unpublished available from the author, 2006).

⁵⁶“FeG Vision.”

⁵⁷Dietrich Schindler, e-mail message to author, October 5, 2009.

⁵⁸“Neue Gemeinde nicht ohne Bewusstseinveränderung auf allen Ebenen: „Forum für Gemeindegründungen“ in größter Freikirche stößt auf wenig Resonanz.“ Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden, July, 2008, http://www.baptisten.org/nachrichten/news_show.php?sel=400&show=719&select=Aktuelles (accessed Oktober 5, 2009.)

like Abraham's wife, Sarah, in the Old Testament, to become pregnant and birth new churches.⁵⁹ Even though few Baptist churches have responded to this program, Beutel is convinced that it is still possible to start new works with worship services geared and attractive for a postmodern audience in Germany.

Church Planting in the BFP

In 1997, Manfred Lanz and a small group of BFP pastors initiated the *Gemeindegründungswerk* (church planting task force – GGW). Lanz summarizes the purpose and vision for GGW.

In order to reach our nation with the gospel, a large number of new dynamic churches are needed in order to carry out the Great Commission in their respective locations. GGW was born out of a deep desire for revival, evangelism and church planting in Germany. GGW understands itself to be a partner for church planting and desires to support the greatest possible number of news church plants in Germany, through consultation, coaching, training and practical support.⁶⁰

Within the last ten years, GGW has established a viable network of regional ministries within the BFP that operates in the following areas.

- Promoting the vision of church planting
- Regional Research
- Training (e.g. church planting schools)
- Motivating and consulting “mother churches”
- Coaching of church planters and their teams
- Promotion of regional prayer initiatives for church planting
- Fundraising for the release of church planting ministries
- Planning and coordinating evangelistic activities related to church planting⁶¹

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Manfred Lanz, “Unsere Vision,” Gemeindegründungswerk, www.gemeindegruendugswerk.de (accessed August 16, 2006).

⁶¹Ibid.

Manfred Lanz and his team of BFP pastors have looked to Erhard Michel of the FEG and church planting consultant Bob Logan as being role models in the field of church multiplication.

Assemblies of God USA missionary Steve Walent, heading up GGW in the East German State of Saxony and a member the GGW national leadership team, explains how GGW works at the regional level:

We have a team of 8-10 people who bring their various giftings to the table. All are either in fulltime ministry in local churches or working secularly. We have developed a vision, goals and strategy, but what is needed is time to communicate and demonstrate this to individual pastors and churches. It has become my conviction, that without anointed relationships, anointed communication, anointed demonstration of God's heart and desire concerning church planting, we will at best grow by addition. Relationship building, coaching, mentoring does much to encourage, inspire and release faith, resources and cooperation to the point where we will see multiplication. Good relationships are addicting when the Holy Spirit kicks in and this turns to exponential growth.⁶²

As noted above, the BFP has planted more churches than any other German free church in the past three decades.

BFP church plants by decade

1970s	31
1980s	67
1990s	107
2000-2006	70 ⁶³

Challenges for BFP Church Planting

One of the major hurdles for church planting within the BFP, as well as for all of Germany is that churches seldom grow fast enough to support financially a full-time pastor, pay rent and cover other ministry expenses. Most churches plants in the BFP are thusly led by

⁶²Steve Walent, e-mail message to author, September 1, 2009.

⁶³Clark, *Missionary Church Planting*, 9.

foreign missionaries, lay people, or pastors who must work a secular job to survive financially. The BFP is able to provide only a small income subsidy for its' church planters.

The BFP as of September 2009 categorizes 106 of their 751 churches as church plants. Some of these churches have existed for twenty years or more and are classified as such, since they are not self-supporting or are small in number.⁶⁴ The church plant category for the BFP is not related to the number of years that a church has been established. It is also helpful to see how the BFP's 751 churches are broken down by individual church size.

Church Membership Size	Number and percentage of Churches	
25 or less	257	34.2%
26 - 50	214	28.5%
51- 100	157	20.9%
101- 180	85	11.4%
181- 250	16	02.1%
251- 500	19	2.5%
500 or more	3	0.4% ⁶⁵

Over 60 percent of BFP churches have less than 50 members. Due to the high cost of living in Germany, most of these churches will be unable to support a full-time pastor. This author is only aware of a few BFP churches planted in recent years which have grown enough to completely finance a full-time pastor.

The BFP has been assisted by foreign missionaries in planting new churches as the following statistic highlights. AG missionaries alone have initiated twenty-two churches in Germany during the past thirty years. All but two of these churches continue to affiliate with the BFP. Most missionary-led churches are turned over to German pastors in a time period from four

⁶⁴Knorr, "BFP Gemeinde-Statistik."

⁶⁵Ibid.

to fifteen years.⁶⁶ Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, thirteen new churches have been started by foreign missionaries in former East Germany, most of these being from the Assemblies of God, USA.⁶⁷

Church Planting – Mother-Daughter Concept

The mother-daughter concept of church planting is the most ideal method of reaching lost communities with the gospel. Here the BFP has been unsuccessful in following this concept, as established churches generally remain unwilling to release existing members to help form new churches. I am aware of one BFP church in recent years that released eighteen members to start a new work in another part of the city which has developed well.⁶⁸ As mentioned above, the BEFG church planting program has also had little interest in the mother-daughter concept. So it remains, in the case of this author and most BFP church planters that one must usually start a work alone, and gradually contacts with individuals eventually form the core group. Obviously, this process requires a great deal of time and one must be willing to “hold his or her breath” for a longer period of time before one witnesses harvest. The difficulties of this method are as follows.

- Low impact from the beginning in target community due to small core group
- Small core groups lack muscle and finances
- Only a few workers shoulder much responsibility that can lead to discouragement
- Small numbers are unattractive for first-time visitors
- Small group offer limited ministries

The FEG has been more effective than either the BFP or the BEFG in intentionally encouraging mother churches to start daughter churches. Many of the missionary church planters

⁶⁶Clark, “Missionary Church Planting,” 10.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Reinhard Meyer, e-mail message to author, October 14, 2009.

from North America working with the FEG have been given active members from mother churches to start congregations in nearby communities.

Schindler offers excellent practical insight as he lists values and distinctives for high impact church planting in Germany.⁶⁹ Every church planter needs to take these ten considerations prayerfully to heart, as he or she attempts to reach the target community. The following considerations apply more in the mother-daughter church planting concept yet much insight is to be gained for small core group as they analyze the following points.

1. Create an Image of Ministry That Is Greater Than Present Reality Or: "*One Has No Second Chance to Make a First Good Impression*"
2. Diversify Evangelism Venues Or: "*He Who Sows Bountifully, Will Also Reap Bountifully*"
3. Spare Almost Nothing to Provide Quality and Excellence Or: "*People Expect Quality from the Business Community But Not from the Church, Therefore Surprise Them!*"
4. Prayer and Fasting Open Closed Doors Or: "*Hidden Sacrifices Secure Public Victories*"
5. Create Your Future by Setting Challenging, Reachable Goals Or: "*The Most Important Step Is Not the Next One, It's the One after That*"
6. Enlarging the Leadership Base Will Lead the Way to Greater Quantitative and Qualitative Growth Or: "*If You Want Height and Depth, Then Expand Your Width*"
7. Grow Big, But Remain small Or: "*Great Churches Have Great Community*"
8. Difficult People Disciple Congregations Or: "*Poor Qualities in People Bring Out the Best in Healthy Congregations*"
9. Anticipate Growth Barriers and Induce Birth Pains Or: "*The Impetus for Current Growth Can Be the Blockage for Future Growth*"
10. Work Toward Initiating a Church Planting Movement Or: "*We Need to Move from Church Planting by Addition to Church Planting by Multiplication*"⁷⁰

In terms of intentional mission, there is no alternative for Schindler other than planting churches that will plant other churches to reach the lost of Germany: "They need communities of loving followers of Jesus Christ who live out their devotion for God and one another. The hope

⁶⁹Schindler, 108.

⁷⁰Ibid., 109-123.

for German Christianity lies in the planting and growth of thousands of new vibrant churches that, in turn, plant churches.⁷¹

Retired Protestant Bishop Manfred Kock stated in 2007 that no one can be proud if a Catholic becomes Protestant or a Protestant joins a free church. “We need to reach the unchurched with the Christian message. As society wants to hear less of this message, it becomes even more urgent that we share this message.”⁷² Every church planter must deal with the issue of transfer growth from other churches in the initial stages. Ed Stetzer rightly points out that the goal of true missional church planting, “is glorifying God, growing his kingdom, and developing healthy churches with new converts. Missional church planters focus on the Great Commission by reaching the unchurched, not by seeking to attract area Christians.”⁷³ I am keenly aware how difficult it is to reach new converts in the beginning phases of a church plant, as often other Christians drop in from neighboring churches to observe what is going on. Even though a small core group must expand to include other Christians, the church planter must practice intentional mission, and find creative ways to reach the unchurched who will be later incorporated in to the church’s ministry.

Reasons Why So Few Europeans Become Christians

The effective church planter always looks for ways and means to share the good news with lost men and women. The German Evangelical newsmagazine *IdeaSpektrum* featured an article during May 2009 that raised the question why so few people in Europe become born again

⁷¹Ibid., 109.

⁷²“Altpräses Kock: Kirche muss als Ganzes missionarisch sein,“ *IdeaSpektrum*, November 14, 2007, [http://www.idea.de/pressdienst/detailartikel/archive/2007/november/artikel/altpraeses-kock-kirche-muss-als-ganzes-missionarisch-sein-2.html?tx_ttnews\[day\]=14&cHash=8559641a7c](http://www.idea.de/pressdienst/detailartikel/archive/2007/november/artikel/altpraeses-kock-kirche-muss-als-ganzes-missionarisch-sein-2.html?tx_ttnews[day]=14&cHash=8559641a7c) (accessed August 22, 2009).

⁷³Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006), 5.

Christians.⁷⁴ Article interviews were conducted with key ministers and lay workers who actively engage in evangelism directed toward the younger generation. The article's assessment sheds light on valid concerns that must be taken into account for intentional mission to be effective in Germany.

- Most Christians have too few genuine relationships with non-Christian.
- Too many Christians are frightened to openly share their personal faith.
- Unchurched Europeans are overwhelmed by countless spiritual and religious offers being made in the marketplace.
- People are easily side tracked by extreme materialism and are distracted by a constant bombardment of information in the electronic media.
- Most sermons do not address reason.
- Christians and non-Christians alike have little thirst or interest in things of God.
- In our churches too few people have a genuine personal God experience.
- Too many people have cast their vote against God and have made themselves to be God.⁷⁵

There has been much discussion in missiological circles that immigrants coming to Europe, primarily from Africa and Asia will play a key role in reaching through “reverse mission” Europe’s unchurched with the gospel.⁷⁶ The international churches within the BFP bring great zeal and encouragement to the movement, but as of yet these churches as a whole have been unable to effectively reach the German community. I believe great potential exists for “reverse mission” within the BFP, if international congregations strive to contextualize the good news of the gospel for German culture. The author recommends that leadership of the BFP

⁷⁴“Warum werden in Europa so wenige Menschen Christen,” 16-20.

⁷⁵Ibid., 20.

facilitate training amongst international church pastors to enable their ministry to be effective in reaching postmodern Germans with the claims of Christ.

BFP Research Study 2006

The BFP is the fastest growing Free Church in Germany; however, as mentioned above, most growth is due to international churches who have joined their ranks. Most of the international churches affiliating with the BFP are from an African background.⁷⁷ Also, a number of German independent charismatic and Pentecostals congregations have become members of the BFP in the past ten years or so.

An extensive research study was conducted by Lothar Krauss for the year 2006 with the purpose of providing a detailed analysis of growth for German speaking congregations within the BFP.⁷⁸ Krauss attempted to compare and understand the characteristics of growing BFP churches as opposed to BFP churches that were not growing. The results of this study are sobering, especially when one observes the slow rate of growth through conversions.

First, Krauss tried to determine how “Pentecostal” are individual members and churches within the BFP. Three quarters of the members in 60 percent of the churches acknowledge receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹ Sixty-three percent of those receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit associate this occurrence with the evidence of speaking in other tongues or one of the other gifts of Spirit. Only thirty-five percent of those experiencing the baptism in the Holy

⁷⁶Anna Lisa, “Foreign Protestant Churches in Europe.”

⁷⁷Knorr, “BFP Gemeinde-Statistik.”

⁷⁸Lothar Krauss. “Auf den Weg in der Zukunft,” (report presented at the BFP Conference Kirchheim, Germany, September 2007).

⁷⁹Ibid., 9.

Spirit viewed the experience as empowerment to witness.⁸⁰ The study found further that in less than sixty percent of BFP Sunday services conducted, one hears audibly someone praying or singing in tongues.⁸¹ Sixty-five percent of the Holy Spirit gifts shared in a service are categorized as “picture messages or impressions messages.” Only seven percent of the gifts displayed were tongues and interpretation. In sixty percent of all BFP churches, ninety percent of the worshipers are not involved in sharing spiritual gifts or praying aloud in a church service.⁸²

The study indicated the following in relation to teaching on healing and prayer for the sick:

60% of the churches teach on healing at least once or more during a quarter.
 82% of the churches pray at least monthly or more frequently for the sick.
 63% of the churches experience healings from time to time.
 5% of the churches report that healings occur very often.⁸³

BFP Statistic for 2006

Total Number of Members	42,057		
Number of Churches	649	Percentage International churches	29%
Number of new members	3,233	Percentage of total Growth	7.7% ⁸⁴

Krauss was unable to analyze the growth among international churches, due to various cultural and language difficulties, so his efforts concentrated on analyzing German churches alone. Of the 475 BFP German churches in 2006, sixty-six were classified as church plants.⁸⁵ In the year 2006 there was only a net growth of 376 members for a growth rate of 1.2% among

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid., 10.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid., 11.

⁸⁴Ibid., 20-23.

⁸⁵Ibid., 24.

German BFP churches.⁸⁶ The most startling figure that came out of this analysis found that only ninety-seven (twenty-three percent) of all the new members in the BFP's 475 churches in 2006 were new converts reached by the local church.⁸⁷ The other new members were transfers or individuals who grew up in the church. In comparison, Krauss notes that in the FEG, about sixteen percent of their new member growth each year is a result of reaching new converts.

Percentage of German BFP churches that contributed to growth in 2006

14% of churches	2/3 Growth
45% of churches	1/3 Growth
41% of churches	Stagnation or declining ⁸⁸

The study expressed concern that the younger generation in BFP churches do not seem to have a missional mind-set. First of all the, youth do not know how to communicate the gospel when confronted by difficult questions of the day. Second, BFP youth have tremendous fear to be rejected by their peers once they share their faith. Sadly, I have observed that in the BFP and other Free Churches in Germany, a large portion of the younger generation is dropping out of the faith once they go to college or begin to work.

Krauss attempted to determine if a direct relationship exists between growing BFP churches and the various church styles or trends of the day. Here are a few styles or trends that he categorized:

- Classical Pentecostal traditional
- Willow Creek, seeker friendly
- Cell church - G 12 emphasis
- Prophetic emphasis⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 29.

Krauss concludes that these styles or trends in ministry have little significant bearing on whether a German BFP church grew or not. Instead, Krauss found that local church leadership in growing BFP churches is intentionally missional and emphasizes continual and active outreach.

Specifically, growing churches have created a missional climate where evangelistic opportunities prevail.⁹⁰ Krauss is convinced that growing BFP churches clearly understand the gifting of their pastor(s) and actively recruit individuals with leadership skills and those gifted in evangelism so they can work together as a team.

For Krauss, growing BFP churches have leadership who persevere in following clear goals and the vision set before them.⁹¹ He warns that “over activity” is not the answer but doing “less of the right things well” will reap harvest.⁹² He concludes that the strongest attribute of the BFP is their 25,000 active workers committed to following the leading of the Spirit. The survey found that forty-five percent of BFP churches report that their pool of workers is growing.⁹³

⁹⁰Ibid., 30.

⁹¹Ibid., 31.

⁹²Ibid., 33.

⁹³Ibid., 12.

PART 3

INTENTIONAL MISSION APPROACHES IN GERMANY

Waiting for Revival

As long as I have lived in Germany prominent German ministers and more often numbers of ministers from other countries have publicly stated that the Land of Luther will soon experience a spiritual awakening or revival. Especially in charismatic and Pentecostal circles, such proclamations are common and received with great expectation. Reinhard Bonnke predicted in 1999 that the BFP would grow tenfold in the next five years. As it turned out, after the five-year period was complete and the BFP had not experienced such growth, Bonnke admitted he had misspoken and actually was prophesying about the growth of his work in Africa.⁹⁴

The most recent forecast of a spiritual breakthrough in Germany took place at the Willow Creek Convention in Stuttgart in 2005 with Bill Hybels predicting that a spiritual renewal would soon touch the churches in Germany.⁹⁵ Yet since 2005 it appears there has been less interest for the gospel in the German populace as atheism itself has gained greater public attention. Also in the last year or so the German media has attacked Evangelicals as dangerous fundamentalists just as intolerant as their Muslim fundamentalist counterparts. These attacks are primarily based on the Evangelical church's stance against same sex marriage and continued efforts to send missionaries to Muslim countries.

⁹⁴Uwe Kaul, e-mail message to author, October 12, 2009.

⁹⁵“Warum wachsen im Abendland nur so wenige Kirchen? “*IdeaSpektrum*, January 9, 2008.

As God's people of hope in Germany, we Pentecostals anticipate that the Holy Spirit will bring revival and renewal, which has been manifest in many countries of the two-thirds world. As of yet, in spite of countless pronouncements otherwise, few revival winds have blown through. The Scripture encourages workers to labor while it still day because the time will come when no one can work. The mandate of the Great Commission remains in place and is to be obeyed until the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ returns to gather His church. Germany, as the rest of Europe, desperately needs to experience the genuine "salt of the earth" and witness the "city set on a hill" in the midst of a culture permeated by *Zeitgeist* forces running contrary to the good news of Kingdom.

Building Personal Relationships

George Hunter cites John Finney and his team, who several years ago did extensive research on over 500 people from a wide spectrum of backgrounds who converted to Christianity in England.⁹⁶ Such a long-term study is now in the works in Germany. I believe that the results of the English study are appropriate for the Germany context, and its' conclusion should affect how we Pentecostals approach intentional mission. "Most people experience the faith through relationships, that they encounter the gospel through a community of faith, that becoming a Christian involves a process that takes time. For most people, belonging come before believing."⁹⁷ For Hunter this is the admirable Celtic way for people to come gradually to faith, rather than the Roman or Evangelical way of sudden and spontaneous conversions. Today, abrupt conversions are probably more the exception than the rule, especially when one observes

⁹⁶George Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity can Reach the West... Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 54.

⁹⁷Ibid.

the far reaching effects of postmodernism. Johannes Eißler, a Lutheran Evangelist, underscores the Finney study by stating:

The Damascus road spontaneous conversion does not occur as in years past since the postmodern individual make-up is much more complicated. Seekers have a wide choice of varying spiritual products on the religious market and need more time to make a decision. Even today as men and women are putting off longer marriage, in Germany people are also taking more time to make a faith commitment. It takes about four years for a commitment to be made after a person has had his or her first contact with a committed Christian. Generally speaking, one evangelistic evening meeting is not enough to win someone for Christ.⁹⁸

In my own church planting context, I have observed that most believers in the core group had established a relationship with a Christian friend or work colleague, and then, over a longer period of time, became a Christian. Interestingly enough, several of the individuals in question were initially not even God seekers, but only later, as a result of the long-term personal acquaintance the seeking process began, followed then later by a decision to follow Christ. Finney's study found that the prominence of the individual's credibility who shares the gospel is a major concern for secular people, as they consider Christianity. Most Europeans have a very negative view of Christianity due to its often dark history, and this hurdle must be overcome. "First, some people wonder if we really believe what we say we believe. Second, some people do not doubt that we believe it; they wonder if we live by it. Third, some people do not doubt that we believe or live by it; they wonder if it makes much difference."⁹⁹ These three questions can only be effectively answered through a long-term heart-felt personal relationship.

Intentional mission stresses the importance of personal relationships, but still acknowledges the need for creative public venues, allowing opportunities for seekers in a gathering or meeting at a local church, where interaction takes place. Such venues need to be

⁹⁸ "Warum werden in Europa so wenige Menschen Christen," 16.

⁹⁹ Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 60.

continually offered so seekers have the opportunity to hear more about the gospel. According to Hartmut Barend, personal relationships or special missional venues alone are not the answer, but both operating parallel to one another will bring results.¹⁰⁰ “No matter how important the personal touch may be, there always must be an element where that person is being incorporated into what is being offered.”¹⁰¹ Ed Stetzer states in a very profound way: “Missional is the posture—the way in church we approach people in culture, but incarnational describes what’s actually happening. Just as Christ came to live among us, we dwell with the people around us. In many ways we are like them.”¹⁰²

In the last fifteen years, the Alpha Course, developed by Anglican Pastor Nicky Gumble, has become one of the most successful tools utilized by Evangelicals in Germany to reach men and women for Christ. This ten-week non-confrontational course on the Christian faith begins each session with participants enjoying a prepared meal, with the goal of establishing personal relationships. The founders of Alpha stress that course participants should be allowed to raise any critical question they desire about Christianity, in an atmosphere of understanding and acceptance. Toward the end of the course participants will spend a weekend together for teaching, as well as relationship building. Approximately two million people in the United Kingdom and nine million people worldwide have attended an Alpha Course.¹⁰³ I have personally observed in Germany many men and women in BFP churches who have come to faith in Jesus Christ by attending the Alpha Course. Alpha is the personification of personal relationship building.

¹⁰⁰Barend, “Evangelisation - die zentrale Aufgabe der Kirche.“

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 2.

¹⁰³“Ever wondered what it’s all about?” The Alpha Course, <http://uk.alpha.org/> (accessed October 16, 2009).

As Pentecostal believers, we are convinced that the Holy Spirit will provide insight and understanding in our personal relationships as to how we approach men and women outside of the kingdom. Just as the Holy Spirit instructed Peter to go to the household of Cornelius, so we are assured of knowing which path to take in intentional mission.

Postmodernism as an Opportunity

Jeremy Rifkin in his landmark book *The European Dream* attempts to describe what he believes is occurring on the European cultural stage. “If the post-modernists razed the ideological walls of modernity and freed the prisoners, they left them with no particular place to go. We became existential nomads, wandering through a boundaryless world full of inchoate longings in a desperate search for something to be attached to and believe in.”¹⁰⁴

In Europe it appears that everyone is creating his or her own brand of truth, and God has been effectively voted out of office.¹⁰⁵ Rather than focusing on the fact that postmodernism seems to be throwing out truth as a whole, we as Pentecostals should see in it the possibility of the giving the supernatural a chance to be set free.

For Jean-Daniel Pluss the Pentecostal/charismatic movement offers opportunities for those in twenty-first century European culture, in that biblical teaching represents tradition on the one hand and the Holy Spirit’s leading on the other, which both is significant for personal experience. From this perspective, the modern German is better equipped through Pentecostalism to deal with secularization, in that one can integrate tradition and experience in the necessary

¹⁰⁴Jeremy Rifkin, *The European Dream* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2005), 5.

¹⁰⁵“Warum werden in Europa so wenige Menschen Christen,”19.

balance.¹⁰⁶ As committed Christians, we do not simply offer theology or a system of religion, but the hope of a living relationship with a God much larger than our understanding and comprehension of Him.

However, there's hope in this new way of looking at the world because God is bigger than any philosophy or system. In every generation, people's hearts seek their Creator. In many ways, each new worldview corrects what the former worldview got wrong about God.¹⁰⁷

Ed Stetzer notes that, "culturally appropriate evangelism answers the actual questions being asked by a given culture rather than those questions the church believes the culture should ask."¹⁰⁸ Postmoderns are very specific in what they are desiring to know, as well as in what they are questioning. Open dialogue provides windows of opportunity for believers listening to the winds of the Holy Spirit. Michael Frost takes a much larger leap in looking forward to something greater than institutional Christianity, which in itself has been the greatest deterrent and hindrance for Germans and Europeans to following Christ:

I, for one, am happy to see the end of Christendom. I'm glad that we can no longer rely on temporal, cultural supports to reinforce our message or the validity of our presence. I suspect that the increasing marginalization of the Christian movement in the West is the very thing that will wake us up to the marvelously exciting, dangerous, and confronting message of Jesus.¹⁰⁹

Frost describes "exiles" as those believers in the post-Christian era who have no desire to look back or return to the Christendom of the past, which was mostly shaped by the cultural and

¹⁰⁶Jean-Daniel Pluss, "Globalization of Pentecostalism or Globalization of Individualism? A European Perspective," in *Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, ed. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Doug Petersen (Carlisle, U.K.: Regnum Books International, 1999), 175.

¹⁰⁷"Postmodernism," Greater Europe Mission, <http://www.gemission.org/why/Postmodernism.asp> (accessed August 22, 2009).

¹⁰⁸Stetzer, 26.

¹⁰⁹Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 9.

political influences of the day that had little or nothing to do with the life and teachings of Jesus himself.¹¹⁰ Frost's characterization of post-Christendom exiles helps those in Germany truly desiring to live as "the salt of the earth" in the communities where they are planted. Frost's offers the following list, which in reality is a prayer request, that should be exhibited in our dealings with men and women presently separated from the kingdom of God.

- We will be authentic
- We will serve a cause greater than ourselves
- We will create missional community
- We will be generous and practice hospitality
- We will work righteously¹¹¹

Joel Edwards, former Director of the Evangelical Alliance in the United Kingdom, emphasizes the cultural realities that face the European church:

Europe is a continent in search of its soul. If Christians pretend that we live in a Christian continent, we make a gross mistake in terms of how we do missions. But if we recognize that Europe is a continent in search of itself, then the church is in an excellent position, and we'll begin to do missions and church in ways increasingly relevant to the culture around us.¹¹²

The feature article in *IdeaSpektrum* in May 2009 asked the question why so few Europeans come to Christ, the individuals interviewed provided helpful insight in what needs to be done in post-Christian Germany I view the answers given as a guide for churches and ministers in the BFP, as we move forward in intentional mission.

- We must allow seekers plenty of time to make a decision for Christ.
- Churches need to offer more spiritual in-depth nourishment.
- If people are not coming to church, the church needs to go to the people.
- Through home groups and Bible studies it is easier to reach people with the gospel.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 27.

¹¹¹Ibid., 81.

¹¹²Cassandra Zinchini, "Taking Revival to the World," *Christianity Today*, October 2007, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/october/44.34.html> (accessed June 15, 2009).

- Christians need to spend more time alone with God; this will enrich their own life's message, making the Christian faith more attractive for seekers.
- We have to utilize effectively the markets of our day, for example the internet.
- We need to create more mystic in our evangelism.
- Many young people come from dysfunctional families. We will only reach them through genuine love and unconditional acceptance.¹¹³

The present spiritual climate in German is indeed bleak and challenging as most individuals do not consider that Christianity will provide any valid answers to their own lives. Looking at the above survey data verifies that this “disinterest” in Christianity will not change soon. Intentional mission is not based on macro societal trends but rather on a proactive endeavor to reach out to individuals with the gospel in their neighborhood, at their work place, in the family, and wherever the unchurched may be found. The BFP's 25,000 active workers have countless opportunities to touch lives as they move about every day. In the European context we dare not measure success in large numerical ways, rather success will be measured in inches rather than feet. Every day in Germany, men and women come to Christ. Our prayer is that God will grant us grace as his body to see even more numbers come to Christ. We need take very small steps, but these steps must be well thought through and birthed in prayer drenched by the Holy Spirit. Germany must hear the gospel in such a way that every hearer will be able to make an intelligent choice to follow Christ.

¹¹³“Warum werden in Europa so wenige Menschen Christen,” 19.

CONCLUSION

During the past twenty-five years I have prayerfully walked through the streets of various German cities where new churches were being planted. Often it seems that hardly a “dent” is being made in the spiritual landscape of a given community, when one considers the size of the church being planted compared to the entire population. However, every church planter in Germany knows the feeling of seeing the faces of lost men and women searching for meaning, but never finding truth. The few individuals who respond to the good news seem like a drop in the proverbial bucket when one considers how many men and women truly follow Christ. Success in harvest is measured in inches rather than feet, and we dare not in Europe compare harvest statistics with those parts of Africa and South America where phenomenal church growth is occurring. Intentional mission implies that we not attempt to get the most “bang for the buck,” but that we bring the good news of the gospel to every individual in every cultural setting no matter how much a culture resists the claims of Christ.

Ekkehard Vetter, who leads the Mülheimer Verband (Mülheimer Association of Churches) in Germany, is somewhat skeptical of the many prophecies given in recent years that Germany will soon experience revival. “I prefer to speak with five people in my neighborhood about Jesus than to prophecy about something that may or may not occur. We pray for revival, and when it happens we are totally surprised.”¹¹⁴ Vetter goes on to explain that the depth of our

¹¹⁴ „Orte der Erweckung (II): In Mülheim an der Ruhr fand einer der umstrittensten Aufbrüche statt,“ *Idea Pressedienst* April 26, 2007, [http://www.idea.de/pressedienst/detailartikel/archive/2007/april/artikel/warum-einer-erweckung-die-spaltung-folgte.html?tx_ttnews\[day\]=26&cHash=3d56fa25cb](http://www.idea.de/pressedienst/detailartikel/archive/2007/april/artikel/warum-einer-erweckung-die-spaltung-folgte.html?tx_ttnews[day]=26&cHash=3d56fa25cb) (accessed August 29, 2009)

spiritual maturity is not the only prerequisite for God's divine intervention. "Revival is not dependent upon us alone, God remains sovereign in that which He desires to accomplish. Still we pray for God to intervene so revival can take place."¹¹⁵

The question remains, how do we measure success in a culture where Christianity is losing influence, and church membership is in general decline? If we are truly intentional in our mission, as directed by the Holy Spirit, we can leave the results of our labors to our Lord. "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Cor. 3:6-7). Whether few or many lives are transformed by the power of Christ, only One receives glory and honor. Success is to see one individual after another transformed by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. Reaching the individual with the gospel and planting churches will require using, appropriate methodologies, directed by the Holy Spirit.

Reinhold Ulonska, who led the BFP for twenty-four years, addressed the 2007 BFP Conference stating that one dare not just reminisce about Pentecostal heritage. "When the Pentecostal movement begun in 1906, Brother Seymour held meetings in an old run-down Methodist church building on Azusa Street that had a pulpit constructed out of three old wooden crates stacked on each other. The building, no doubt, smelled like a stable with its saw dust, and one was reminded of the manger in Bethlehem. In this atmosphere God allowed the Holy Spirit to fall on all those present."¹¹⁶ Ulonska then pleaded with the pastors and delegates of the BFP not to linger in the past by preserving the ashes of Pentecostalism and forgetting the flames. "A fire must burn before you experience its warmth. If the fire remains only a memory, it will have

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Reinhold Ulonska, "Bevollmächtigt beauftragt zum Zeugnis Auf dem Weg in die Zukunft: 112. BFP-Bundeskonferenz vom 23. – 26. September 2007," BFP – Pressestelle September 27, 2009.

no affect at all.”¹¹⁷ Intentional mission is dependent upon the flames of the Spirit that empower and bid us to go. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Whether a revival breaks out now or at a later time, the Church must be faithful in bringing the good news of freedom to everyone in post-Christian Germany who would have an ear to hear.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

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