



The Cross over Europe

Viewed from the outside, Europe stands out as a group of nations attached to democracy and human rights, and as a cultural zone with specific characteristics.

Looking from the inside, 'we Europeans' are much more aware of the mosaic of ethnic origins, languages, national and regional histories, political traditions, cultures, and lifestyles. Many of us are strongly attached to our particular identity, feeling 'European' only in a secondary or an accessory way.

At the same time, there are many connections between the peoples of Europe which are characteristic not just of that country but of the region to which they belong. When it comes to ethnic origins, we are a mixed rabble indeed. Incessant people movements in the past and migration today are complicating the picture. Tensions between the modern nation state and ethnic minorities are a recurrent phenomenon.

But when it comes to our many languages, there is some kind of a pattern. They are Latin in the south-east, Germanic in the north-east and Slavic in the east – with

some exceptional cases here and there.

I would suggest that the cross provides us with a suitable symbol and a key. As we draw an imaginative cross over Europe, we become aware of four major parts.

North versus South

Alongside language, the geographic situation has determined culture. This includes climate, natural resources, arable land, commercial routes, and access to ports. The divide between the Mediterranean world and the Northern regions has a lot to do with climate and vegetation, which influence the agriculture, food patterns, lifestyle and traditions of a given society. The colder the climate, the harder one must work to survive and make living conditions more pleasant.

Another consequence of climate: families in the north live more indoors, in the south more outdoors. People drink wine in the south, beer in the north.

At the time of the Roman Empire, the natural north-south division largely coincided with the border between the 'civilised' peoples linked together by a Hellenistic-Roman culture, and the 'uncivilised' world of the Barbarians. In time the Roman Empire declined while the

EDITORIAL

Generalizing Europe

In my experience there are two common fallacies on mission in Europe. The first sees all Europeans as broadly the same: all of Europe is said to be thoroughly secularized, or pagan, or devoid of vibrant Christian witness. The second considers the context of each nation or region as so unique that only those who have a deep appreciation of the language, history, culture and religious traditions of that place can possibly engage in authentic Christian mission. The first ignores European diversity and the second disregards Europe's many common features. And when it comes to mission the first makes few allowances for contextualization whilst the second blinds us to opportunities to learn lessons from elsewhere.

As Alexander Dumas once said, "All generalizations are dangerous, even this one." The problem, of course, is not the making of generalizations. We all do that as a step in our learning. The problem is turning those generalizations into absolutes so we don't have think any further. But the opposite can also occur, where localisms are turned into absolutes, so that our thinking is closed to outside influences.

This edition of Vista seeks to trace a middle way between those two dangers. Evert van de Poll's lead article explores some of Europe's common regional features and this is followed by four responses, one from each of Europe's four "corners".

Vija Herefoss, writing from Norway, takes Evert to task for some of his generalizations of Scandinavia. Chris Ducker brings a Slavic perspective. Stephen March writes from the view of Catholic Europe and Kostake Milkov gives us a Balkan angle. Each emphasises the importance of understanding history and culture in contemporary Christian mission.

So whichever "corner" of Europe we are from, **all** of us can learn something **if** we are willing to reflect deeply on these stories of contextual mission in Europe today. And that is no sweeping generalization.

Jim Memory

CONTINUED...

Barbarians adopted the (Christian) religion of their former foes. Gradually, the north-south divide lost its significance. But traces remained.

Even today, the Latin and Greek zones around the Mediterranean have distinct characteristics, as compared to the north. To mention just one example: in the south extended family structures are more important than any other social structure. Parents help their children with financial aid much longer than they generally do in northern countries.

It is a matter of interpretation where the north ends and the south begins. Belgium for instance has been called the most northern part of Latin Europe while people in northern France point out that the Latin mentality is only found in the southern part of their country. But wherever you draw the line, there is a difference between north and south. The Mediterranean world has a 'feel' of its own.

West versus East

Then there is the divide between West and East, going back to the old division between the western and the eastern Roman Empire. After the Empire was Christianised, the division continued between the Catholic Latin West and the Orthodox Greek East.

“Christianity is a major, if not the main common denominator in the history of European peoples. At the same time it has also shaped their cultural diversity”

During the Middle-Ages, the peoples to the north and the east were evangelised by Catholics and Orthodox respectively, so the division line spread as well. Germanic and some Slavic peoples were incorporated in the Catholic realm, and most Slavic peoples into the Orthodox realm. As a result, the dividing line went right up to the northern outskirts of the continent, separating Scandinavia and the Baltic from Russia.

As the West developed global trade routes and colonial empires, the East seemed to lag behind. For a long time their elites were orientated towards France and Germany

Different interactions with Christianity

Christianity is a major, if not the main common denominator in the history of European peoples. At the same time it has also shaped their cultural diversity, more than anything else.

Again, there is a pattern in all this diversity, which strikingly largely overlaps with the linguistic pattern. South-west or 'Latin' Europe has almost exclusively been

Nordic Germanic Europe

- Germanic peoples and languages
- 'Beer' culture
- Climate less hospitable
- Culture mainly determined by Protestantism
- Mostly Protestant with Roman Catholic minorities. Some Roman Catholic countries
- Industrious, enterprising, commercial development
- Used to a plurality of religious expressions.
- Today largely secularised

Slavic Europe

- Slavic peoples and languages (some exceptions)
- 'Vodka' culture
- Climate less hospitable
- Cultures determined by Roman Catholicism (western part) or Orthodox (eastern part)
- Less prosperous than the West
- Some countries are very much secularised (e.g. Czech Republic), others marked by widespread religious practice (Poland)

Latin Europe

- Latin or 'Roman' languages
- 'Wine' culture
- Hospitable climate
- Culture determined by Roman Catholicism
- Industrious, enterprising
- Less secularised than NW Europe. High percentage of nominal Roman Catholics

Balkan Europe

- Latin, Slavic, Greek, Turkish and other languages
- 'Wine' culture or 'black coffee' culture
- Hospitable climate
- Cultural mosaic of 'pieces' determined by Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam
- Less industrious and prosperous than the West
- Less secularised, because of relation between religion and national/cultural identity

Some of the generalised characteristics of the four regions of Europe

dominated by Roman Catholicism. North-west Europe with its Nordic and Germanic languages came largely under the influence of Protestantism while maintaining important Roman Catholic minorities. Slavic Europe was dominated by Roman Catholicism in the western part and by Orthodoxy further to the east, but Protestantism remained a marginal influence.

Finally, there is the south-eastern part Europe that seems to belong neither to East nor West. It is difficult to mark its frontier; it is even more difficult to give it a name. In the nineteenth century, the name 'Balkan' came to be used, denoting a region of incessant strife. Indeed, this is an area of tension, because it represents a mosaic of different ethnic origins, language groups, and religions. This is the only part of Europe where Islam has maintained a continual presence till the present day (Bosnia, Albania, and Kosovo). And we should not forget that Istanbul, ancient Constantinople, is a Muslim metropolis on European soil.

A socio-cultural cross

When we combine the geographical, linguistic, and religious zones, we can identify a 'cross', dividing Europe into four major socio-cultural 'quarters.'

The 'borders' between these zones are abstractions of a more complex reality. But as one travels across Europe, at some point, travellers will realise that they have entered into another world, another kind of Europe.

Of course, this 'cross' does not visualise the religious and ethnic minorities spread all over Europe: Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, adherents of new religious movements. Nor does it bring out the increasing percentage of non-religious people.

Secularisation is taking place all over Europe, but it takes different forms in different zones. First, people who are not affiliated with any religious institution. We see this notably in Protestant and ex-communist countries, with peaks in the Netherlands, the eastern Germany and the Czech Republic.

Secondly, the non-practicing nominal members of Christian churches. This phenomenon is most widespread in traditionally Roman Catholic countries.

As to the 'line' between east and west, it seems to be moving eastwards as the EU expands to the east. Slovaks, Slovenes, Croats, Hungarians, Czech and Poles like to consider themselves as being part of West. In their mind, the 'East' is Russia, Belarus, and the Ukraine.

Russian leaders often oppose their 'Eurasian' culture to the 'American' influenced culture of 'Western' Europe. Ukrainians themselves are divided to which side they belong, and this is the undercurrent of the troubles that rip their country. Some would even exclude the Russians from the European civilisation altogether. Meanwhile, Orthodox Church leaders insist that Russia and its neighbours are the inheritors of Byzantine Europe, standing in continuity with the Christianised Roman Empire, and therefore part of the 'house of Europe'.

Understand resemblances and differences at a regional level

This cross over Europe is a generalisation, and a tentative one. We do not pretend to have analysed in depth the various aspects of these zones. Further research is necessary to refine and modify it. We have used a number of variables, but to check our provisional conclusions and refine the picture, other variables should be added, such as individual versus state initiative, tolerance of religious diversity in general and of Islam in particular, of the attitude towards authority.

Despite its provisional state, this cross clarifies why some national and regional cultures have more in common with each other than with others. It also helps workers in intercultural mission to understand that cultural dividing lines do not always correspond to national borders.

An interesting question for Evangelicals involved in mission in Europe is where and how does Evangelicalism fit into the picture?

How receptive is the population in each socio-cultural zone to the Evangelical expression of Christian faith, with its emphasis on conversion, personal relation with God and individual responsibility?

How do they relate to Evangelical forms of church life, with its 'low liturgy' and its emphasis on participating in and contributing to the witness of the Gospel?

For example, it appears that a population with a Protestant background (northern Europe) is generally more receptive than a population with a traditional Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox background.

Is there perhaps a distance between the church model generally used by Evangelicals, and the socio-cultural context of these zones. And if so, what are the implications for how Evangelicals practice mission in Europe today?

Evert van de Poll is a Dutch evangelical theologian, minister and former editor. He is presently a Baptist pastor in south France (Toulouse) and is university professor at the Evangelical Theological Faculty (ETF) in Heverlee, Leuven, Belgium.



State flag of Ukraine carried by a protester to the heart of developing clashes in Kyiv, Ukraine. Events of February 18, 2014 ©2014 Mstyslav Chernov, some rights reserved

THE CROSS OVER EUROPE: NORTH WEST EUROPE VIJA HEREFOS, NORWAY

The following reflection on mission in Northern Europe builds on a slightly different premise than Evert's article.

Evert's article provides an overview of Europe that is based on a lot of generalizations. Some of these generalizations might be helpful, but others, to my opinion, are misleading. For example, he claims that families in the north live more indoors. Perhaps this observation is right when it comes to Sweden or Finland, but when it comes to Norway it could not be more wrong.

Norwegians love to be outdoors and they do not worry about the weather. They even have a little rhyme that goes something like this: "there is not such thing as bad weather, there is only bad (or unsuitable) clothing", meaning that one can be

outdoors in all kinds of weather as long as one is properly dressed.

This in itself presents an interesting missiological challenge: Norwegians' love for being outdoors has for years been a special challenge during Easter time when majority of Norwegians will leave for their mountain cabins to ski or hike leaving the churches with the challenge of finding creative ways how to motivate people to attend Easter services.

In order to avoid similar misconceptions about the countries that belong to Northern Europe I have chosen not to making any general statements about the region but instead concentrate on my observations about mission and church in Norwegian context, which I know best. It is up to the reader then to decide to what

degree these observations can be generalized and/or applied to other contexts.

According to Evert, Northern Europe is mostly protestant, industrious, enterprising and economically developed, used to plurality of religious expressions, and largely secular. Using this description as a starting point, I would like to suggest three main challenges for mission in the Nordic context.

Challenge 1: Knowledge of Christianity and the Church

The first issue is related to the average Norwegian's knowledge about Christianity and the Church.

Here we meet a twofold challenge: from one side, most people have very limited

knowledge about the basic elements of Christian faith.

From the other side, most of them are convinced that what they know is sufficient, and, more importantly, that their views are correct. What are some of the fundamental, underlying issues that shape these views?

Let me mention two of them. First, church history in general and the heritage of pietism in particular. The impact of this pietistic heritage on the perception of church should not be underestimated – Christianity is still very often described in terms of what it prohibits and/or condemns.

The second issue is related to attitudes towards religious pluralism. Values of equality and egalitarianism are central in Norwegian society and therefore there is a strong dislike for any kind of exclusive claims, especially if they are perceived to teach that some are better than others. These attitudes and views often lead to the conclusion that the Christian faith has little or nothing to offer.

So one of the challenges for mission in Nordic context is to be able to motivate curiosity about Christianity as well as to be able to go beyond the lack of interest or negative attitudes.

Challenge 2: The Folk Church phenomenon

The second challenge is connected to the folk church phenomenon. Most Norwegians (up to 80% of the population) are members of the Lutheran church and therefore consider themselves Christians, but less than 10% actually attend church services or are actively engaged in the life of the local congregation.

“Christianity is still very often described in terms of what it prohibits and/or condemns.”

Here I would like to challenge Evert’s observation that the problem of nominal Christianity is most widespread in the Southern part of Europe among Roman Catholics. Countries like Norway (as well as the other the Scandinavian countries) where majority of people are members of the Lutheran church also struggle with the same problem.

The attitude that is sometimes described as “belonging without believing” or “belonging without practicing” presents a serious challenge and points towards the fact that one of the main tasks of those involved in mission is to challenge the people to ask questions like “What does it mean to be a Christian?”, “How does one practice one’s faith?” or “What do we understand by discipleship?”

Challenge 3: A highly differentiated society

The third challenge is related to the fact that churches have to reflect and find out what is their role and function in a highly differentiated society. As a result of the secularization process most of the social functions of the church (such as education, healthcare) have been taken over by the state.

Thus although the churches are still involved in charity work, they are no longer the only or even the main actor engaged in this kind of work. But if taking care of the poor and vulnerable is no longer seen as a uniquely Christian then we have to ask what is Christianity’s unique contribution to society?

What is it that we can offer to people that no one else can? Finding good answers to these questions, to my opinion, is essential for mission in the Nordic context.

Vija Herefoss (MPhil) is a young missiologist from Latvia currently living and working in Oslo, Norway. She is a PhD student at MF Norwegian School of Theology. Her doctoral thesis aims at analysing the challenges for mission in a post-communist context. She also is a visiting lecturer on the MA in Contemporary Missiology at Redcliffe College.



The Norwegian love of the outdoors can in itself present a missiological challenge, says Vija Herefoss

THE CROSS OVER EUROPE: NORTH EAST (SLAVIC) EUROPE CHRISTOPHER DUCKER, MOLDOVA

One in three Europeans belongs to a Slavic people group, by far Europe's largest such grouping. The majority of these are Eastern Slavs in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, though there are also Western Slavs in Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and (western) Ukraine, as well as a smaller number of Southern Slavs in the Balkans. Whilst these people share a common identity on one level, they are also sharply divided in terms of socio-cultural and religious identity.

Eastern Europe persists in being a highly religious region, especially amongst older generations. But whilst belief in the existence of God is strong, and the symbols and influence of Christianity are widespread, there is a great deal of nominal religion. Christianity is culturally strong here, but is often accompanied by limited personal belief and spiritual shallowness. Within the three Slavic blocs, there are very strong national religious identities: Eastern Slavs number some 200 million, the vast majority of whom identify themselves as Russian Orthodox. There are less than half as many Western Slavs, meanwhile, and this group are generally Roman Catholics. Southern Slavs are split between the two churches. Throughout the region overall, evangelicals number just 1%-2% of the population.

These religious differences preclude us from making too many generalisations about the Slavic region as a whole. However, there are some common features. Firstly, religion is widely tolerated, and often deeply entrenched, in the public sphere, in contrast to western Europe. In Russia and Belarus, for example, the Orthodox church can be seen to be legitimizing state power and in return the state confers certain privileges upon the church, including influence on lawmaking. Secondly, the Slavic countries are less economically developed than countries in western and central Europe, though with the admission of Poland, the Czech Republic and other countries into the EU, this gap is receding. Thirdly, these countries have been profoundly shaped by the legacy of communism, and western commentators perhaps underestimate the amount of influence this legacy has even today, even on those born after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

As recent events in Ukraine have demonstrated, there are very significant divisions in some parts of eastern Europe, based on competing loyalties to Russia, on the one hand (and its nascent Customs Union), and to 'the West' on the other (with membership of the EU as the goal). Not



Protestant or evangelical mission in Slavic countries does not take place in a religious vacuum

surprisingly, these East vs. West loyalties are to a large extent synonymous with religious identity, in that Roman Catholic countries look to the West, and Orthodox countries more to the East. Nearly 1,000 years since the Great Schism between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, the economic, social and cultural trajectories of these Slavic countries remains inextricably linked to their religious identity.

The challenge ... is to find a humble respect for existing churches in the Slavic heartlands; and to better contextualise church models and missionary teaching and practices there.

How does this tale of two confessions affect our understanding of contemporary mission in Eastern Europe? Most significantly, it reminds us that any Protestant or evangelical mission in these Slavic countries will not be taking place in a religious vacuum but rather amongst people who have existing religious affiliations, even if no more than 10% of them regularly attend church. It is an oft-repeated criticism of western missionaries that they ignore the historic national churches and assume a blank canvas (or worse, that they are operating in 'enemy territory'). Sadly, it is just as likely that national churches will not accept other denominations as true believers, even labelling them 'pagans.'

The challenge for mission practitioners – and missiologists – is twofold: to find a humble respect for existing churches in the Slavic heartlands; and to better contextualise church models and missionary teaching and practices there. Whether these two challenges can be met *simultaneously* is a question on which the future of mission in

eastern Europe rests, as old and new ecclesiologies and missiologies interact. Can Europe's churches, rather than competing, grow to complement each other in a spirit of unity?

These two challenges can perhaps be better understood as *opportunities*: respect for national churches, whether Catholic or, especially, Orthodox, may lead to greater ecumenism and a united mission and common witness. The alternative scenario to such cooperation is continued public division which undermines our testimony to the world, and weakness in the face of secularisation and perhaps Islamization of Europe in the future. The second challenge concerns greater contextualisation as Western missionaries turn away from their own church models and assumptions and embrace new ones rooted in eastern European culture and the Slavic worldview.

The good news is that there are promising signs of house church movements and fresh expressions, which can thrive in the geographical and conceptual gaps left by historic churches. These are increasingly in the hands of indigenous church leaders who love the Lord and are listening to the Spirit; perhaps theirs will be the generation who also love their brothers and sisters from the historic churches and listen to their concerns and fears.

Chris Ducker is a British missionary who has worked alongside the Baptist Church in Moldova since 2007. His research has included examining the relationship between Moldovan church leaders and visiting short-term mission teams, especially relating to cross-cultural communication and feedback.

SOUTH WEST EUROPE: A VIEW FROM THE LATIN QUARTER

STEPHEN MARCH, FRANCE

I have lived in France for the past 14 years involved in a ministry of grass-roots ecumenical cooperation in a Roman Catholic parish. The following elements strike me as being significant with regard to future mission. Whilst I am speaking mainly of France, the same trends seem to be generally prevalent in other Latin countries.

The Rural Demographic

The Roman Catholic parish structure is still the only significant Christian presence 'on the ground' in most of France, which has a very rural demographic. The lack of priests has driven successive agglomerations of parishes and the average priest in a rural setting will therefore find himself serving a "super-parish" of between 50 and 100 separate villages. The average age of a priest is 74, with a retirement age of 75.

Rural parishes are generally very poor and the Church buildings usually belong to the state, with elected local authorities in charge of repairs and renovation. The buildings therefore have often not been adapted to modern needs - of the 46 village churches in our parish, not one (not even the main parish centre) has running water or a toilet. This lack of basic facilities greatly hinders any development in the mission of the parish.

The penury of priests also means that a minimum sacramental offering of births, death, marriages is difficult to maintain.

Rural France is a place of desertification and ageing populations. Young people leave to go to secondary school at age 15 and most never return. In the parish a minority of young children (perhaps less than 10%) still go through catechism, however, once they go to *lycée* they generally break contact with the church. For this reason the "Profession de Foi" (Profession of Faith) ceremony which tends to happen around this age is often called "a rite for leaving the church"!

Churches in urban contexts are generally better equipped and staffed. Their buildings are often used by the local authority for cultural events and therefore better maintained and developed. There are also more new churches. Any church that was built after 1904 belongs to the church, and usually has facilities appropriate to contemporary ministry needs.

France and the French are still very much Roman Catholic in identity. The Protestant presence and as a subset of that, the Protestant Evangelical mission, is largely restricted to urban centres and for historical

reasons, to certain limited geographical zones. Thus the vast majority of the French population (90 to 95%) is outside the scope of any Protestant mission. This is due either to their cultural self-understanding as being Catholic - even if this has no religious connotation e.g. a French person will happily describe him/herself as "*Catholique, non-croyant, non-pratiquant*" (Catholic, non-believing, non-practising!); or due to the geographical reality of the absence of any Protestant presence in the area.

Evangelical Spirituality

However, whilst Evangelicals are incapable of reaching the majority of French people, evangelical spirituality is not.

For example, both the Protestant Church and the Roman Catholic Church have embraced the ALPHA course. Beginning in the urban centres, this evangelistic tool is spreading in a remarkable manner from just 50 courses in 2008 to around 700 courses this year. There are now around 1,000 locations in France where ALPHA courses are regularly run (<http://www.classic.parcoursalpha.fr/Espace-Presses.html>). ALPHA is significant for several reasons.

ALPHA is majority Roman Catholic in France but all training courses are run ecumenically, which has built relationships of trust between the different denominations. This new ecumenical reality has enabled joint action, for example the recent massive protests against the Government's proposal for Gay Marriage. In a socio-political context that is

increasingly hostile to religious faith in general and to the Christian faith in particular, these new alliances may prove to be significant.

Further cooperation could be forthcoming. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, black Gospel music is very popular in France, even amongst those with no religious connections or beliefs. Gospel concerts can be highly attractive evangelistic events and where churches and denominations come together to present this kind of cultural event, first-contact evangelism (e.g. ALPHA invitations to explore the Gospel faith) can be an effective.

The emphasis on lay involvement in ALPHA makes mission possible in the current Catholic context of very few priests, and is putting evangelism back on the agenda in the French Catholic world.

ALPHA also tends to create a group of people who want to continue to meet in small groups as an expression of their new-found, or newly re-vitalised faith. This can often serve as a remedial tool for a parish, through creating the stimulus for small groups which engage with the bible, establishing a missions outlook or stimulating a communal life of prayer.

If we move away from ALPHA and look at the church demographic we see that whilst young people are generally absent from the rural parish they are not however untouched by Christian ministries. In fact there are some phenomenal success stories.



Taizé attracts young people from across France for prayer and worship

During the summer months, the Protestant monastic centre Taizé, welcomes up to 4,000 Protestant and Catholic young people a day from all over the world. Many stay for a week, during which they enter a cycle of prayer and biblical reflection based on the final week of Jesus' life. It also goes 'on the road' and 30,000 young people gathered for its most recent event in Strasbourg (http://www.taize.fr/fr_article16192.html).

Although Protestant in origin, Taizé is liturgical in its spirituality – it has a catholic "look and feel" and, like ALPHA, is ecumenical in its outlook.

The Catholic JMJ (*Journée Mondiale de la Jeunesse – World Youth Day*) attracts enormous numbers of French young people. Every 2 or 3 years around two million Catholic young people from all around the world gather for a week of prayer and praise. They spend several days in smaller groups hosted by local parishes and then come together for the main two-day event. These events birth faith and bring spiritual vitality to the lives of young people as they gather together.

However, both Taizé and JMJ often fail to lead young people into a re-engagement with their local parish, leading to an 'oasis' type spirituality. Young people will attend attractive youth-oriented events, or visit a pilgrimage centre such as Lourdes, or walk part of the ancient pilgrim route to St Jacques de Compostelle – but they do not regularly attend church, nor generally involve themselves in the life of their local parish.

Some ministries are trying to address the issue. The gatherings of the Catholic MEJ

(*Mission Eucharistique des Jeunes – Youth Eucharistic Mission*) draws around 1,400 young people from all over France for a week of vibrant youth-oriented worship and Christian formation.

Its activities are rooted in local parish groups which meet regularly and also run events in order to try and maintain contact with the young people and also to encourage their spiritual life out with the big annual gatherings. These parish based activities are supported and encouraged by national concert tours by the MEJ worship band (<http://www.mej.fr/Tournee>). However, even here it is acknowledged that many of the young people will still not attend mass on a regular basis.

Other youth movements, such as the Scouts (which are overtly Catholic in France) play a part in promoting spiritual life in young people with little or no contact with the parish.

Conclusions:

Whilst the majority Roman Catholic church in France is struggling, some bright points of light do exist.

When the Christian faith is presented in culturally appropriate ways people do respond to the message. For example the successful migration of ALPHA into the Roman Catholic world indicates the reality that Anglican ventures can transfer here much more easily than models and methods birthed in other Protestant traditions – it looks and feels quite like a Catholic church and has a hierarchical authority structure, a parish model, a liturgical form of worship and the same liturgical calendar.

Whether other Anglican ventures, such as Fresh Expressions, can also successfully migrate to France and the other Latin countries will be interesting to see.

Another bright point is the response of young people to the possibility of spiritual experience and divine encounter when this is offered in a youth-oriented, attractive package.

The French experience supports the general postmodern thesis that contemporary as well as ancient forms of spirituality are the most appealing to the non-churched. Ancient spiritual practices such as walking pilgrimages attract many non-church goers. On a recent ALPHA course a man shared how he had decided to walk the St Jacques de Compostelle pilgrimage route alone on taking early retirement. During this pilgrimage he encountered God in a new way and came to a living faith. ALPHA helped him discover how this experience of God in his life related to the Christian message and the Church. He is now an active member of his local parish and an ALPHA volunteer. A young friend who is an avowed agnostic and non-church goer, has just told me that he is off to walk the same pilgrimage route this summer – I can only pray for the same result!

Stephen March *Raised in the Protestant Evangelical tradition, Stephen and Sharon responded in 2000 to a call from God to serve in a ministry of grass-roots, ecumenical cooperation in the French, Roman Catholic Church. This voluntary service has had as its goal the encouragement of evangelism, discipleship and the life of worship within the parish. See sjmarch.wordpress.com for more*

SOUTH EAST EUROPE: SECULARISATION AFTER COMMUNISM KOSTAKE MILKOV, MACEDONIA

When the Berlin wall fell it gave the signal for the end of an era of Communism in Eastern Europe. It took only few years before the countries from the Communist block dismantled the one party systems and introduced political pluralism as a precondition to transition into democracies.

One of the obvious consequences of the fall of Communism was deemed to be the return of the people to their respective religious backgrounds. Disappointment with communist eschatology (i.e. communism becoming a conservative movement in late real socialism), the willingness of the middle members of the administration to maintain religious values and the social anxiety which followed the

collapse of the old system led to the revitalization of religion¹. Initially this is exactly what seemed to be happening, and the churches, expected people to flock back into an active church life.

“The end of the East-West conflict did not bring the end of atheism”

However, this did not happen. The churches found themselves in a minority and to have lost much of their political influence². Attempts at living in the past or inviting liberalization and modernization only produced divisions within the church on methodological grounds³.

Moreover the end of the East-West conflict did not bring the end of atheism. Indeed, many former Marxists believe that atheism is the one thing which should survive from their

former worldview and that it should form a bridge between the old and the new systems. This is because of the western scientific atheistic tradition which is derived from the Enlightenment.

If this is so, then neither atheism nor secularisation are a consequence of Communism in Eastern Europe⁴. What can be said is that Communism picked up the idea of atheism from the Enlightenment and developed it into something that can be called anti-theism. This was certainly the case with Albania, but the communist ideology of Former Yugoslavia, although more lenient, was also strongly antireligious.

This specific anti-theistic mannerism of Communism was driven by its ideological

vision for the New Man. This vision, would be achieved through the annihilation of the old social structures and cultural establishments emphasising the role of the individual. For this purpose "[t]he human relations that make up the society's fabric - the family, religion, historical memory, language - become targets, as society is systematically and methodically atomized, and the individual's chosen relationships are supplanted by others chosen for him, and approved by the state. Man remains alone, face to face with the state Leviathan. Only by melting into the collective, by becoming a mere drop of the "mass," can a man save himself from his terrifying loneliness."⁵

The result however was totally opposite. "[A]ll former European communist societies experienced, to various degrees, the destruction of societal trust and societal texture ..." and "lack of trust both at interpersonal and societal levels is still very high in these societies even today. This in turn led to civic, economic and political collapse."⁶

Communism directly and indirectly affected the churches in a major way. Its direct effect was the open and tacit deterrence of the population to practice their faith, and the interference with the administrative and hierarchical affairs of the churches. This led to the indirect effect of the churches being passive or confined to a very limited scope of social influence. The inevitable negative selection for clergy resulted in lack of proper church leadership, and charismatic and inspirational thinkers.

Another reason for the rise of secularism is detected in the poor adaptation of the churches to the new situation. They did not come with a clear religious message based on biblical principles, did not address the issues of folk religion and rampant superstition and tolerated it for

the sake of increased outward religiosity, and did not offer anything (except, maybe nationalism) to fill the void of ideology that Communism left. This opened the way for superstition to play the role of an unlikely ally to secularism.

Besides Communism the reason for the rise of secularism is detected in the poor adaptation of the churches to the new situation

Superstition in the region usually means the conscious or unconscious syncretism that combines elements of Christianity and Islam with the pre-Christian pagan religions. It is the smorgasbord of the religious market which fits well within secular pluralism and its non-judgemental policy which lacks the requirement for any form of personal commitment, prescription of a lifestyle and the dogmatic formulations foundational for the established religions.

This can be reduced to "practical atheism" where the belief in the absence of God is not ideological but practical. God is, but he is *not* here and now,, a view which leads to the amoral mentality that something is good if makes one feel good.

Decreasing church attendance indicates that people are alienated from the traditional churches in spite of their "surge in religiosity", especially youth who are usually looking for short-term solutions to their problems and quests. The general population may still claim religiosity, but the assessment is that the churches play smaller role than within five years from the fall of Communism. This is due to the dichotomy between the churches as cultural / identity institution and anticlericalism and non-religiousness.

The pressure to adapt to foreign and imposed standards is felt even more intensely with the presence of numerous NGO's, armed with resources and personnel, which aim to introduce values and ways of life that are considered wrong and offensive.

The secular ideology is seen as an attempt to impose its own value-matrix of life, and to oust any kind of religious tenets from the public sphere as a shaping force of society. Rather than a religious identity, the secularist agenda is to transform the person into a mere individual guided by pure pragmatism.

Kostake Milkov has finished his masters and doctorate in Patristic Theology at the University of Oxford. Kosta and his wife, Nada, currently run the Balkan Institute for Faith and Culture (BIFC). He is a visiting lecturer of theology at Evangelical Theological Seminary, Osijek, Croatia, a Senior Associate of RZIM Europe and an ordained minister in the Evangelical Church in Macedonia. Since 2011 he has participated in the Langham International postdoctoral research seminar. Kosta, Nada and their daughter Gabriela live in Skopje, Macedonia.

Endnotes

1. Marko Kersevan, "The Change of Religious Situation in the Eyes of the Non-Believers" in Milos Tomka and Paul M. Zulehner eds., Religion During and After Communism (London, SCM Press, 2000), 74-81.
2. Poland is an exception.
3. Albert Franz, "A Rise in Atheism?" in Milos Tomka and Paul M. Zulehner eds., Religion During and After Communism (London, SCM Press, 2000), 36-43.
4. Miloslav Cardinal Vlk, "Social Upheaval and the Phenomenon of Atheism: Two Challenges" in Milos Tomka and Paul M. Zulehner eds., Religion During and After Communism (London, SCM Press, 2000), 44-51.
5. Heller, Mikhail, Machine et les rouages, English, Cogs in the Wheel: the Formation of Soviet Man, Mikhail Heller; translated by David Floyd, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988, pp 29, 30.
6. Rogobete. 2004. 279.



DISCOVER, DISCUSS AND DISCERN WHAT GOD IS DOING ACROSS EUROPE TODAY...

17-18th September at London School of Theology ONLY £99

Speakers include: Thomas Bucher, Peter Magnusson, Juliet Kilpin, Jim Memory and many more...

eurofest2014.org.uk



Editorial Team: Darrell Jackson, Jim Memory and Jo Appleton



Redcliffe College Horton Road Gloucester, GL1 3PT

Telephone: 01452 399939

europeanmission.redcliffe.org