

## **Apostolic Offensive in Europe (5/07)**

Proposal for new initiatives in bringing the Kingdom of God to Europe and the regions beyond

By Dick Scoggins, Fellowship of Church Planters, Frontiers, and Impact Network

### **THE HOPE (Vision):**

I wrote an article on Petrine and Pauline Apostleship that appeared in Mission Frontiers, summer issue, 2006. In it I detailed why I feel that the new post modern world, especially in Europe, offers great opportunities for the expansion of the Kingdom of God; IF we can raise up a new generation of apostles who will develop and implement new models of Kingdom communities which fit the post modern era. I feel that the summary below of needs and opportunities presents a unique time in history, which, if acted upon, can revitalize Europe in such a way as to put God's Kingdom on the offensive, not only winning Europeans to a vital, transforming faith in Jesus, but also taking the offensive against Islam, seeking to penetrate Muslim communities in the major cities of Europe, seeing Faith communities of Jesus emerge in this population and taking the faith back to their homeland. A Network of apostles in Europe planting Jesus communities would meet together to not only share notes, but to envision the task of comparing people group receptivity and innovative approaches. Petrine and Pauline apostles should humbly learn from each other and share in the total task of building the Kingdom outside of the existing structures and concepts.

### **MARKERS FOR PROGRESS/SUCCESS:**

The following would be indicators of real progress and success in this endeavour:

- A surge in apostles and apostolic teams committed to planting Kingdom communities throughout Europe amongst European and Muslim populations.
- New vibrant, transforming, reproducing communities of faith in multiple European countries.
- Establishing vital Kingdom families where fathers, mothers and children are living out a vital faith in their homes and before the fragmented European society.
- Vital Kingdom communities being established in the Muslim populations in Major European cities.

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **THE LEGACY:**

In the 1800s to the mid-1900s Europe was a bastion of the Kingdom of God and a base for the expansion of the Kingdom. The reformation countries like England and Holland, especially took the initiative at expanding the Kingdom of God; with a large missionary force they followed the colonizing armies and navies of these countries to bring the Kingdom of God to those who were lost. We can certainly see the weakness of the colonial expansion in hindsight, but there is little doubt that these pioneer missionaries had a huge impact in expanding the Kingdom of God to the ends of the earth. But now, sadly, Europe has a need.

#### **THE NEED:**

- The Kingdom of God in Europe has declined throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is due to a number of things, not the least which are: 2 world wars, the failing of enlightenment philosophy to bring a better life (relationally at least), decrease in world influence due to the end of the colonial age, social structures which inhibit growth and initiative, a calcified, often stifling Christianity which has often been the instrument of politics and state ambitions through the centuries.
- Christianity has been on the decline in every western European country through the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many countries (e.g. France, Spain, Italy, Portugal) never really experienced the reformation, but even in these Catholic countries

Catholicism has been on the decline. Many western European countries have fewer than 1% of the population that would claim to follow Jesus and have a personal relationship with the living God. Church cathedrals are empty museums to a past era.

- Over the last decades, many countries which experienced the reformation have suffered dramatic drops in the evangelical population. England has declined even since the 1990's from 7% of the population to less than 5% in 2005. This in spite of things like the Alpha course which has been popular in England and other English speaking countries. Alpha was developed during the "Decade of Evangelism" of the Anglican church which, rather than seeing growth, saw a small slowing of the decline of the size of the church in England when all denominations are measured.
- Switzerland has gone from 25% (in the reformed areas) in the mid-1950s to a little over 1% now. (These statistics based on studies done in early 2000 in both these countries by evangelical societies).
- The conflict of the kingdoms which will characterize at least the first part of this century between the West and Islam is nowhere as clear as in Europe. Islam has come to Europe through waves of immigrants and an increasingly shrinking native European population. With the breakdown of the family in Western Europe, native European fertility is about 1.3 children for every white, European woman. For Muslim women in Europe the fertility rate is 3.5 according to a recent London Times article. And, of course, Muslim immigration to European countries continues as well as substantial emigration of European populations to places like Australia and New Zealand. I have seen a number of projections that predict that Europe will be a Muslim Enclave by 2020 in terms of cultured and practiced faith. Mass Muslim immigration is a political, religious, and economic emergency. Whereas many Europeans are burying their heads and wishing to turn back the clock with immigration, we view Muslim immigration as a major opportunity to see God's kingdom communities birthed amongst the secular and Muslim populations.

### **THE TREASURE:**

Europe is a gold mine of resources for apostolic development around the world.

- Many Western Europeans are wealthy. Though shy and not always forward thinking, Europeans have treasure that they want to invest in humanitarian and Kingdom projects around the world.
- Western Europeans, excluding the millions of immigrants, are educated and trained with substantial business acumen. Organization and strategic planning are second nature to Europeans. This power has yet to have been harnessed for the Kingdom.
- Western Europeans are faced with rising immigration and a struggle with the consequent cost of health care and subsidy costs. They are looking for answers. Most Europeans admit that there is a spiritual vacuum in that pales in the staunch commitment of Muslims from abroad. They need partnership. They seek answers.
- Europeans no longer feel guilt over misdeeds, nor do they equate sin with a Biblical consequence of godless choices in life. But on the bright side, Europeans respond in a shame and honour worldview, similarly to Muslims. Lessons from apostolic work, planting Kingdom communities among Muslims, are useful as a gold mine in learning a post modern approach which affirms Europeans, honouring them in their walk with Jesus.

### **THE OPPORTUNITY:**

The future may look pretty bleak from the above data, but I feel that this is a time of great opportunity.

- Western Europeans are terrified of the new Muslim influx. They realize that their own culture is in danger.

- Many are beginning to realize that the secular European worldview which has been cherished during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is not able to stand up to a vibrant and increasingly militant Islam. Many were hopeful that Muslims would come to Europe and integrate with the secular society, embracing European liberal and secular values. This has not happened and Europeans are beginning to realize it will not happen and, increasingly that secularism is not a hope for the future. Muslims do not want to integrate into what they see as an “infidel culture.” Europeans rarely wish to fully integrate with their Muslim visitors because of economic and cultural clashes. This offers both Petrine and Pauline opportunities for building the Kingdom of God.
- In just the last months I have seen articles appearing in the London Times and other secular press reviewing the Christian heritage as a possible way to combat militant Islam—even though existing Christian structures have proven largely impotent in the face of militant Islam and secularism.
- There has been a greater openness than ever to explore radical new forms of faith (like house churches) which have the opportunity to recover and strengthen the nuclear family. The family, largely ignored as important by secular Europe, is the building block of the Kingdom of God as well as societies and cultures. This weakness of families and the corresponding immorality is one of the biggest obstacles in making the Kingdom of God attractive to Muslims in the West.
- Since 9/11 we have witnessed a real interest in small, organic, faith communities (mostly house churches) in western European countries. Whereas before 9/11 there was hostility toward anything but traditional forms of faith (large, centralized churches) since 9/11 we have seen hundreds of house churches emerge in the UK, Switzerland, and Germany. My experience over the last 22 years in Northeast New England and England developing these kind of communities have reinforced my conviction that these are the best way forward in recovering Kingdom families which can reproduce and fill the earth with the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Books like “Houses That Change the World” (Wolfgang Simpson) have fuelled this vision.