

Mission in Europe: A Lost Cause or An Open Door?

Have the days of public proclamation passed in secularised, anti-authoritarian, visually-orientated Europe? Should we just focus on personal friendships, acts of compassion, and community-orientated expressions of Christian witness, or does proclamation still have a role? We will seek to answer this question by investigating biblical, historical, and contemporary models, assessing our cultural context, and reviewing the importance of content-full and creative public presentations of the Gospel.

Lindsay Brown is a native of Wales. He studied European History at Oxford (MA) and Theology at the Free Faculty of Theology at Vaux-sur-Seine, near Paris, under Henri Blocher. He has been involved in student ministry with IFES for over 30 years, serving variously as European Regional Secretary / International General Secretary and currently heads up the newly formed FEUER (Fellowship of Evangelists in the Universities of Europe) - a network formed by a joint effort of UCCF, the British student movement and IFES, the international evangelical student body - which has as its aspiration the renewal of public communication of the gospel in the universities of Europe. Its current goal is to host 36 university mission weeks in 36 cities in 36 countries in 36 months and to develop a Europe-wide network of at least 60 university evangelists. Lindsay is also currently seconded to work with the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization as its International Director. He will be leading the Evangelism Network.

I. Introduction:

A. Acts 8:1-3

B. Acts 10:19-21

II. The encouraging growth of the evangelical church in Europe since 1989 - examples: Albania / Ukraine / UK / France

A. The research of missiologist Philip Jenkins

B. New evangelistic initiatives e.g. Alpha; Christianity Explored; the work of Raphael Anzenberger; FEUER

C. The growth of interest in public dialogue.. e.g. Lennox/Dawkins debates in UK; Stefan Gustavsson in Slovenia; Jurgen Spiess in Germany; Veritas Forum dialogues in France; example of John Calvin

- D. Large youth events in Germany (ProChrist); Word Alive (UK); mission days in Spain and Italy; large student conferences e.g. Germany; Hungary

III. The simultaneous growth in hostility (Tolstoy: ‘Anyone who wants an easy life has been born in the wrong generation.’) E.g. Turkey; Greece; universities in UK; hostile press and media vis-à-vis evangelicals in Sweden.

- A. The roots of Europessimism – Jacques Ellul - “3 influential thinkers in Europe in the 20th century were Marx, Nietzsche, Freud...”

- B. The genesis of the New Atheism, espoused by Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and others

- C. The overwhelming indifference and apathy of many, as well as the unholy trinity of hedonism, materialism and pluralism.

IV. Future challenges and the way forward - The continued need for pioneering, church-planting, proclamation and general evangelism

- A. The importance of creativity – the model of John Calvin; what approaches might be used today? What are the modern equivalents of Calvin’s public dialogues, literature publication, and distribution?

- B. The importance of building loving, caring Christian communities in contexts where people feel isolated; the research of Rodney Stark.
 - C. The importance of working with young people, especially students- ('If you want to change the world, start with the university/ - Charles Malik) The most effective way of spreading the gospel is through the universities of Europe' – Martin Luther 1523) Note how Luther, Calvin, Whitfield etc. were converted as university students.
 - D. Word and image – how do we communicate a faith which is word-based in an image-saturated culture? How to make the best of the new social networks and new technology? Some examples....
 - E. Continued need for a combination of creative public engagement and distinctive, godly living.
 - F. The need to take a long view and the importance of perseverance and prayer.
- V. Kenneth Scott Latourette's observations of the 6 weapons in the Christian armoury:**
- A. Evangelism

B. Prayer

C. Argument

D. Example

E. Action

F. Suffering

VI. How did Jesus deal with those with entrenched views?

A. Proclamation

B. Persuasion

C. Subversion

D. The use of storytelling and questions