

Missiological Perspectives from Germany: Innovation and Mission in Rural Areas

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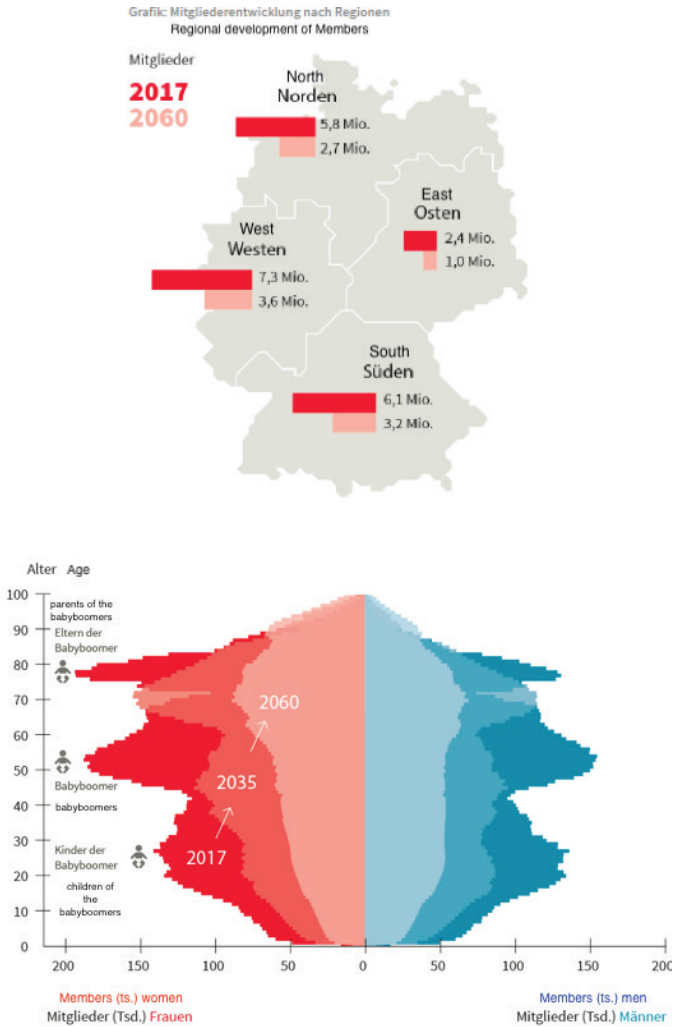
ABSTRACT

This article argues for innovation and mission in the Lutheran Churches of Germany. The authors approach this topic by drawing on research on innovative and missional projects in rural areas in Germany. The authors are looking at rural areas where few people would expect innovation. Presenting a study called “Landwards” and the evaluation of exemplary projects in rural areas in Eastern Germany, it is possible to review key factors for innovative and

missional church development. One of the most intriguing factors is that, compared to international studies on missional church development (like fresh expressions of church in the Church of England or pioneering places in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands), it can be shown that lay leaders do not play the dominant role in starting the initiatives. However, lay people organized in teams do seem to be the engine of on-going innovative initiatives in rural areas. This raises different questions regarding the training of leaders, for example, or the collaboration of such initiatives with established churches. The “Landwards” study points out the possibilities of innovation in rural areas in and adjacent to the Lutheran structure of being a “Volkskirche.” This is a rather original way to deal with the challenges of being a state-like church in Germany.

INTRODUCTION

This article takes the results of the recent study “Kirche im Umbruch” (EKD 2019) as a reason to look at innovation in the Lutheran Churches of Germany. “Kirche im Umbruch” is a study on the development of church membership and church taxes in the Lutheran Churches of Germany. Principal investigator Bernd Raffelhüschen and his team came to the conclusion that Lutheran Churches in Germany will lose more than 50 percent of their members by the year 2060 due to demographic reasons, such as birth, deaths, and relocation (24 percent), *and* due to the lack of commitment of the members to their church (28 percent) (EKD 2019). The church’s membership situation is based upon the behavior of the baptized, the members who have abandoned their membership, and the people who are attracted to become new members of the church. This will have a major impact on the religious landscape inasmuch as the church tax system in Germany grants financial stability to Lutheran Churches.



Regional Development of Members (EKD 2019, 8)

The authors do not offer any programmatic solutions to their disturbing findings, which are not necessarily surprising outcomes, although they've received significant media attention in Germany. Yet it is evident that new and innovative ways for being Church

have to be sought. Instead, the authors conclude their report by describing four different innovative and missional projects which could be exemplary for arresting the decline of membership and commitment (EKD 2019, 20–26).

The report is proof that ongoing dialogue on mission is relevant. On the one hand, the increasing use of the term mission appears to be a hopeful sign in the midst of a crisis as churches are once more encountering their mission and their rootedness in the *missio Dei*. On the other hand, discourse about the term mission and its implications are in danger of leaving central topics and inherent issues behind or unclear. Could this be an unhealthy development if mission is degraded to a program for slowing or even stopping membership and church tax decline? Mission would then become merely an instrument for maintenance. This can be seen, for example, in the recent structural discussions and new church laws. A recent decision caused controversy in the “Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Norddeutschland” (a Lutheran Church in the north of Germany). Their Synod declared that, although there are major upheavals in church membership and the structural maintenance of the local churches, the structure of parochial entities should remain the same and is non-negotiable. The “Personalplanungsförderungsgesetz” (the personnel planning promotion law for full-time workers, mainly pastors) cements the parochial paradigm.

It is no new phenomenon to think about missional church development in Germany as a brief survey of the decades of debates about mission in the Lutheran churches show (EKD 2006; Karle 2011). Although there has been increased attention to mission since Eberhard Jüngel’s proposal of a missional church at the 1999 EKD Synod (Jüngel 2000), the concept of mission is rarely addressed in German church theory and practical theology.

In this article, we want to present a study on missional entrepreneurial initiatives in rural areas in Germany which highlight possible criteria for innovative and missional pathways for the church. These initiatives are part of a new and promising reality. We plead for the case that churches in the West are entering

an unknown situation. This implies that Lutheran and Catholic Churches in Germany face a major transformational process. The self-understanding of what it means to be a “*Volkskirche*,”¹ Church for all people, needs to be reformulated and adapted. The cultural and religious dominance of state-like churches are being pushed back. The Church has entered a post-Christendom society. In a way, the churches in Eastern Germany have more experience in dealing with this phenomenon due to their experience during the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) (Herbst 2014a). On the one hand, these challenges might lead to renewal and reorientation of the Church’s mission. On the other hand, such changes may result in holding on more firmly to yesterday’s answers and generating resistance.

It is evident that the Lutheran Churches need to rethink their identity and options as a “*Volkskirche*.” The missional dimension of Church as “*Volkskirche*” has been recently stressed by the systematic theologian Ulrich Körtner, who said, “Being a *Volkskirche* means to be a Church in society and for society. . . . The calling of the Church—its mission—is the calling of the disciples into the world that God loves. In this way, the *Volkskirche* is a missional Church which lives by communicating the gospel” (Körtner 2018, 592).

The frequent use of and referral to the concept of *missio Dei* is a signal for these discourses happening in Germany (Pompe et al. 2016) and includes questions about new places, practices, time schedules and new forms of the Christian faith. These issues are associated with new requirements for pastoral ministry and arouse questions on how to establish a mixed economy church—a blended economy of different types and forms of churches which still holds on to the prescribed unity of the Christian Church.

1. The term “*Volkskirche*” is a German term to describe a form of church which is partly linked with the state, e.g., by church taxes. The majority of German society still belongs to the Lutheran or the Catholic Church.

**PRELIMINARY REMARKS—UNDERSTANDING THE
SITUATION OF THE LUTHERAN MAINLINE CHURCHES
IN GERMANY**

We would like to make a brief theoretical introduction to the situation of the Lutheran Church in Germany in order to provide a better understanding of German mainline churches. As theologians, we have a pretty solid theological concept of what the Church is—*creatura verbi*, fruit of the *missio Dei*. On the one hand, we are certain that the Church is headed towards the kingdom of God. On the other hand, it seems to be rather difficult to grasp how these theological concepts can be translated into everyday life. What is the Church that we live in and work for? How do we explore the empirical side of Church that we experience? Putting this into relation to the *ecclesia* of our creed is the goal of recent discussions of “church-theory.” The point is: Our Church—the way it behaves, its dominant ways of thinking and organizing itself—has been described in German literature as “hybrid”—a “hybrid” of three different rationales (Kunz-Herzog 1997; Hauschildt 2007). Church consists of the people of God, people who trust in God and live their life accordingly both as individuals and in groups. The Church, however, is also an organization that has to deal with finances, buildings, manage its staff and funds, recruit and train personnel and so on—quite similar to many non-profit organizations. However, this has shaped the German Church as a former state-like church, it operates very similar to a public institution. The Church used to have its independent department right next to the department of health. In many ways, the Church in Germany is used to behaving, thinking and feeling as if it was a subdivision of public government—less people-oriented and more concerned with formal aspects of Church, e.g., compliance to rules and patterns, public integration, church law and the ministry as a public office. It has great difficulty implementing a “mixed economy.” Cross-parochial activities, church plants, fresh expressions of church and lay leadership and pioneering are very challenging to the inherited, institutional way of “doing church.” Recently,

churches have started to question their strategies. Due to decreasing membership resulting in less funds and a lack of young ministers, churches are increasingly open to discussing alternatives. In many areas of Germany, especially in rural areas, the parochial system has reached its limit, and the focus seems to have shifted to developing church regions, networks of several parishes working together and cooperating.

THE “LANDWARDS” STUDY

Research Questions and Definitions

In 2014, the Institute for Evangelism and Church Development finished “Landwards,” a study on mission in peripheral rural churches published in 2016 (Schlegel et al. 2016). This study was preceded by a conference in 2013 called “Mittendrin” at the Alfried-Krupp-Wissenschaftskolleg in Greifswald and was embedded in an academic research consortium called “Think Rural” on rural areas at the University of Greifswald. Thus, there is an interdisciplinary history of research on rural areas and mission in rural areas at the University of Greifswald (see Schlegel 2012; 2013a; 2013b; Schlegel and Alex 2012; Alex et al. 2013; Alex and Schlegel 2014; Dünkel et al. 2014; Herbst 2014a; 2014b; Herbst et al. 2016).

The starting point of the study was to observe the challenges of the context, shrinking rural areas and the parallel shrinking of church life in peripheral regions. An interesting observation was discovered. Various concepts and innovative approaches emerged in rural areas which caused a growing engagement with and attraction of de-churched and non-churched people. This led to the research question: Why did the new concepts work? How did they start? Do peripheral zones have a special potential for innovations?

The authors of the study defined three key perspectives: rural areas, their understanding of mission, and their understanding of innovation. A peripheral rural area is an area which lies at least a twenty-minute driving distance to a regional metropolis and has

little population density (less than one hundred and fifty residents per square kilometer). Regarding the term mission, the authors refer to a multidimensional concept of mission as discussed in an exemplary way in the Anglican Church as the five marks of mission. The five marks of mission defined by the Anglican Lambeth Conference 1998 are (Church of England 1999, 38; Walls and Ross 2008):

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the earth²

For a definition of innovation the authors refer to the theory of social innovation (Moulaert et al. 2007; Moulaert 2010; Butkevičienė 2009). The social innovation theory emphasizes three key dimensions to social innovation: First, innovations are usually new combinations or hybrids of existing elements rather than something wholly new. This refers to the contextuality of innovation. Second, their practice involves crossing organizational or disciplinary boundaries. Third, they leave behind compelling new relationships between previously separate individuals and groups. The main conviction in social innovation is that innovation helps to solve certain problems better than previous approaches and methods did. Moulaert observes, “What counts for social innovation is ‘good practice’—i.e., a practice that has shown some contribution to social innovation in other similar contexts, or ‘good formulae’ that could contribute to social innovation in the future” (Moulaert et al. 2005, 1978).

2. For an exposition and critique of the five marks of mission, see Ross 2012.

Method and Assessment

Through guided interviews with volunteers in peripheral rural areas and the analysis of different documents of church-related projects as well as the data according to Philipp Mayring, the authors assessed a compilation of one hundred and twelve intriguing samples.³ After the evaluation, they focused on seventy-nine projects which could be assessed. First, these were clustered according to their similarity. Second, twelve projects (one of each cluster) were evaluated in more detail. Two distinctive features could be noted beforehand. First, it was notable that sixty-seven projects were located in East Germany. Second, it was obvious that there was a significance in recurrent ideas.

The following sample gives an insight into the first assessment of the findings by summing up the projects into twelve clusters and selecting one project of each cluster for further investigation (Schlegel et al. 2016, 197–204):

1. Mobile youth ministry: “Der Blaue Bus im Oderbruch” (Brandenburg)⁴
2. Church without pastor: Lay-led prayer time “Ad fontes” in Mönchgrün (Thuringia)
3. Village church network: Series of night-time organ concerts in the Tecklenburg Area (Westphalia)
4. Innovative use of church buildings: Biker church in Wehlen (Saxonia)
5. Touristic attraction: Park of labyrinths in Malchow (Brandenburg)
6. Village meeting place: House of inter-generational encounter in Globig (Thuringia)

3. The data recall was facilitated either by internet, recommendations, or letters (85 letters to deans and superintendents of church districts). Filtered by the criteria rural area, mission, and innovation, 79 projects were left.

4. “The blue bus in the Oderbruch area.”

7. Responsibility for societal issues (right-wing radicalism): Youth band project in Joachimsthal (Brandenburg)
8. Central events for the region: Soccer camp in Oese (Lutheran Church of Hannover)
9. Evangelism: Faith nurture course in Verchen (Western Pomerania)
10. Traditional “Volkskirche” (Lutheran mainline church)—missional: Geithain (Saxonia)
11. Celebration/commemoration of local mentality and village history: Museum of local history in Brück (Brandenburg)
12. Unique ideas: Free ride for your mind—local television project (Mecklenburg)

The second assessment was designed with expert interviews and the portrayal of twelve exemplary projects. With the help of the three criteria—rural area, mission, and innovation—it was possible to detect marks and distinctive features of innovation. The authors developed a fingerprint of each project with the goal of comparing the projects. A project would get all five points on the scale for “peripheral rural area” if it was located in an area with under fifty people per square kilometer and would need longer than a forty-minute drive to the next town. The spots on the scale of mission indicate the dominance of the focus on an aspect of mission as presented before. The scale of innovation was created with a framework on challenges for innovation in rural areas. The specific challenges for church life in rural areas were collected and described using six challenges for innovation: church structure; paid clergy and volunteers; demographic change; effects of peripheral situations; fragmentation, reduction of differentiation; and secularization, atheism. The darker spots represent the emphasis or degree of concentration regarding the specific criterion.

As an example, see the fingerprint of the project “Der Blaue Bus im Oderbruch”:



Der Blaue Bus im Oderbruch (Schlegel et al. 2016, 313)

The third assessment focused on the initial emergence and formation of the projects. The authors asked under which circumstances there was an ideal process for innovation. They found out that there were seven factors that occurred—even in different sequences: a key person (“Schlüsselperson”), teams and team-building (“Team”), networks and networking (“Netzwerk”), a reason to innovate (“Anlass”), an idea of what to do (“Idee”), resources (“Ressourcen”), and resistance and challenges (“Herausforderungen”). The key factors appeared in different order regarding the exemplary projects. Some started with a team, others with a key person.

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Ort	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Brück	Schlüsselperson	Netzwerke	Anlass	Idee	Ressourcen	Team	Weitere Umsetzung Herausforderung
Greithain	Team	Netzwerke	Schlüsselperson	Anlass	Idee	Ressourcen	Weitere Umsetzung Herausforderung
Globig	Schlüsselperson	Netzwerke	Anlass	Idee	Team	Ressourcen	Weitere Umsetzung Herausforderung
Joachimsthal	Team	Schlüsselperson	Anlass	Idee	Netzwerke	Ressourcen	Weitere Umsetzung Herausforderungen
Laage	Schlüsselperson	Team	Anlass	Idee	Ressourcen	Weitere Umsetzung	Herausforderungen
Malchow	Schlüsselperson	Team	Anlass	Idee	Netzwerke	Ressourcen	Weitere Umsetzung Herausforderung
Oese	Team I	Anlass	Idee	Netzwerke	Ressourcen	Team II	Weitere Umsetzung
Schleiz	Schlüsselperson	Anlass	Netzwerke	Team		Weitere Umsetzung Herausforderung	
Seelow/ Wriezen	Schlüsselperson	Anlass	Idee	Netzwerke	Ressourcen	Team	Weitere Umsetzung Herausforderung
Tecklenburg	Schlüsselperson	Anlass	Ressourcen	Netzwerke	Team	Weitere Umsetzung	
Verchen	Schlüsselperson	Anlass	Idee	Team		Weitere Umsetzung Herausforderung	
Wehlen	Schlüsselperson	Team	Anlass I	Ressourcen	Idee	Team II	Weitere Umsetzung Herausforderung

III LANDEKONFERENZ – INNOVATIVE BEISPIELE MISSIONARISCHER PRAXIS

Innovative Beispiele Missionarischer Praxis (Schlegel et al. 2016, 342)

Outcomes

The in-depth qualitative evaluation of the twelve projects showed remarkable outcomes and conclusions regarding the criterion “mission.” It could be observed that about 50 percent of the projects chose their starting point in “*diaconia*,” a social ministry (“compassion and justice”). Regarding eleven of twelve samples, “compassion and justice” was the key aspect of their ministry (mark three of the criterion mission). Three of twelve samples had their focus on societal issues (mark four of the criterion mission). Nevertheless, evangelism was always included. However, evangelism was the starting point/main interest in only one of the twelve samples (mark one of the criterion mission). It was interesting to see that only one of twelve samples had an ecological core (mark five of the criterion mission) (Schlegel et al. 2016, 302–6), given the fact that these are rural areas and there is a growing awareness of ecological issues in society and in the churches in general.

Conclusions regarding the criterion “innovation” were (1) that nine of twelve samples were sensitive and responsive to ecclesial, cultural and societal challenges; (2) ten of twelve samples intended to counteract processes of territorial disintegration and fragmentation; (3) only two of twelve samples targeted the encouragement and promotion of volunteers; and (4) only six of twelve samples perceived secularization as a challenge and responded to this phenomenon (Schlegel et al. 2016, 309–11).

Regarding the focal point of the study, i.e., the formation phase of an innovative project, all of the projects showed that, on the one hand, there were key players who initiated and pushed the project. This study called them “heroes” (also “community entrepreneurs”). Most of them were full-time workers, mainly pastors or ministers (only one volunteer) who were great networkers and team-players.⁵ On the other hand, in all of the samples, the authors perceived the importance of team-building with volunteers with a strong sense of belonging and (a strong sense of personal) responsibility of the team members (Schlegel et al. 2016, 317–23). Beside

5. In four of twelve samples, “the hero” was a team of two to three people.

these factors for innovation in rural areas, there were a couple of important “soft” factors such as positive and joyful atmosphere, attitudes like agility and perseverance and a start-up spirit (Schlegel et al. 2016, 323–24). In addition, the causes for innovation had manifold reasons: motivation for innovation and new practice, crisis (i.e., flood, right-wing attack, failure), institutional occasions (i.e., memorial anniversaries), pressure from outside (i.e., deadline for applications for support, structural reforms), etc. It could be observed that innovative practices were created through an external and inner stimulus and incentive. Heroes reported a free and open space, which was often a result of a crisis. It is impressive to see that resources on their own did not cause innovation. However, there is no innovation without resources (Schlegel et al. 2016, 325–41). Furthermore, innovative projects also suffered and endured resistance and opposition, harsh critique and periods of great problems.

The “Landwards” study shows that innovation and mission have happened in rural areas of Germany (especially in East Germany) which have led to significant implications for innovation and mission.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this article, we ask, “*Quo vadis*, Church?—Where are you going, Church?” Asking this question implies different answers since the Church may journey in numerous directions on its way towards the future. One of our strongest impressions regarding the “Landwards” study and its implications for mission-shaped thinking and fieldwork in Germany concerns the people involved in these innovative missional initiatives. It seems to be a central question to ask, “Who are the pioneers, pioneering and innovating?” Besides the “heroes” (key persons), it is obvious that there must have been different *Kairos* moments when the “right people” met at the “right place” at the “right time.” In this study in almost every case the “heroes” were pastors or other paid full-time workers. This is somewhat disillusioning given the priority shown towards lay

leadership in mission-shaped church processes, for example in the Church of England or in the Dutch Protestant Church (Lings 2016, 61–62, 173–79; Kerk 2017, 7). A recent study of fresh expressions of church in the Church of England called “The Day of Small Things” shows that the proportions of ordained and lay leaders are about equal. A study on pioneering places in the Netherlands shows that 18 percent of teams have no paid staff and 29 percent of them have staff employed two days per week or less.

In most cases, it was pastors or other paid full-time staff in the “Landwards” study who generated ideas and established teams to move forward. Somehow, full-time staff are a stable guarantor of sustainability. Whether this is a specific finding due to the situation of the German “*Volkskirche*” remains unclear. In a certain sense, these findings contradict what alternative concepts of the future of pastoral ministry might look like. Other examples such as the concept of Catholic pastoral ministry in Poitiers, France, envisage a pastor whose main ministry is to train the baptized and believing active members of the diocese, who gather in small, vital Christian communities. Their survival is not dependent on full-time staff. And yes, church still exists without full-time staff, even without a trained and ordained theologian (Rouet et al. 2005; Rouet 2011; Müller 2012). Similar concepts have been introduced in the discussion on the future of pastoral ministry in Germany by Michael Herbst and Hans-Hermann Pompe, who talk about a “regio-local” ministry (Herbst and Pompe 2017). They drew their concept from the Anglican discussion of a mixed economy of the church (Herbst 2018, 158–66). The language of a mixed economy church or a blended economy originates in the fresh expressions of church and was introduced by the previous Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. The mixed economy is a plea for ecclesial diversity and deals with the question of how to conceive unity between fresh expressions of church and inherited forms of church. This becomes explicit in the foreword of the report “Mission-shaped Church”:

But the existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose. We need to recognize that a variety of integrated missionary

approaches is required. A mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary, in an active partnership across a wider area, perhaps a deanery. (Mission and Public Affairs Council 2004, x)

Michael Moynagh has promoted the term and the concept of a mixed economy church. He says, “The phrase ‘mixed economy’ . . . refers to fresh expressions and ‘inherited’ churches existing alongside each other, within the same denomination, in relationships of mutual respect and support” (Moynagh 2008, 177). The mixed economy of church can be discussed in different ways, for example in terms of theological and spiritual accountability and responsibility in a region or in terms of the collaboration of new and inherited forms of churches (see Nelstrop 2008; Nelstrop and Percy 2008; Moynagh 2012; 2017; Croft 2016; Müller 2019). Regarding the outcome of the “Landwards” study, particularly the role of pastors and lay leaders, a mixed economy approach could mean the change of roles and responsibilities in missional church development. For example, instead of being the only catalysator of innovation in local contexts, pastors would focus on training disciples for their ministry in the world, being a kind of regional “*episkopos*.” The *episkopos* would mainly be responsible for leadership, doctrine and teaching, which corresponds quite closely with the role of the *episkopos* in the Early Church. Christians will be seen and serve as “religious experts” in their daily networks—as the membership study of the Lutheran Churches in Germany already shows for its members (Hermelink and Weyel 2015, 435–37). As much as we count on attractive events and appreciate the structures of the Church that invite people to come to the events and meetings, we have to open our eyes to the fact that lay people are often the first and usually the only chance for de-churched and non-churched people to get in touch with Christian faith and the Church. Other studies (see Lings 2016, 96–97; Kerk 2017, 8) as well as the “Landward” study demonstrate the importance of the spirit of participation and of being part of something relevant for the community. For this task, lay people will have to be supported by the pastors and their congregations. Support could mean opening

up innovative spaces for them to try fresh expressions of being and doing church in or beside established parochial structures. It also means equipping lay people to be able to talk about their Christian faith and engage with others in doing so. Furthermore, lay people need to be trained in becoming vital and mature Christians. David Heywood calls this “kingdom learning” and proposes focusing on discipleship in this process, which means “the whole-life response of Christians to Jesus Christ” (Heywood 2017, 7). This inward process is connected to the outward process. “The relationship is integral: the disciple’s gradual change of inward character and its outward expression in a godly life that reflects the character of Jesus and her participation in the mission of God are part of a single process of gradual formation and reorientation of life” (Heywood 2017, 15). Discipleship obviously plays a rather minor role in the projects evaluated by the “Landwards” study. The study highlights the important role of pastors for innovation but also points to its possible danger. When pastors neglect to disciple people, empower their team and raise up other leaders, then they not only fail to be “heroes” but instead actually become the “stumbling block” of sustainable, innovative, missional church development. They will not create and sustain a releasing culture, but a culture of dependence on the full-time worker. In the future, mission-shaped church, Christian communities will have to redefine the role of full-time staff and break the dependency and focus on the pastor who takes care of the flock. As David Heywood says, ministry is not what only the clergy does (Heywood 2017, 9). Summing up, the role of pastors and full-time staff of the Christian churches in Germany will have to be diverse in the future.

Another quite important insight that can be drawn from the study is the role innovative initiatives can play for the wider church, including regional churches. Although the “Landwards” study itself does not discuss relationships with other Christian communities (because it was not part of the study design) it points to discussions which will have to be led. The “Landwards” study has made it evident that mission and innovation in rural areas are not driven by resignation. It seems that local teams have a realistic

view of their situation. This can be interpreted as a specific potential of innovation in rural areas which would need further investigation. On the one hand, there is negative church growth and a necessary change of structure in rural areas as the examples in “Kirche im Umbruch” and the “Personalplanungsförderungsgesetz” show. On the other hand, we can observe that new initiatives start with available resources. This leads to the question of how to coordinate scaling down processes with innovative processes. The appearance of innovative initiatives raises future questions about the relation between traditional and inherited churches and new expressions of church. Recently new attention has been devoted to this in German theological debates (Herbst 2017; 2018; 2020; Herbst and Pompe 2017; Herrmann 2020; Kunz 2020; Lings 2020; Müller 2020; Pohl-Patalong 2020). The mixed economy of church idea, as shown before, may prove to be the most fruitful and offer a new perspective.

In addition, we can say that rather than merely sharing administrative duties, we believe that regions should develop a mission-shaped mix of different approaches. This does not imply a specific strategy but a fresh perspective on these challenges. This fresh perspective aims to overcome inherited constraints of our institutionalized-church mindset and embraces the advantages of understanding the Church as a hybrid. The regio-local perspective rests on certain beliefs and values. The beliefs are, first, the *ecclesia* of the creed is not equivalent to a single congregation. That is why regio-local church development brings churches in a region closer together. Second, the *missio Dei* calls for diversity amidst a pluralist society, a variety of “biotopes” of faith. Third, strong congregations need a strong region and vice versa. Fourth, a regio-local perspective aims to create a supportive network of different ways of being Church. Fifth, this can only be achieved by an ecumenical perspective.

Likewise, the values of a regio-local perspective are, first, voluntary cooperation in a region (e.g., in catechumenate, youth groups, courses) (Herbst and Pompe 2017). Second, a clear profile must be developed (i.e., prioritizing what you are good at). Third,

ministry should be done in a complementary way (i.e., regional arrangements versus competition, envy, and fear of loss), as well as, fourth, in solidarity with others (e.g., taking on responsibility for a region, sharing, protecting the weak).

“Where are you going, Church?” Asking this, we should recall that the primary question in the New Testament was, “*Quo vadis, domine?*” This is the question Peter asks the Lord, “Lord, where are you going?” And Jesus simply replies: “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later” (John 13:36). The apocryphal acts of Peter recall this incident. Peter escapes from Rome and meets Jesus on his way traveling the *Via Appia*. Again, Peter asks: “*Domine, quo vadis?*” This time, Jesus answers: “To Rome to be crucified again.” Hearing this, Peter turns and goes back to Rome to be arrested and crucified. This legend became famous. Mission means to be where the Lord is. That is what counted for the disciples: They wanted to be where the Lord was. Being part of His sending means to be where the Lord is. He surely is always with those who are on the way with Him (Matt 28:20). This is the point the old legend about Peter makes: instead of, “*Quo vadis, ecclesia?*” we should be asking “*Quo vadis, domine?*” The Church wants to be where her Lord is, i.e., on the way to the people, testifying and serving. Or to agree with Lesslie Newbigin, “There is no other way to be with him. At the heart of mission is simply the desire to be with him and to give him the service of our lives” (Newbigin 1989, 127).

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