

**Charting the way forward for
Church Planting and Church Revitalisation
in the Development of CAEF Churches in France**

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List of Abbreviations

BBC	Belfast Bible College
CAEF	<i>Communautés et Assemblées Évangéliques de France</i> (Evangelical Communities and Assemblies in France)
CFRI	<i>Centre de Formation Regional pour Im planteurs d'Églises</i> (Regional Training Centre for Church Planters)
CGM	Church Growth Movement
CNEF	<i>Conseil National des Évangéliques de France</i> (National Council of Evangelical Churches in France)
CPM	Church Planting Movement
CRM	Church Revitalisation Movement
CSR	<i>Commission de Service et de Référence</i> (Service and Reference Commission – The national coordination committee of the CAEF churches in France)
PDi	<i>Parcours Découverte Implantation</i> (Church Planting Discovery Course)

Chapter 1

Introduction

Once the bastion of Christianity, Western Europe is rapidly becoming a wasteland of Christianity. Paas points out that 'Europe was Christianized in more than a millennium, and it became secular in less than a century' (2012, 467). Most missiologists agree that Europe has now passed from a Christianised society to a post-Christian society. Mohler illustrates this in noting that: 'Between 1969 and 2011, the Church of England knocked down 500 churches and "deconsecrated" another 1,000' and he adds: 'That pace is set to increase dramatically, and England is not alone' (2015, 7). In the shadow of this reality the Church Planting Movement (CPM) and the Church Revitalisation Movement (CRM) have both reacted in a concentrated effort to see renewed growth in the Church.

1.1. Context

Christ himself promised us that he would build his Church and that the gates of Hades would not prevail against it (Matt 16:18). For two millennia Christians have been cooperating with Christ in the building of his Church. The great missionary efforts of the early centuries of the Church followed by the renewed vigour of the Reformation and the later modern missionary movement have all seen great advances in Christ's building project. For centuries Europe has been at the heart of this project. While in many parts of the world the Christian Church continues to grow and flourish, historic Christianity is left struggling to survive in an area where it once thrived.

The inability of traditional methods to produce the desired growth and development of the missionary enterprise in the mid twentieth century propelled Donald McGavran to promote what is now called the Church Growth Movement (CGM). In direct lineage of this development, we find the CPM (Ott and Wilson, 2011, 71). Peter Wagner, one of McGavran's devoted disciples, gave a new twist to the CGM in proclaiming that: 'The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches' (2010, 11). This became the catch phrase of a new CPM.

Following Peter Wagner's publication of *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest: A Comprehensive Guide* in 1990, the production of church planting literature has exploded. Many churches, denominations and mission boards joined the band wagon and invested heavily in the movement. Nonetheless, despite the abundance of new church planting initiatives, one must recognize that historic Christianity is still struggling to keep its ground in North America and Western Europe (Davis 2017, 18; Croft 2016, 15; Paas 2016, 181-199). Notwithstanding all its virtues and promises, the modern CPM has not yet managed to turn the tide, particularly in Western Europe (Paas, 2016, 131, 144, 178-180). In France, despite the impressive claim that there is one new church being planted every 10 days (Liechti, 2017, 12), the evangelical church still represents only a tiny portion of the population (Paas, 2016, 7-8). Much of the recent growth has come from immigration and as such is more 'transfer growth' rather than 'indigenous growth' (Paas, 2016, 7).

Paas, a church planter himself, is one of those starting to question the CPM and its numerous claims. Rather than placing all the emphasis on planting new churches to see the Church grow in Europe, Paas proposes that "the *revitalization* of European Christianity may be of great relevance for the future of the European project" (2016, 181, emphasis added). While Paas' Church revitalisation is more on an institutional level, many of those involved in the pastoral ministry at a local level find themselves struggling to grow and develop the local churches they once planted. A grassroots movement for church revitalisation is arising in Western Europe. In France, following an interdenominational learning community on the theme of church planting (2013-2016), the National Council of Evangelical Churches in France (CNEF) felt the need to follow up with a similar learning community to explore church

renewal and development (2017-2020). This was partly in reaction to a 'new is better than old' mentality that many church leaders felt was being imposed by the CPM. The reaction has also been fuelled by the impression that there has been a diversion of the Church's resources towards the more 'virtuous' church planting initiatives. A certain tension has arisen as both movements struggle to share the limited resources in a common vision to see the Church grow and mature.

1.2. Research Focus

Paas (2016, 181) along with Davis (2017, 18) propose that church revitalisation can really be an asset for church planting. Reeder notes that revitalising existing churches with all their material and human resources is actually a very interesting opportunity for church planting globally (2008, 22-23). To date, little research has been done on how church planting and church revitalisation can work hand in hand for healthy church growth.

A deeper insight into the relationship between the two movements will involve taking a closer look at each movement and seeking to identify some of their common theological underpinnings and goals. Historically there has been a scarcity of academic reflection in both movements. Most of the literature comes from North American and/or Anglo-Saxon context where historically there has been a strong evangelical Protestant influence. Little research has been done on contextualising these movements for southern Europe where a Catholic ethos rather than a Protestant ethos has moulded the culture. The unique French context seems to have been largely ignored to date in academic circles. In light of this deficiency, we will attempt to contextualise the discussion, and identify some areas for reflection for the *Communautés et Assemblées Evangéliques de France* (CAEF) in France. The research focus of this paper will take a general look at the CPM and the CRM before exploring some of the theological principles and practices common to both movements. This will be followed by a closer examination of church planting and church revitalisation within the CAEF churches.

1.3. Research Objectives

The CAEF in France have been significantly influenced by both the CPM and the CRM. In 2013 they introduced the motto: *'Une synergie pour l'affermissement et l'implantation d'églises'* (A Synergy for the Strengthening and Planting Churches). As a denomination, it has been an active participant in both national learning communities organised by the CNEF on church planting and church development (revitalisation). The two teams involved came up with their own conclusions and priorities. The objective of this research is to examine areas of commonality between the two movements based on theological priorities and practices and then explore ways these two teams, representing the two movements, can join hands and work together for the development of the CAEF churches in France.

1.4. Research Methods

The first part of the research is geared towards a critical evaluation of the CPM and the CRM in Western Europe with the aim of critically assessing some of the underlying theological principles and practices they might have in common. Given the more theoretical nature of this section, documentary research (Denscombe, 2014, 629-630), exploring some of the pertinent academic literature will form the basis of chapters two and three.

In recent decades a profusion of literature has appeared on the church planting theme. For church revitalisation, being a more recent concern, significantly less material is currently available. Much of the literature on both themes lies in the 'hands-on' category and relates to methodologies and best practices. Recourse will be made where possible to any available academic literature, but given its scarcity, reference will at times be made to some popular works that have relevance to the subject. One of the key challenges of this research will be to explore how some of the existing academic literature can be adapted to the unique French culture englobing its Catholic, revolutionary, and secular facets.

In contextualising church planting and church revitalisation within the French evangelical context, we will take a closer look at the CAEF churches, one of the major evangelical

denominations in France. This demands a different research methodology. Given their history and their ecclesiology, much of what has been done has been ad hoc and thus little written data is available on the subject. This deficiency will be addressed by using a mixed methodology (Denscombe, 2014, 423). We will explore correspondence with key people and any recorded material available. This will be supplemented by semi-structured interviews with several church planters and church revitalisers within the CAEF churches. The interview strategy and methodology have been validated by Belfast Bible College's (BBC) Research Ethics Committee. The interviews were recorded Zoom meetings which were then entirely transcribed, printed, coded, and analysed to highlight and interpret common themes that are of interest to both movements (Biggam, 2017, 197). The questions (Appendices 1 and 2) were thematically organised and focused on the research aims of this dissertation to facilitate the analysis of the data. Permission has been obtained from participants for using the material thus gleaned. Studying recent examples of church planting and church revitalisation initiatives within the CAEF group of churches in this way is a vital part of contextualisation (Biggam, 2017, 157).

Personal proximity with the CAEF churches and the persons interviewed could lead to a lack of objectivity. To minimise this risk, the mixed methodologies for data collection will enable triangulation of the data (Biggam, 2017, 180) thus enhancing reliability and objectivity. The interviewees were carefully selected in consultation with CAEF leaders and have been anonymised to further maximise reliability and objectivity (Biggam, 2017, 202).

Having personally worked in a variety of church planting and church revitalisation situations over the past 35 years, and more recently as part of the CAEF Church Planting Commission, my personal experience and insights gained over the years have been integrated into the reflection. This personal involvement has the advantage of proximity to the questions at hand, but also raises the issue of objectivity, to which special attention has been paid. An autoethnographic approach will seek to relate the personal experience and subjective analysis to the existing research (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, 4). This approach enables a greater degree of contextualisation and appropriation of the academic literature in both areas of research to the French context, especially in a field where such contextualised academic literature is largely lacking.

1.5. Personal Status in the CAEF Context

Given the autoethnographic input in this paper, it is important to understand where I am coming from. On a personal level, I have been involved planting churches in France with the CAEF since 1986. At that time, we were not aware that what we were doing was 'church planting'. The label came later. After a few years in the Paris region and in the East of France, most of my time has been spent in the West of France where, compared to other regions in France, Roman Catholicism retains a certain influence, and the evangelical church represents an even smaller minority than elsewhere. The first seven years of ministry in the West of France were in a rural church planting initiative. The small church grew and matured but several years later I had to return to the town to close the church following leadership difficulties and dispersion of members. For the last 25 years I have been involved in church planting in a large urban setting. During this time, I have also been called upon to help in two church revitalisation projects in the area.

From 2013 to 2016 I had the privilege of participating as part of the CAEF team in the first learning community organised by the CNEF on the theme of church planting. The learning community was comprised of nine five-member teams from ten of the main evangelical denominations represented in France. These teams met for three days at a time twice a year over three years to work on individual action plans for implementing on a denominational level the vision of the CNEF to see one church for every 10 000 population across the country. Following this experience, the CAEF team has continued to meet regularly to follow up on the action plans proposed during the learning community and has transitioned to become the official Church Planting Commission for the CAEF churches, of which I remain a member.

1.6. Value of this Research

The selection of interviews and my personal involvement with the CAEF churches orients the initial value of this research towards a healthy development of the CAEF churches in France. The denomination is in the process of restructuring the Church Planting Commission and the

team that participated in the Church Development learning community. This research seeks to bring insight into that situation.

The value of this research aims, not only at benefitting the development of CAEF churches, but by extension, the evangelical church at large in the French context. Although some level of contextualisation would be needed to apply the findings to the wider evangelical church context, the CAEF churches typify a notable segment of the evangelical church in France and thus may prove to be useful on a wider scale, both within France and other culturally analogous contexts in Western Europe. If the two movements, rather than being perceived as being in competition for the meagre resources of the Church, can be understood as complementary and fundamentally essential to one another, the Church should be better equipped to grow and mature in a healthy way.

Chapter 2

A Critical Analysis of the Church Planting Movement in Western Europe

2.1. Recent Church Planting in Western Europe and France

Western Europe has a long history of church planting. The social and economic structure of the Roman Empire facilitated the expansion of the Church to areas including Western Europe. By the end of the second century, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, indicated that churches had been planted in Germania, Gaul, and Spain (Paas, 2016, 14). The influence of the Church in all aspects of political and social life developed and flourished over several centuries. However, in more recent times, and notably since the mid nineteenth century, that influence has been in sharp decline as a wave of secularism has taken over.

The Church in Western Europe is now at a stage where it needs to be revitalized and replanted. This need is felt in all branches of Christianity. While the Roman Catholic Church talks about the necessity of *replanting the Church*, the evangelical churches, with their emphasis on the local church, talk of *planting churches* (Paas 2016, 16-42).

Towards the mid-twentieth century a renewed interest in missions and church growth amongst Anglo-Saxon churches, provoked a wave of missionaries, notably American, flocking to France to plant new local churches (Fath, 2005, 13). They brought with them the ideas and practices learned at home in quite a different cultural and historical context. The early efforts were often painfully difficult. As Paas points out: 'Planting churches in secular Europe is like laying out a garden in hard soil and an arid climate' (2016,1). With time and

perseverance, many have sought to adapt, contextualise, and indigenize their efforts to plant churches in that hard soil.

The influential European Leadership Forum has sought to be a stimulus for the CPM in Europe at large. While the impact in Eastern Europe has been more evident, the impact in southern Europe seems to have been somewhat less. The reasons for this are difficult to ascertain, but perhaps the language factor (the French, for example, are noted for being poor linguists and the Forum is all in English), as well as the North American flavour and influence, make the Forum no doubt difficult for the French and other Latin cultures to adapt to.

In France the dominant church planting influence for the last several years has come through the *Faculté Libre de Théologie Evangélique* (FLTE), an interdenominational seminary in the Paris region which promotes the CPM through its bachelor's and master's degrees in church planting. In parallel to these programmes, the CNEF has promoted extensively a national church planting vision aiming at one church for every 10 000 population. In a quest for new church planting strategies to reach that goal, the CNEF launched in 2013 its first three-year interdenominational learning community. Other church planting influences in France include the European M4 movement, used mainly by the French Federation of Evangelical Baptist Churches (FEEBF), and the Acts 29 church planting network which has been active within the Association of French Speaking Evangelical Baptist Churches (AEEBLF). Following the CNEF learning community, the Churches of God have launched their own ambitious church planting programme in France.

In Western continental Europe where traditional institutionalised Christianity has long been on the decline, the evangelical church is slowly growing. In France, for example, in 1950 there were 249 recognized evangelical churches with some 50 000 participants. In 2015 that number had jumped to 2184 churches representing about 500 000 participants (Liechti 2015, 610). The French sociologist and researcher, Sébastien Fath, estimated at the beginning of the twenty-first century that the evangelical population represented roughly 0,5% of the total population in France (2005, 10). In 2021 Fath now estimates that evangelicals represent just over 1% of the population (2021). The current annual growth

rate of evangelicals is estimated at 2,4% while the national population growth rate remains at 0,58 % (Operation World, 2021). As previously noted, these statistics must nonetheless take into consideration that a large portion of this growth comes from immigration and its offshoots (Fath, 2005, 15). The historic French population generally remains difficult to reach with the gospel.

2.2. Theological Principles for Church Planting

While there is no biblical theology of church planting *per se*, both Paas and Murray, in attempting to lay some sort of theological foundation for the movement, push for thinking about church planting theologically (Murray 2001, 38; Paas 2016, 10-15). This reflection has revolved around several theological principles. A few of these principles are explored below.

2.2.1. *Missio Dei*

The Latin term *missio Dei* is almost as old as the Church. Over the centuries there has been much debate and many interpretations attributed to the expression. According to Wiher, each differing theological current over the centuries has tended to take up the term and interpret it within its own theological framework (2015, 46). Keller points out that the modern CPM has not escaped this trend (2012, 252-259). He maintains the CPM has actually narrowed the understanding of *missio Dei* and sums up the current missional church conception of *missio Dei* as meaning: 'The biblical God is by nature a sending God, a missionary God. The Father sends the Son, the Son sends the Spirit and his disciples into the world. Therefore the whole church is in mission; every Christian is in mission' (2012, 259). The Church is presently not only the object of that mission, but also the means of accomplishing it. Although most missiologists have been drawn to the idea that church planting is only a partial expression of God's mission in this world, Murray boldly asserts that *missio Dei* is the first and foremost theological basis for church planting (2001, 39). It is, however, not so simple as that. Paas, holding a broader or more traditional understanding of *missio Dei*, points out that there are some inherent difficulties to this

newer approach (2016, 213-217). Seeking to understand God's mission and follow what he is doing in the world can be tricky business. The good as seen by the world in general, or by parts thereof, in social justice or humanitarian causes, can be described in sociological or political terms. It does not need the gospel as part of its message. Then of course the traditional planting of the Church in un-evangelised areas is quite different from the modern concept of church planting being reduced to the starting of individual local churches.

Undeniably, the 'planting' of the Church is part of God's mission in this world (Lausanne Movement, 2010, 1-10). Christ himself stated unequivocally that at least one of his missions is to build his Church (Mat. 16:18). Following that, one looks in vain in Scripture to see any explicit instruction of Christ transmitting this responsibility to his disciples. This demands caution in upholding *missio Dei* as the first and foremost theological basis for the modern CPM. The ecclesiological question of the identity and the role of the Church in God's overall mission arises and must be dealt with. We will come back to it.

2.2.2. Missionary Mandate

The missionary mandate is commonly summarised with the closing words of the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus charges his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Mat. 28:19-20). This charge, with its counterparts in the other gospel accounts and Acts, has mobilised the Church to varying degrees over the centuries in its missionary endeavour to proclaim the gospel to every creature and has enabled the Church to be planted on every continent. Wagner's popular declaration that 'The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches' (1990, 11) has fuelled the assumption that church planting is just another means of evangelism and thus the fulfilment of the missionary mandate (Murray, 2010, 20). Keller, in support of Wagner, goes so far as to interpret the Great Commission as essentially a call to plant churches (2002). He points out that baptism, a key element of the mandate, necessarily means incorporation into a community of believers and therefore church planting is really the objective. Keller is perhaps taking the concept of the Church's mission as found in the Cape Town Commitment

a bit further than initially intended (Lausanne, 2010, Preamble, I.10). The necessary extrapolations and proof-texting in support of this interpretation are tenuous at best.

Paas, taking a much broader view of mission, advocates a more nuanced approach to church planting as just one of the means of fulfilling the Church's mission in today's world (2016, 264). He contests the universal need for church planting and more specifically in Europe where the Church has been present for centuries (2016, 242). Backed up with numerous statistics, he points out that church planting does not necessarily live up to its claims of being the most effective method of reaching Western Europe with the gospel. His detailed analysis dismisses some of the preconceived ideas of the CPM and shows that older established churches can be just as effective as new church plants in the gospel mission of the Church. This opens the door for reflecting on the importance of stimulating and revitalising existing churches as a means of fulfilling the mission of the Church.

2.2.3. Incarnation

The principle of incarnation in church planting has been used in a variety of ways. Schindler, basing his comments on John 1:14, presents incarnation as Christians drawing close to others in a way that they can tangibly see the effects of the gospel, in the same way Jesus did in the way he came into this world and then set his priority on seeking contact with people (2013, 22). He goes on to underline that God wants to use people filled by the Holy Spirit and transformed by the gospel to touch, call, and convince other people (2013, 52). Incarnation here is at the level of the individual.

Murray uses the example of Jesus to promote the incarnation principle on a collective level. He maintains that 'God speaks to people through making his word flesh' (2001, 43). He underlines the fact that a church transmits a non-verbal message to its surrounding community through its perceived image. Churches that are introverted or unconcerned with the life of the community send a non-verbal message 'that suggests the God they worship is remote, unconcerned, silent, restricted to a holy building and religious issues' (2001, 44). This must be combatted by churches which are incarnational, churches which reflect in

practical ways the example of Jesus as he authenticated his message by his acts. Murray goes as far as to argue that this provides a theological basis for church planting even in areas where there are already churches. He maintains that, if churches in a particular area are wrapped up in their own internal needs and are not incarnating, or demonstrating in concrete ways, the good news of the gospel to the local community, incarnational church planting is legitimate (2001, 44).

This approach to incarnational church planting is based on the principle that the Church is the body of Christ. Christ, having returned to his heavenly position, has left the Church, of which he is the head, to represent him in this world. Tim Chester uses 1 John 4:12 and John 17:20-23 to show that the unseen God and his love are made visible to the world through the body of believers (2016, 37). God speaks to the world through his Church. His message is not only communicated verbally or by writing, but by the living example of transformed lives in community.

To highlight another model of incarnation in church planting, Paas points to the example of the Irish monks. The establishment of a community by the monks and the inclusion of any interested persons preceded the verbal proclamation of the gospel.

Within this fellowship people could see the gospel 'work' in conversations, ministry, prayer, and worship. In this way they would hear a message that was much more complete (or 'incarnate') than just a verbal address. The life of the community, together with (spontaneous) verbal invitations, would move them into a decision for or against Christ' (Paas, 2012b, 8).

This is the precursor of a modern trend of 'belonging before believing' (Keller, 2012, 281).

Lives transformed by the gospel message are a powerful tool for not only authenticating the message, but as well, spreading the message. Incarnation of the gospel on both the personal level and the communal level is thus seen as a key element in church planting. Considering that, we will need to take a closer look at what we are trying to plant and to rethink some of our discipleship training and strategies to give priority to Christ-like character development over theological knowledge.

2.2.4. Contextualisation

Contextualisation, although closely linked to the incarnation principle, is nonetheless a principle in its own right. The message of the gospel must never change, be diluted, or distorted, but the way in which it is presented and lived out must be adapted to each local situation so that the message may be clearly understood and accepted. Ott and Wilson propose Darrell Whiteman's definition of contextualization:

Contextualization attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture (2011, 119).

According to Leslie Newbigin: 'True contextualization happens when there is a community which lives faithfully by the gospel and in the same costly identification with the people in their real situations as we see in the earthly ministry of Jesus' (quoted in Ott and Wilson 2011, 111).

Contextualisation invites creativity and adaptability as well as giving birth to new ways of doing things. It pushes the Church to rethink the reasons behind certain traditions. Church planting with contextualization in view is one way of making sure the Church does not fall into a trap of sclerosis where it is disconnected from the reality of the world around it and no longer transmits a meaningful or understandable message. Murray in his later writing adds a nuanced approach and argues that incarnation 'means *both* identifying with our culture *and* living counterculturally' (2010, 23).

2.3. Conclusion

The modern evangelical CPM has taken root on a continent where the Church has been historically present for centuries. Theological distortions and the rapid decline of the Church in the light of massive secularisation have reignited the quest for renewal and church growth. All branches of Christianity agree that Europe needs to be re-evangelized. For many

evangelical Protestants, following Peter Wagner and his numerous disciples, aggressive church planting is seen as the answer to that need. Church planting is generally accepted as the most effective way to evangelise Western Europe. But other voices are beginning to make themselves heard. Revitalization of existing churches is proposed as another way forward.

Chapter 3

A critical Analysis of the Church Revitalisation Movement in Western Europe

3.1. Church Revitalisation: A Definition

The Church is a living organism. Rather than being simply an institution it is the grouping of individual believers in Jesus-Christ into a functioning body. As any living organism in a broken world, health is a major issue. Many churches that started well end up in poor health for a variety of reasons. Revitalisation, according to Brown, simply 'seeks to help bring a church back to spiritual health and vitality' (2020). Davis is a bit more precise when he says that church revitalisation is 'the effort to restore by biblical means a once healthy church from a present level of disease to a state of spiritual health, as defined by the Word of God' (2017,20). This brings up the sticky question of how to define a healthy church, but that discussion would take us beyond the limits of this paper.

3.2. Recent Church Revitalisation in Western Europe and France

Church revitalisation is nothing new. Already in the book of Revelation we see that various churches needed revitalisation after only a few decades of existence, notably the church at Ephesus which had once been a hub for Paul's apostolic ministry (Rev. 2-3). At various points in church history there have been revivals or awakenings that have renewed the Church, but in recent years revitalisation has gained a renewed status and following. Paas remarks that

sociologists of religion and missiologists are fascinated by the current state of religion in Western Europe. The decline of European Christianity in particular draws their attention and provokes their continuing analysis. This decline is even more remarkable since Christianity has always been a missionary religion, eager to win new adherents (2011,3).

The decline, especially in Protestant circles, has sparked not only a renewed interest in church planting, but in church revitalisation as well. This is particularly true in North American and northern European countries where the Protestant church has had a strong influence in the local culture. It is from this context of waning influence and decline that most of the church revitalisation literature has been produced.

The situation in France comes in sharp contrast to the North American and northern European context. One of the key influencers in the Protestant Reformation was the French Jean Calvin, but his influence within France was not enough to ward off a national rejection of the Reformation. The infamous Wars of Religion and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes ended up leaving France destitute of any strong Protestant influence. One of the results of this rebuff has been a very marginal Evangelical presence ever since. It was only as the Anglo-Saxon and Swiss evangelical communities in the late 19th and 20th centuries took to heart France as a needy mission field that the Protestant evangelical church started to grow. Growth has been slow and difficult. There is no history of a large evangelical influence that is now losing ground. Rather, there is a struggle to gain ground.

Many churches have difficulty in maintaining a dynamic evangelistic vision where the spiritual ground is tough and where conversions are relatively few and far between. The ambient socio-political context weighs heavily with a negative a priori against proselytising. Churches are small and growth is difficult when economical or educational reasons drain off key members to larger cities. For others, as elsewhere, tradition sets in rather quickly and easily, promoting an ever-increasing gap between the inside Christian sub-culture and the exterior post-Christian culture.

Regardless of the significantly different context, many churches in France are nonetheless struggling and in need of revitalisation. In a survey conducted by the CNEF five years ago 50% of the evangelical churches, members of the CNEF, were either stagnating or declining (Brown, 2020). This survey was done ad hoc with the national leaders of each denomination and the actual percentage could be significantly higher. After initiating the national learning community centred on church planting, the CNEF saw fit to organise similar a learning community composed of representatives from six major evangelical denominations in France to address the question of revitalisation and church development (2017-2020).

The question of revitalisation is being taken more and more seriously. The European Leadership Forum, having promoted a Church Planting Network for several years, started up a Church Revitalisation Network in 2015. Interestingly, it is headed up by David Brown, a long-time British missionary to France (European Leadership Forum, 2021). Despite growing concern for church revitalisation, there is still little academic literature focusing on the subject (Coyler, 2018, 31). Even less is available written from a French contextualised perspective. In light of this dearth, many concerned with church revitalisation in France have turned to the North American scene for counsel and inspiration. The difficulty has been to avoid importing concepts and principles without the difficult work of contextualisation.

3.3. Theological Principles for Church Revitalisation

Again, in the absence of a biblical theology of church revitalisation, we must look at some of the theological principles and practices underpinning the subject. Given the more recent character of the modern CRM, the academic literature on the subject is even more rare than for the CPM. To facilitate a cross-examination of theological principles we will restrict our analysis of the available literature to the corresponding theological principles examined in chapter 2.

3.3.1. *Missio Dei*

To integrate church revitalisation into God's overall mission, authors, such as Croft (2016) and Davis (2017), take up Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37) as an illustration of God's desire for revitalisation. Croft, referring to what he sees as the New Covenant texts found in Ezek. 36, seems to assign the dry bones imagery of chapter 27 strictly to the New Covenant, and thus to a New Testament Church context. In doing so he neglects a first reader understanding of the passage which would no doubt include for the Israelites a national revival following the Babylonian exile. If Croft and others did not restrict their interpretation, perhaps the dry bones passage could be taken to enlarge our understanding of God's overall renewal project for all creation contained in the *missio Dei*.

A far stronger theological rooting of church revitalisation in *missio Dei* is proposed by Cronshaw. Quoting the Baptist Union of Victoria (Australia) in their understanding of mission, he says 'everything God is doing in the world [is] to restore the world to God's dream' (Cronshaw, 2015, 318). He takes a broad view of church revitalisation as part of the divine project of restoring the fallen creation. He insists that revitalisation 'is the process of reconnecting a local church with the life and mission of God... [It is] renewing a church's passion for and engagement with God's mission' (2015, 318). Revitalisation is not a question of numbers but rather a holistic approach to mission and Church that invites to true discipleship. Coyler falls into line with Cronshaw's thinking as he underlines that God's redemptive plan was started long before the Church arrived on the scene and stretches from creation through to the new creation (2018, 23). This introduces a much wider and more biblical approach to church revitalisation in sharp contrast with much of the current popular writing that skips over this overarching principle and contents itself with more pragmatic and denominational reasons for church revitalisation. Such considerations would no doubt lend much credit to a fledgling yet important movement.

3.3.2. Missionary Mandate

Another key theological theme in the church revitalisation discussion is that of evangelism flowing out of the missionary mandate as set forth in Mat. 28:19-20. Coyler, in his doctoral thesis, contends that an adequate emphasis on fulfilling the missionary mandate through a primary accent on evangelism is the single most important key to church revitalisation (2017). A quick reading of Coyler might lead one to think that he has been influenced by the CGM in thinking that a growing church is a healthy church. Several writers are quick to point out though that church health is not dependant on numbers (Reeder, 2008, 29; Davis, 2017, 19). A closer reading of Coyler reveals that his argument turns around the importance of the church, and in turn each member, having a missional approach to evangelism and the Great Commission. In what is no doubt an oversimplified analysis, he maintains that what is important is not the number of conversions resulting from evangelism, but rather the heart of the church in its compassion for the lost.

Davis maintains that '[e]very revitalization effort must culminate in the church being transformed to embrace the vision of growing as disciples and making other developing disciples' (2017, 199). He elevates the fulfilment of the Great Commission to the culminating point of revitalisation, insisting that a revitalised church will no doubt be a church where its members are mobilized in witnessing for Christ, each in their own milieu. He does go on, though, to point out that this is a 'two-journey' discipleship process: the journey of conversion and the journey of teaching (2017, 198ss). This is seen in the inclusion of baptism and teaching new converts in Jesus' charge to make disciples. Noting that the Great Commission goes well beyond the simple proclamation of the gospel message and conversion, Davis adds a corrective element to Coyler's proclamation interpretation of the Missionary Mandate.

Reeder, points to such New Testament writings as 1 Corinthians and Galatians, to maintain that Paul's apostolic ministry in fulfilment of the Great Commission was not just that of preaching the gospel to unreached people and places, but it was also a revitalisation ministry as he corrected false teachings and practices (2008, 20). Reeder also maintains: 'All the strategies for church revitalization find their source, and their expression, in the last words

of Jesus to His disciples' (2008, 206). It is a bit surprising then that his emphasis on the Great Commission in church revitalisation comes only as the final element of 10 revitalisation strategies and the link between most of these strategies and the Great Commission is not immediately obvious.

3.3.3. Incarnation

An unhealthy or dying church often reflects a poor image of Christ and the true gospel message. As it struggles to survive, it tends to become inward looking and isolate itself from the community at large. This encourages the non-Christian observer, especially in a Western European context, to see the Church as totally irrelevant to their daily existence. Paas identifies this as a problem of credibility (2012, 470). Taking the problem beyond the local church context, Paas points out the gaping chasm between what the institutional church represents and the preoccupations of daily life for most Western Europeans. Quoting Jim Wallis, Paas maintains:

Our Bible is open to public examination, so is the church's life... The gulf between them has created an enormous credibility gap... The power of evangelism today is tested by the question, What do we have to explain to the world about the way we live? (2012, 470).

In the revitalisation process a church needs to reflect on how it can restore Christ's reputation and the repute of the gospel in the community. Keller reminds us that '[t]here must first be a life-changing recovery of the gospel – a revival in the life of the church and in the hearts of individuals. We call this *gospel renewal*' (2012, 51). For revitalisation to take place in a church, there must be revitalisation in the way its members live out their Christian faith in the community. Their faith must be seen to be relevant to their real-life situation. People want to see its relevancy to their daily lives. In recent years, in France at least, there has been a great shift in the way people come to faith in Christ. For most new Christians these days, the faith journey involves walking with Christians or attending church over a length of time to verify the authenticity of the spoken or written message (Liechti, 2015, 612).

3.3.4. Contextualisation

Contextualisation is often linked with incarnation. Paas notes that ‘the question of mission in post-Christian Europe concentrates on the dual issue of contextualisation (building bridges to different groups in a plural society), and credibility (integration between message and communal life-style)’ (2012, 470). The world is changing at a rapid pace. Many churches in areas where Christianity has had a long tradition remain trapped in traditions that were once useful and adapted to the culture. But the culture has changed and left the Church behind. In France, where the evangelical church does not have a long history, struggling churches are often holding on to outward forms put in place by the original foreign missionary/church planter several decades ago. The traditional evangelistic market stall or the annual gospel calendar distributions are but some examples.

Reeder refers to Paul’s description of David in Acts 13:36 as having ‘served the purpose of God in his own generation’ to point out that God uses different people and means to reach out to specific generations (2008, 128). Ways and means of reaching previous generations are not necessarily what is needed to reach the current generation. The way in which we present the changeless message of the gospel must be adapted to the nature and conditions of the culture.

Paas goes further in his argument for renewal through contextualisation. He maintains that ‘[w]hat we need are innovations: changes that go beyond adaptations’ (2012, 471). He maintains that innovation comes out of spontaneous attempts at contextualisation. One interesting example of innovation coming out of a desire for contextualisation in France includes a Paris church plant based around a secular Gospel music choir. The journalist commenting on the church underlines the innovation in an attempt to contextualise and renew the image of the Church (My Gospel Church, 2018).

Although innovation in contextualisation is no doubt necessary for renewal, Paas’ enthusiasm for innovation beyond adaptation, must be tempered with a word of caution coming from Reeder who warns against a certain pragmatism that seems to promote conformity to the world rather than seeking to connect to the world (2008, 27). The biblical

principle taught by Jesus is that the Church should be in the world but not of the world (cf. John 17:14-18). This is often a difficult line to follow. The difference between 'connecting with' and 'conforming to' is not always easy to delineate and remains somewhat subjective. The varying attitudes towards My Gospel Church in Paris are a case in hand.

3.4. Conclusion

The CRM is gaining ground in France. Similar theological underpinnings link the movement with the CPM. It must nonetheless be underlined that the reasons and the context of church revitalisation in France differ much from those inspiring most all the literature on the subject. To further understand and evaluate how that impacts the specific French context we will pursue our exploration of the church planting and renewal through the lens of some of the church planters and church revitalisers with the CAEF family of churches in France.

Chapter 4

Contextualising Church Planting and Church Revitalisation in France

We will now take a closer look at some of the theology and practices of church planting and church revitalisation in one of the larger French evangelical denominations, the CAEF. A brief historical overview of the French evangelical milieu and the CAEF context will open the way for the analysis of several semi-structured interviews with church planters and church revitalisers. It will be of interest to see if and how the theological principles and practices promoted on an academic level from a largely North American and northern European background have been integrated and adapted on a local level in the French context.

4.1. Evangelicals in France

The limitations and the goal of this paper preclude a general history of the evangelical protestant movement in France. Nonetheless, a certain number of salient historical factors need to be retained to better understand the contextualization of the church planting and church revitalization principles being examined.

The evangelical movement has taken over two centuries to establish firm roots in France (Fath, 2005, 3). The first signs of evangelical dogmas began to appear in France near the beginning of the nineteenth century (Fath, 2005, 4). The development was stimulated by the growth of the international Protestant mission movement. Evangelicals remained a very marginal dissenting sect on the national religious scene in France where only the Roman

Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed Protestant churches were officially recognized as Christian churches. The official separation of the Church and state in 1905 finally opened the door for an official recognition of evangelicals as a legitimate branch of Protestantism. Nonetheless, the popular reputation of a dissenting sect and the ultra-minority mentality of the evangelicals themselves proved difficult to shake off. It has taken the best part of a century for these mentalities to evolve. Several national mediated events in the latter portion of the twentieth century, including the Billy Graham crusade in Paris in 1986, helped to bring evangelicalism out of its pigeonhole as an unrecognized sect (Fath, 2005, 9). It is only since the founding of the CNEF in 2003 that evangelicals have started to gain confidence in the public square. In the past 50 years the movement has grown from 769 churches in metropolitan France (Liechti, 2017, 5) to 2226 churches in 2021 (CNEF, 2021). This encouraging progression still leaves the evangelical movement in a marked minority position representing barely 1,6% of the total population (Fath, 2021). This cursory overview of the evangelical church in France is perhaps enough to highlight its significant dissimilarity with the historical and influential evangelical church of North America or Great Britain from where much of the church planting and church revitalization material is produced.

4.2. CAEF Churches in France

To critically evaluate some of the theological principles and practices of church planting and church revitalization in the French context, we have chosen to explore several examples from within the CAEF denomination. The choice of remaining within the CAEF network of churches was made for several reasons. First, the CAEF group of churches represents the 4th largest evangelical denomination in France (Liechti, 2017, 10). Second, while acknowledging its own unique characteristics, the history and development of the CAEF churches would be somewhat typical of a large segment of French evangelicals which may facilitate a certain generalization within the evangelical movement in France. Finally, my own personal involvement and proximity with the CAEF group of churches facilitates the investigation of the chosen examples.

Sylvain Aharonian, in his extensive socio-history of the CAEF churches in France, notes that the origins of the Open Brethren Movement, the roots of the CAEF churches in France, go back to the 1850s (2017, 63). After slow beginnings and with the help of a wave of foreign missionaries (Bariteau, 2020), the number of churches grew rapidly from the late 1960s to the early 1970s and then again from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s. There are currently 103 churches in metropolitan France (CAEF, 2021). According to an internal survey conducted by the denomination in 2017, 60% of the churches considered themselves as growing, 33% as stationary and 12% as declining (Bariteau, 2017). These figures reflect a certain generous self-esteem when compared to the analysis of the annual declaration for membership dues. Over the past 5 years the annual declarations indicate that only 53% of these churches have experienced growth while 18% have stagnated and a further 29% have experienced decline (Bariteau, 2020).

In 2011 the CAEF adopted a new slogan: *'Une synergie pour l'affermissement et l'implantation de nouvelles églises'* (A synergy for the strengthening and planting of new churches) (Kozycki, 2012). Joining the national impetus of the CNEF, the CAEF actively encouraged the CPM within its ranks. The team of CAEF church planters that participated in the CNEF church planting learning community evolved into the CAEF Church Planting Commission (Com'Union, 2021) and church planting became a common leitmotiv within the denomination. Nonetheless, certain leaders in the 47% of struggling or stagnating churches started to question what was felt to be the 'monopoly' of the CPM in the priorities of the denomination to the detriment of the existing struggling congregations. For them the arrival of the CRM has been a welcome development. Another team representing the denomination participated in the second national learning community organised by the CNEF centred on church development.

4.3. Theology and Practices of CAEF Church Planters and Church Revitalisers

The qualitative research included interviewing four different church planting situations which were selected to represent the diversity in age and experience of the church planters as well as their geographic locations. All represented medium to large urban contexts.

Unfortunately, this has left out smaller rural church planting contexts with perhaps some unique implications, but the limits of this paper have precluded a larger sampling. The common framework of questions for the semi-structured interviews did not deter a wide diversity in the responses and ensuing discussions.

The church revitalisation research included three projects chosen to represent a variety of contexts and reasons for church revitalization. One situation was in the heart of a large urban centre where demographics meant that the families with children were obliged to move further out from the centre to find suitable affordable housing. The church was unable to adapt to the demographics of its neighbourhood. The revitalization project was undertaken by an older experienced pastor. A second church in a small city had been decimated by the effects of an effective church planter/evangelist who overstayed his welcome and was unable to meet the pastoral needs of the church. A younger pastor with some pastoral experience came to the rescue. The third situation represents a church on the fringe a large metropolitan area where a division caused by differing theological approaches had left the church significantly reduced and struggling. The revitalizer in this instance was young pastor in his first post. Despite the small number of samples, the diversity in both context and persons would seem to be an interesting asset.

Table of Interviews:

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Type of project</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Beginning of project</i>	<i>Participants at the start</i>	<i>Participants currently</i>
A 1.	Church plant	Suburb	2000	10	140
A 2.	New church plant from church A 1	Suburb	2021	10	10
B.	Church plant	Large city centre	2014	15	200
C.	Church plant	Small city near large metropole	2014	13	60
D.	Church plant	Large city	2018	5	13
E.	Church revitalisation	Large city centre	(1972) 2015	10	50
F.	Church revitalisation	Small city	(1960) 2010	30	135
G.	Church revitalisation	Large town	(1992) 2008	30	120

* To respect anonymity, subsequent referencing of interviewees is according to the letters indicated above.

4.3.1. *Missio Dei*

With only minimal reference to *missio Dei*, the church planting interviewees seemed to distance themselves from Murray's assertion that *missio Dei* is the first and foremost foundation for church planting (2001, 39). They nonetheless agreed that church planting was a strategic part of God's current activity in the world. Church revitalisers, on the other hand, were more apt to see church revitalisation as part of *missio Dei*. They saw the Church as being God's 'showcase' to the world, following in the footsteps of the nation of Israel. This was seen as a motivation for revitalising churches: to present an attractive presentation of the gospel to the world.

Perhaps a more important aspect that surfaced in the interviews is that caring for the bruised, hurt and wounded is at the heart of revitalisation. This reflects God's heart for the world and therefore his mission in the world: healing and restoring. From this theological point of view, one interviewee (F.) refuses to admit that we can just let a church die as part of its natural life cycle. The Church is people and theologically one cannot simply let disappear Christians who are spiritually feeble or unhealthy. He militates for a fresh theological understanding of what the Church is and even questions our understanding of the gospel if we are not willing to give priority to weak and wounded Christians as well as non-Christians. He maintains:

There is a shifting in the understanding of what the Church is ... To revisit the understanding of what the Church is, appears to me to be imperative today. The problem is that everyone is willing to sign on the dotted line as to what the Church is in theory, but in practice we do not think in the same theological terms. We reason otherwise (F.).

We find here echoes of writers such as Cronshaw who insists that revitalisation 'is the process of reconnecting a local church with the life and mission of God... [It is] renewing a church's passion for and engagement with God's mission' (2015, 318).

Connecting the Church with the life and mission of God means connection with God himself to understand and be motivated by his heart's desires. Prayer, although a foundational priority for knowing God's 'life and mission' is, apart from two notable exceptions (B., G.), largely missing from the discussions.

4.3.2. Missionary Mandate

In contrast with much of the Anglo-Saxon literature, the Missionary Mandate did not come across as a major motivation for either church planting or church revitalisation. Only one interviewee made explicit reference to it. This could mean that either church planting and church revitalisation are not seen as a primary fulfilment of the missionary mandate or that the planters and revitalisers interviewed skipped over the Missionary Mandate considering it

to be so self-evident that they passed on to other more practical considerations. This could also be an indicator of a certain contextualisation in a setting where there is a social aversion to proselytism. To verify this would entail further exploration beyond the reach of this study.

The practitioners interviewed tended to take a certain distance from most of the church planting literature which, following in Wagner's footsteps (1990, 11), regularly promotes church planting as the best way to fulfil the Missionary Mandate. As for the church revitalisers, they are in sharp contrast with writers such as Coyer and Davis who insist that the Missionary Mandate is the essential ingredient for church renewal. For one interviewee this absence is not surprising (F.). According to him, French theological institutions have sadly neglected missiology, leaving France very weak in this area. This is an interesting observation given that France is still considered from without and within, and by all faiths, as a mission field. Further investigation on this point would be interesting and helpful but would require further research.

A weak or developing missiology, however, has not completely obscured the Missionary Mandate. Revitalisation is understood as not just getting the Christians to come back, but rather rekindling the vision for conversions and the multiplication of disciples. Multiplying discipleship, in all its forms, is seen as a key element for both church planting and church revitalisation.

4.3.3. Incarnation

For the hands-on practitioners interviewed, incarnation and contextualisation were not so much theological principles as core values in their philosophy of ministry. The large quantity of material under these categories denotes a particular interest in these areas for both planters and revitalisers in the French context.

As in the discussion of *missio Dei*, the Church as people came across strongly. All persons interviewed put a strong emphasis on relationships and community as reflecting gospel

values and truths. Several interviewees join Liechti (2015, 612) in observing that it is generally through a relationship with a Christian that people find their way to church, hear the gospel, understand the gospel, see the authenticity of the gospel worked out in the lives of the Christians and then come to personal faith in Christ. Revitalised gospel relationships between believers are key to both church planting and church revitalisation. According to one interviewee, the community of believers as a body becomes the evangelist (A2.). This is seen as enabling non-Christians to get involved in all aspects of church life before they actually make a faith commitment and tends towards a centred set ecclesiology (Niewold, 2008).

Although the reasoning in several cases seemed to be from intuition or experience, rather than theological reflection, all interviewees lined up with such writers as Schindler (2013, 22) and Murray (2001, 43-44) by insisting on the need to seek proximity with people to effectively communicate the message and demonstrate the values and the transforming power of the gospel.

4.3.4. Contextualisation

Contextualization involves making the message of the gospel intelligible through words and actions for the target population (Whiteman, 2011, 119). It is here that the interviewees have encountered the most challenges. Different obstacles unique to the French culture were highlighted with the need to intelligently address them. Several underlined that religion in France is more and more seen to be a 'problem' rather than an asset to society. This is largely due to religious history and the current Islamic extremism. Recent governmental declarations concerning evangelicals have continued to fuel misunderstandings and suspicion. Religion is being pushed more and more into the private realm with no right to the public square.

Given the traditional minority mindset of evangelicals in France, or as one put it, 'miserabilism' (F.), there is seen to be a great need for the Church to gain confidence and demonstrate its credibility. There is, on one hand, the incarnation credibility with

transformed lives living out the gospel (Paas, 2012, 470). But there is also the need for social and institutional credibility of a religious minority in a highly secular world. The obstacles of small numbers, small unattractive meeting places, social distrust, and administrative opposition must be countered. Church renewal must (re)create confidence in the Church. This pushes the planters and revitalisers to insist on the importance of proximity and visibility within the community through cultivating intentional relationships with the local authorities and associations to overcome biases, misunderstandings, and suspicion while creating positive personal gospel relationships. This echoes Paas as he refers to Leslie Newbigin's 'hermeneutic' of the gospel (2012, 470). In a context where 'people think they know how Christianity tastes, and no longer like it' (Paas, 2012, 470), Christians must make an effort to bridge the gap between the caricature and the real image of Christianity. There is a general agreement with Reeder in needing to adapt ministry and goals to 'fit the nature of the times' (2008, 129), although none of the interviewees went as far as Paas (2012, 471) to insist on radical innovation above simple adaptation.

4.4. Conclusion

The differing context of church planting and church revitalisation from that of the Anglo-Saxon literature, can be seen in the differing approaches to certain theological principles. This denotes a certain contextualisation of the principles all the while maintaining a biblical basis. The more practical values of incarnation and contextualisation show a high level of convergence between the literature and the French qualitative research. The pressing need is to find ways of bringing the CPM and the CRM together based on these common themes. The next chapter will help us explore some areas of reflection that could help us move forward.

Chapter 5

Charting Ways Ahead for Partnership in the Gospel

As we have seen, thinking theologically and pragmatically about church planting and church revitalisation has led both academics and practitioners down common paths. The various themes that we have looked at along the way lead to convergence in mission and theology. The exploration of these theological principles nonetheless reveals several areas needing deeper reflexion both theologically and practically if the route to greater collaboration between church planting and church revitalisation is to be travelled. In this chapter, we will limit our consideration to three key issues arising from the research conducted thus far.

5.1. The Church is People

The first issue takes us back to the grassroots of ecclesiology. The Church is at the heart of both the CPM and the CRM. But what is the Church we are talking about? Within the evangelical community there seems to be a consensus that the Church is firstly a community of believing people over and above a building or an institution. But in analysing the research, one wonders if we only pay lip-service to a well-accepted doctrine. A detailed response to our question is beyond the scope of this paper, but we shall look briefly at the issues arising from the research.

In reading the literature and listening to the practitioners, one gets the distinct impression that both CPM and CRM are generally project orientated rather than people orientated. All

the while recognising the core value of people and relationships, the discussion leads on very rapidly to how best to prepare and accomplish a church plant or a church revitalisation. The accent is on models and methods of how to influence people with the gospel to reach the goal of a new or revitalised church (Brown, 2020; Croft, 2016; Cronshaw, 2015; Murray, 2010; Reeder, 2008; Schindler, 2013). Popular movements, such as DAWN in Britain, have tended to highlight the strategic planning aspect of church planting (Paas, 2016, 44-46; Robison, 2006, 21-29). The CNEF church planting tool, *Parcours Découverte Implantation* (1pour10000, 2011), promotes the same pathway. Both church planting and church revitalisation have become projects rather than people.

Davies reminds us that God throughout scripture is 'calling out a people for himself' (2012, 27-29). The Apostle John identifies the people of God as the bride of Christ (Rev. 21-22). The accent in scripture is on the Church as a community of people living in relationship with their Creator and with each other in a way that reflects God in the world. The importance of relationships and community are underlined repeatedly in both church planting and church revitalisation (Erwin, 2012; F.; Liechti, 2015; Robinson 2006; Schindler, 2013). Nonetheless, a closer look at both the literature and the qualitative research, reveals that relationships and community have become means to an end rather than the objective. Healthy relationships have become a tool for obtaining the goal of a healthy local church.

The Church largely seems to have lost Christ's passion for people demonstrated when he looked on the crowds and was moved with compassion (Mat. 9:35-38). It was that deep-gutted compassion that compelled him to send out the twelve on a mission to proclaim the good news of the kingdom in word and in act (Mat. 10:1-8). Somehow, in our discussions and our practice, we tend to transfer our passion from people to projects. Success is measured in numbers rather than in the transformation of lives. We need to regain our passion for those without Christ – as people that God loves, not as building blocks for a church plant or a church revitalisation. Our project and productivity-oriented culture has filtered into the Church. We must stop and ask ourselves how we can refocus our priorities and better incarnate God's passion for people. One place to start, in practice and not just in theory, would be to put prayer and fasting back into the equation on a continuing basis, and not just as a starting point to put in place a project. Christian Blanc's call to a mobilising

prayer to accompany a refocusing of the CNEF from an institutional trap to the proclamation of the gospel (2021) is a welcome step in the right direction. Other possible steps would be to look to other disciplines such as sociology to explore how to build people-orientated projects.

A further area of reflection needs to include our use of language. Our vocabulary influences our understanding and our actions. The church planting terminology, with its strong local church connotations, naturally prompts one to think in terms of managerial pragmatism and projects rather than people. We need to revise our vocabulary to come back to the historical understanding of *'plantatio ecclesiae'* (Paas, 2016, 31) in the sense of cultivating the development of the universal community of the people of God and its local form of a gathering of disciples (Davies, 2012, 28-33) in areas where it is not yet present. Despite Murray's unconvincing arguments to the contrary (2010, 17-20), reverting to the original meaning of 'planting the Church' would perhaps help us to maintain a clearer focus on the Church as people. The choice of 'Church development' vocabulary, with an accent on the 'Church' rather than the 'churches', would no doubt help us to focus on the people God loves rather than on our personal project. Let us choose our vocabulary wisely and intentionally as it is shaping both our minds and our actions.

5.2. The Church is Discipleship

A second consideration arising from the research and flowing out of the previous point is a missiological question. The contrast between accent on the missionary mandate in the literature (Ott and Wilson, 2011, 22) and the lack of explicit reference to the missionary mandate in the interviews raises the question of the Church's role in God's mission. Jesus' foundational declaration concerning the Church (Mat. 16:18) reminds us that building the Church is his responsibility. The mission that he later gave his disciples includes being witnesses (Luke 24:28; Acts 1:8), proclaiming the good news (Mark 16:15) and making disciples (Mat. 28:19). The book of Acts focuses on the growth of the Church, with numerous references to growth and expansion. But the focus is always on the progress of

the message and the number of disciples (Acts 2:41, 4:4, 5:14, 6:7, 11:20-21, 12:24, 14:21) rather than the number of local churches. Remarkably none of the letters to the churches in the New Testament contain an exhortation to either evangelism or church planting.

Theologically it is Christ who builds his Church and one of the ways he is doing it is by asking his disciples through proclamation to make disciples of all nations. Christ then adds to the Church (and not the churches) those who are saved (Acts 2:47). The accent is clearly on the universal Church rather than the local church.

Our research correctly identifies disciple making as being at the core of both the planting and the revitalising of churches. But reproducing discipleship is generally seen as a tool for building or rebuilding a local church. Could it be that we have unintentionally succumbed to our base desire to be like God and are subtly taking on the role of trying to build Christ's Church rather than focusing on our mission of discipleship through baptism and teaching (Mat. 28:19-20)? This of course does not preclude the establishing of local communities of Christians, but rather, as in the case of Paul's missionary activity in the book of Acts, and as argued by Paas (2016,13), local churches become a by-product flowing from a desire to bring all men into a living relationship with Jesus-Christ through the proclamation of the gospel.

The argument is thrown back that church planting is the best way of making new disciples (Keller, 2002, 1-2; Ott & Wilson, 2011, 231). Of course, the Church in its visible and accessible form as the incarnation of the gospel is a powerful showcase of the gospel that draws others to Christ. But from there to insist that new churches are necessary simply because they do a better job than older churches at making new disciples, is a major jump that not all are willing to make. Certain voices are arising in both the literature and the interviewee experience to question the validity of such a presupposition which struggles to find empirical evidence to support it (Paas, 2016, 178-180; F.).

If the Church could recentre its mission on cultivating healthy disciples rather than on church planting and church revitalisation, that could well answer the problem of a serious lack of pastors, revitalisers, and church planters. Whereas church planting and church development are highly dependent on theologically trained professionals and specialised teams, the

making of disciples is accessible to and the responsibility of all believers. Healthy reproducing disciples engender healthy reproducing churches.

Specialised teams are no doubt essential in certain circumstances, but in a country such as France where the church is already planted (Liechti, 2017, 8), insisting on specialised church planting ministries tends to be not only unrealistic but counterproductive as well. Robinson reminds us that Christianity works best when it is a lay movement (2006, 14). A movement of multiplying disciples and churches can only be attained as all members of the church are involved. In the light of the dearth of candidates and of funding for revitalisation and church planting ministries we need to return to a grass roots approach involving all Christians. Perhaps we need to get the horse in front of the cart again. One of the leaders interviewed has put this principle into action with some very encouraging results (B.). Other fledgling initiatives are being implemented. We need to study and reflect on these examples to see what can be learned and developed elsewhere.

5.3. The Church is Local

A third issue stemming from our study is another ecclesiological question involving our understanding of the 'local church'. It is perhaps in part our practical ecclesiology of the Church in its local expression that hinders greater cooperation between the CPM and the CRM. 'Speaking of "local" churches involves some knotty problems, both practical and theoretical' (Blocher, 2016, 53). A serious theological discussion on the definition of the local church is beyond the scope of this research, but perhaps a quick glance at some of the biblical data and current experience will prove helpful.

Theologically the local church is generally considered as a localised expression of the larger universal Church. Blocher insists: 'the local church *is* the Church – locally' (2016, 56). In perusing Paul's writings, one understands that the early Christians generally met together in homes (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Phlm. 2). In the larger centres where the gospel had a major impact, such as Rome, Corinth and Ephesus, there were no doubt several congregations meeting in different homes (cf. Rom. 16). Yet Paul addresses his letter to 'the

church of God that is in Corinth' (1 Cor. 1:2). The New Testament would seem to designate multiple congregations under the oversight of a single group of elders in each locality as a local church (Coulter, 2018, 10). Of course, the size of locality today is difficult to define with our changing world. Blocher reminds us that: 'Concrete experiential space, and therefore nearness and distance, is not just a matter of yards and miles, but rather of possibilities of life together, encounters, mutual help. Distance, for most of us is measured by time of transportation' (2016, 54-55).

As the quest for autonomy invades our society (Blocher, 2016, 51-52), the notion has become virtually an idol for some congregations. Scripture gives us little theological grounds for cultivating congregational independence in a close geographical area. In the current state of the Church, with all its various denominational divisions and sub-groups, a city-wide local church is no doubt beyond our reach. But within the denominational context it could be possible to redefine what a local church is and how it can be structured. An adapted multi-site model might have something to offer in the way we consider the local church. There are several cities in France where one finds in the same city at least one healthy and growing CAEF church, alongside other CAEF churches that are either stagnating or in decline. Could a change of our theological (and sociological) mindset, followed by a change of structure, not allow these churches to function together as a 'local church' where the stronger congregations help the weaker ones and where all are concerned primarily with the progress of the gospel in the city rather than the success of their own assembly? Of course, this means a major paradigm shift to master our innate appetite for independence inherited from the Fall.

Based on a congregationalist model, the strong historic accent on the autonomy of the local church within the CAEF movement has conceivably been a hindrance to the overall development of the churches. Aharonian notes a clear shift in the sociological model from overall independence to an ideological association around certain common values (2017, 293-330). This shifting has opened the way for mutualising certain resources, but there remains nonetheless a marked trait of autonomy within the local churches. Aharonian has done a remarkable job in retracing the history and identifying the sociological developments

of the movement, but further investigation would be necessary to study the effect of this autonomy on the general development of the movement.

In line with the shifting values within the denomination, there is already a tentative move toward regionalisation of the CAEF. The regrouping of the churches in the Southeast around the theme of multiplication, including a regional fund for multiplication, is an interesting example of how local congregations may work together to promote the development and the multiplication of disciples and local churches (C.). The Regional Training Centre for Church Planters (CFRi) in Aix-en-Provence has proven to be, not only a rallying point for church planting, but also an interesting tool for church revitalisation in the area (Dickson, 2021). The experience merits close attention for further development in other regions.

Of course, behind such adaptations and innovations there must be an intentional theological reflection on the local church and its role. This will take determination and time to filter through the denomination. We are no doubt more influenced than we like to think by the egocentric cultural values surrounding us. We are generally more concerned with our local church than we are with the Christ's body, the Church, even in a localised area. We are again faced with the paradox between our theology and our practice.

5.4. Conclusion

Development of the Church in Western Europe with new and renewed local churches is a continuing concern. Rethinking some of our theological principles and practices must be a first step forward. Within the CAEF denomination, the fusion of the CAEF church planting and church development learning communities is a major step forward. Together this new group must stop and reflect on these major issues that could enhance partnership and progress for the development of the CAEF churches in France. The final chapter will propose a few thoughts for action.

Chapter 6

Concluding Remarks

The CPM and the CRM have in recent years impacted the CAEF churches as they have the Church at large. We have established that both, working from different angles, are seeking to further the Kingdom of God and the development of the Church. Exploring the convergence between both movements pushes us to rethink our mission and practices as Christians and as the Church in the 21st century. This exploration leads us to identify some specific avenues for reflection and action for the CAEF churches in France.

6.1. The Church is People

Following the example of the CNEF National Committee, the CAEF churches, led by the national Service and Reference Commission (CSR) need to realign their mission to focus on the mission of God in reconciling the world with himself. In a context where more and more people are hungering after meaning and hope, Christian Blanc, president of the CNEF reminds us that bringing the message of the Gospel to our contemporaries is an essential part of *missio Dei* and thus must be an essential part of our mission as the Church (2021). People with 'no hope and without God in the world' (Eph. 2:12) must be our priority above projects and institutions. This realignment could be realistically the theme of a national congress with motivational teaching coupled with pertinent workshops.

In our productivity and project-oriented society, we must nonetheless beware that even this reorientation does not become just another project for which we need to find methods and models. Blanc addresses this pitfall in pleading for an upsurge of prayer to accompany this reflection (2021). If we are to feel and reflect the heart of a missionary God who ‘so loved the world that he gave his only Son’ (John 3:16), we must spend time in his presence.

6.2. The Church is Discipleship

To recentre the Church’s mission on disciple-making, one key idea would be to modify slightly, but significantly, the current motto of the CAEF. Instead of ‘*Une synergie pour l’affermissement et l’implantation d’églises*’ (A Synergy for the Strengthening and Planting Churches), a more appropriate version would be ‘*Une synergie pour l’affermissement et la multiplication de disciples*’ (A Synergy for the Strengthening and the Multiplication of Disciples). This better reflects our mission as disciples and as a church to go into the world, as Christ himself was sent, to be witnesses and to make more disciples through the proclamation of the good news (Mat. 28 :19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:48; John 20:21). The accent on discipleship widens our vision to focus on people rather than on a local church project and at the same time it encourages the implication of all Christians and not just those specialising in church planting or revitalisation. A movement of healthy disciple reproduction will fulfil the goals of both the CPM and the CRM.

6.3. The Church is Local

The reflection on regionalisation within the CAEF is in progress. The CAEF must go even further to develop a reflection on new shapes and structures of what it means to be a local church. The Church Development Pole needs to explore new expressions of the local church as multiple congregations in what Blocher calls a ‘concrete experiential space’ (2016, 54-55). One leadership group overseeing several smaller congregations in a close geographic area could be a response to a lack of trained professional leaders and church planting teams as well as difficulties in obtaining suitable buildings. It would at the same time encourage a

wider lay ministry, internal leadership development and proximity within the community. As more disciples are involved in ministry intentionally oriented to making disciples, the health of the congregations will improve, and the multiplication process will continue. Both CPM and CRM will find their fulfilment. Of course, this represents a major challenge for the CAEF churches. It calls for a major change of mentality from a traditional strict autonomy of the local church to a larger vision of the Church where all are more concerned with the development of the Body of Christ rather than building their own local church in their own resemblance.

6.4. Conclusion

These reflections on the CPM and the CRM and their impact on the CAEF churches in France are obviously not exhaustive or sufficient for clearly charting a way forward in the mission that Christ has confided to his Church. My prayer is that this research would in some way help to open up new paths of reflection that will promote revitalised disciples and churches which will in turn be effective in their mission of making new healthy reproducing disciples and healthy reproducing congregations for the overall health and growth of the Church. Christ is faithfully building his Church according to his promise. Let us keep our missional focus on people, discipleship, and the Church.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Questions for Semi-Structured Interview - Church Planting

1. Could you describe in a few sentences the church planting project that you have been involved in? When was it started? How many people were involved in the project from the outset and how many people are involved now? What is the social and geographic context of the church plant (rural, small city, large city ...)?
2. What was the main motivation in starting the project - for the church, the denomination and for you personally? What fundamental theological principles motivated you in the project (for example your understanding of the mission of the church ...)?
3. What was your strategy for planting the church? What worked and what didn't work? What values have been important in your context of church planting (for example contextualisation, incarnation ...)?
4. What has brought new people to the church/to faith? What have been some of the barriers? What aspects of the French culture either help or hinder church planting in France? What has been done to respond to these issues?
5. Do you think that it is more difficult to plant churches in France than in other parts of Europe? Why or why not? What is being done by yourself, by the CAEF or by the CNEF to respond to those issues?
6. How do you evaluate success in your church planting project? When can you say that the church has been planted? What does a planted church look like? What are the criteria for success, for you personally and for the denomination?

7. What points of convergence do you see between church planting and church revitalisation which would permit a fruitful interaction between the two movements?

Appendix 2

Questions for Semi-Structured Interview - Church Revitalisation

1. Could you describe in a few sentences the church revitalisation that you have been involved in? When was it started? How many people were involved in the project from the outset and how many people are involved now? What is the social and geographic context of the church plant (rural, small city, large city ...)?
2. What was the main motivation in starting the project - for the church, the denomination and for you personally? What fundamental theological principles motivated you in the project (for example your understanding of the mission of the church ...)?
3. What was your strategy for revitalising the church? What worked and what didn't work? What values have been important in your context of church revitalisation (for example contextualisation, incarnation ...)?
4. What has brought new people to the church/to faith? What have been some of the barriers? What aspects of the French culture either help or hinder church revitalisation in France? What has been done to respond to these issues?
5. Do you think that it is more difficult to revitalise churches in France than in other parts of Europe? Why or why not? What is being done by yourself, by the CAEF or by the CNEF to respond to those issues?
6. How do you evaluate success in your church revitalisation project? When can you say that the church has been revitalised? What does a revitalised church look like? What are the criteria for success, for you personally and for the denomination?

7. What points of convergence do you see between church revitalisation and church planting which would permit a fruitful interaction between the two movements?

Appendix 3

BBC Ethics Committee Response to Application



BBC Ethics Committee Response to Application

Summary

Name of student	Gerald Seed	
Title of Project	Church Planting and Church Revitalisation: rivals or allies?	
Ethics committee date	15/03/21	
Ethics committee decision (click relevant box)	Application approved	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Application approved dependent on changes noted below being made and signed off by supervisor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Substantial changes needed, as noted below, and resubmission to ethics committee for approval	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Application declined	<input type="checkbox"/>

Required changes

Application form:	
Section number	Changes required
11	Personal data in form of names etc will be retained – need to indicate how it will be stored securely
12	Include withdrawal date and instructions on how to withdraw (also on participant information docs)

Participant information sheet:
Since some participants are being interviewed because of their specific role within the denomination it may not be possible to maintain anonymity. They should be informed of this and asked to waive anonymity.
Participant consent form:
Use modified consent form asking if participants wish to review comments. Include box inviting participant to waive anonymity.
Letter of invitation
Debriefing sheet
Other
Submit interview questions to committee (via supervisor) for comment.

The application documents should be amended in accordance with the above, with **amendments highlighted in yellow**.

Amended forms should be returned to the project supervisor or the ethics committee as noted above.

Supervisor/Ethics committee declaration:

The student has made all the changes required by the ethics committee and is therefore permitted to proceed with the research.

Signed:

Date:

Appendix 4



BELFAST BIBLE COLLEGE

Participant Consent Form

Title of Investigation: Church Planting and Church Revitalisation: rivals or allies?

Please answer the following questions by circling your response:

Have you read and understood the information sheet about this study?	YES / NO
Have you been able to ask questions and had enough information?	YES / NO
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study any time up to 15 May 2021 and without having to give a reason for withdrawal?	YES / NO
Do you give permission for the researcher to analyse and quote from your responses, understanding that they may be attributed using the appropriate title for your role, but not your name?	YES / NO
Do you agree to your interview to be audio and video recorded?	YES / NO
Do you wish to review any direct quotations from your interview that will be included in the final dissertation?	YES/NO

Please sign here if you wish to take part in the research and feel you have had enough information about what is involved

Participant Name

Signature

Date

Researcher Name

Signature

Date

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