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Unique History, Unique Opportunity: Evangelicalism in Austria since 1945

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Unique History, Unique Opportunity: Evangelicalism in Austria since 1945

Abstract

The article deals with the history of evangelicalism in Austria, a subject on which there is hardly any scholarly research. In focus is the development of the newly recognized baptist, charismatic, mainline evangelical, mennonite and pentecostal denominations since 1945. The role of immigration in the growth of evangelicalism is examined, especially during two periods: the decade after WWII (1945-55) as well as the massive immigration from Eastern Europe (particularly from Romania) after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. The article also presents examples of indigenous church movements among the Austrian people themselves, especially during the 1970's and 1980's. Although the story of its growth is remarkable, less than 0.3% of the population are members of evangelical churches. Conclusions are made as to how Austria's evangelicals can learn from their past in order to more effectively shape their future.

Keywords

Austria, evangelical, church, mission, missionary, church planting, church growth, Pentecostal, Baptist, Brethren, immigration

Cover Page Footnote

John Doss holds a Master of Divinity in Missional Studies from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and served as a missionary and church planter in Austria from 2003-2015.

INTRODUCTION

“Unique worldwide” was the reaction of the Austrian Federal Chancellery toward the “Freikirchen¹ in Österreich” (Free Churches of Austria, henceforth referred to as FKÖ), an umbrella organization formed by Baptist, Pentecostal, Mennonite, mainline Evangelical, and charismatic denominations in Austria.² These groups of churches were able to achieve something by joining together that each of them individually had failed to accomplish after decades of effort: the Austrian government officially recognized the FKÖ as a religious body on August 26, 2013. This paper tells the remarkable story of evangelicalism³ in Austria as represented by the history of those denominations in the FKÖ.

The 2001 edition of *Operation World* estimates the number of evangelicals in Austria to be 20,000.⁴ This figure is close to that provided by Frank Hinkelmann’s more current and thorough *Konfessionskunde*, which lists 350 free Protestant churches with a combined membership of over 23,000.⁵ With approximately 17,000

¹ Hans Jörg Urban identifies five characteristics of “Freikirchen” (free churches): 1. Freedom: membership is voluntary and must be preceded by a personal conversion experience; 2. Independence: strong conviction of separation of church and state; 3) Church autonomy or congregationalism: the local church is at the forefront, universal priesthood of the believer means that the congregation should make all decisions; 4) missionary character: every member should share their faith and lead others to conversion, discipleship and Christian service; 5) holiness and discipline: sanctification and personal holiness is emphasized and enforced by the exercise of church discipline even to the point of excommunication. Cf. Hans Jörg Urban, “Freikirchen,” *Lexikon der Ökumene und Konfessionskunde*, ed. Wolfgang Thönissen (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2007), 435.

² Cf. KAP, “Freikirchen in Österreich staatlich anerkannt,” *www.religion.orf.at*, August 26, 2013, <http://religion.orf.at/stories/2600148/> (accessed November 23, 2015).

³ Peter Beyerhaus defines evangelicals with the following seven characteristics: “a) Emphasis of the verbal inspiration of the Bible and its absolute authority for faith and practice; b) Confession of an unabbreviated, apostolic Christology; c) Exaltation of subjective over objective salvation (experience of regeneration as a result of personal repentance); d) Necessity of sanctification by the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer, Bible study and serving out of love; e) Distinguishing the ‘church of Christ’ comprised of those who are truly saved from the visible institution of church; f) Priority of mission; g) Intense eschatological imminence. Peter Bayerhaus, “Evangelikale Bewegung,” *Lexikon der Ökumene und Konfessionskunde*, ed. Wolfgang Thönissen (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2007), 379.

⁴ Cf. Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk. *Operation World 21st Century Edition* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2001), 88.

⁵ Cf. Frank Hinkelmann, *Konfessionskunde: Handbuch der Kirchen, Freikirchen und christlichen Gemeinschaften in Österreich* (Edition ea. Linz: OM Books, 2009), 111-205. Some would contest that there are 350 evangelical churches in Austria. As of 2012, at least 216 churches were listed and mapped out on an independent website. Cf. “Gemeinde-Atlas,” *www.freikirchen.at*, <http://www.freikirchen.at/gemeinde-atlas/> (accessed April 25, 2012). Hinkelmann includes 57 Seventh-Day Adventist congregations (p. 147) as well as house churches, such as the *Jedidja-Gemeinschaft* in Linz with at least 140 members in approximately 30 house churches (p. 165). There are, however, a number of evangelical churches not included in Hinkelmann’s figure of 350, especially independent, ethnic congregations in the larger cities of Austria; which Hinkelmann lists as having a combined membership of 2,750 in Vienna alone (p. 205). Thus, 350 may not be an exaggerated estimate for the number of evangelical churches in Austria.

members⁶ in over 160 churches,⁷ the FKÖ easily represents the majority of Austria's evangelicals. Amazingly, less than five of these congregations existed prior to World War II (WWII), and all five FKÖ denominations were founded after the war. Evangelicalism in Austria is thus clearly a postwar phenomenon. The postwar growth of evangelicalism is all the more extraordinary given the stark decline within the old state churches over the same period. Membership in the Catholic and Lutheran churches decreased from 89 percent (6,170,084) and 6 percent (429,493)⁸ respectively of the total population in 1951 to just 64 percent (5,452,734)⁹ and 3 percent (319,752)¹⁰ in 2010. The purpose of this study is not only to chronicle the postwar emergence and growth of evangelicals in Austria, but also to attempt in part to provide explanations for this development. Two primary themes will emerge from this study: the role of immigration waves in the birth and growth of evangelicalism as well as the importance of building an indigenous church.

POSTWAR EMERGENCE OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES AND UNIONS (1945-55)

The first evangelical church in Austria was a Baptist church in Vienna founded in 1869. Up until 1948, this congregation in the Mollardgasse remained the only "autonomous" Baptist church in Austria. Things rapidly changed after WWII, however, due to a large number of displaced Baptists in Austria and genuine openness towards the gospel. New churches started in Salzburg (1948), Bad Ischl (1950), and Wien-Hütteldorf (1952) such that the Association of Baptist Churches in Austria (BBGÖ) was formed in 1953.¹¹ Today, the Baptists have 23 churches and over 1,300 members.¹²

The first Pentecostal church in Austria began in 1923 in Vienna.¹³ There were two congregations in Vienna for a time, but eventually they merged and

⁶ Cf. KAP, "Freikirchen in Österreich staatlich anerkannt," *religion.orf.at*.

⁷ Cf. "Die „Freikirchen in Österreich“ stellen sich vor," *freikirchen.at*, <http://www.freikirchen.at/freikirchen/> (accessed November 23, 2015).

⁸ Cf. Statistik Austria, "Bevölkerung zu Quartalsbeginn seit 2002 nach Bundesland," *www.statistik.at*, http://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/bevoelkerung/bevoelkerungsstand_und_veraenderung/bevoelkerung_zu_jahres_quartalsanfang/023582.html (accessed May 4, 2012).

⁹ Cf. Katholische Kirche in Österreich, "Statistik der katholischen Kirche in Österreich," *www.katholisch.at*, http://www.katholisch.at/site/article_blank.siteswift?SWS=4a7caa4b71472b46d4db1ed59efd7649&do=all&c=gotosection&d=site%2Fkirche%2Fkircheinoesterreich%2Fstatistik (accessed May 4, 2012).

¹⁰ Evangelische Kirche in Österreich, "Zahlen & Fakten," *www.evang.at*, <http://www.evang.at/kirche/zahlen-fakten/> (accessed May 4, 2012).

¹¹ Cf. Franz Graf-Stuhlhofer, *Frisches Wasser auf dürres Land: Festschrift zum 50-jährigen Bestehen des Bundes der Baptistengemeinden in Österreich* (Kassel: Oncken Verlag, 2005), 122.

¹² Cf. Hinkelmann, *Konfessionskunde*, 118.

¹³ Cf. Fritz Börner, *Freikirchlicher Gemeindebau in Österreich: Eine Untersuchung der Gemeinden der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Evangelikaler Gemeinden in Österreich (ARGEÖ), mit einem historischen Rückblick in Kirchengeschichte und die Geschichte der Bekenntnisgemeinden auf österreichischem Boden* (Linz: Published by the author, 1989), 173.

remained one church during WWII.¹⁴ Along with Baptists, there were also many displaced Pentecostals after the War, such that in 1946, 26 ministers met together in a refugee apartment complex to form the Pentecostal denomination known as FCG (*Freie Christengemeinden in Österreich*).¹⁵ The FCG is the largest evangelical denomination in Austria today with 69 churches and over 3,500 members.¹⁶

In 1953, the first Mennonite missionaries came from North America to work amongst the large refugee camps in Linz.¹⁷ Within five years, they were able to found two churches in Linz and Steyr. Today, the Mennonites have six churches and over 400 members in Austria.¹⁸

Although the mainline Evangelical denomination known as BEG (*Bund Evangelikaler Gemeinden*) was not formed until 1992, the history of some of its congregations is much older. In 1912, a Lutheran pastor and gifted evangelist named Max Monsky began a long and fruitful ministry known as the *Volksmision* (“mission to the people”). After decades of preaching the gospel to thousands across Austria, seven churches eventually emerged from his ministry.¹⁹ Today, three of these are part of the Association of Evangelical Churches in Austria (BEG) while four of them are associated with the Lutheran church.²⁰ The first Brethren church in Austria was planted in Vienna in 1920 and by 1940 two more had been planted in the city with a combined membership of over 100.²¹ After WWII, several Brethren missionaries came to Austria, starting approximately five new church plants in Vienna, Graz, Knittelfeld and Zeltweg by 1952.²² Most of these congregations are part of the BEG today, which has over 1,500 members in 41 churches.²³

REASONS FOR RAPID GROWTH OF EVANGELICALISM IN POST-WAR AUSTRIA

The decade after WWII was the first significant period of growth for evangelicals in which the number of churches increased from less than five to almost 30 and the first two evangelical denominations were constituted.²⁴ There are two principle reasons for this rapid growth. First, the freedom of religion granted by the occupied²⁵ Second Republic of Austria after the fall of the Third Reich enabled

¹⁴ Cf. Klaus Winter and Anton Bergmair, *Eine Bewegung stellt sich vor. 50 Jahre Freie Christengemeinden in Österreich. 1946-1996* (Salzburg: Lebensbotschaft, 1996), 17.

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 15.

¹⁶ Cf. Hinkelmann, *Konfessionskunde*, 123.

¹⁷ Cf. Franz Rathmair, “Die Mennonitische Brüdergemeinde in Österreich,” (Research Paper: Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1987), 5ff.

¹⁸ Cf. Hinkelmann, *Konfessionskunde*, 131.

¹⁹ Cf. Börner, *Freikirchlicher Gemeindebau*, 108-11.

²⁰ Cf. Hinkelmann, *Konfessionskunde*, 182.

²¹ Cf. Börner, *Freikirchlicher Gemeindebau*, 79-80.

²² Cf. *Ibid.*, 80-85.

²³ Cf. Hinkelmann, *Konfessionskunde*, 114.

²⁴ Cf. Börner, *Freikirchlicher Gemeindebau*, 77; 90; 106; 128.

²⁵ The Allied Troops (United Kingdom, France, United States, and the Soviet Union) occupied Austria from 1945 until May 15, 1955. Cf. Richard Rackett, *A Brief Survey of Austrian History* (Vienna: Georg Prachner Verlag, 1998), 150.

evangelicals to carry out missions work on a legal basis with no real hindrance from the government. As Stuhlhofer points out, it was actually the Treaty of Saint Germain (1919)—which officially ended the monarchy—that guaranteed rights such as the freedom of speech, press, religion, and peaceful assembly to all residents of the First Republic.²⁶ This newfound freedom proved conducive to the emergence of the first evangelical churches in the 1920's (e.g. Brethren, Pentecostals, Salvation Army, *Volksmission*, etc.). However, it was disregarded when the Nazis came to power and annexed Austria in 1938. After WWII, these liberties were once again granted to the Austrian people. The Pentecostal church in Vienna greatly rejoiced over a letter from the city magistrate on April 19, 1946 stating that under the Treaty of St. Germain, “Every inhabitant of Austria is guaranteed the right, whether privately or publicly, to practice any type of religion or faith.”²⁷ Evangelicals were now given unprecedented freedom to propagate the faith and establish local congregations.

The main cause of the growth of evangelicalism in this period, however, was the great immigration wave, which took place after WWII.²⁸ According to Werner Bauer in a 2008 report for the Austrian Association for Policy Consulting and Development (ÖGPP), in 1945 approximately 1.4 million people or 20 percent of the total Austrian population were not Austrian citizens. More than 500,000 of these were labeled “displaced persons,” which included anything from war refugees, concentration camp survivors and other forced laborers to Jewish refugees, former prisoners of war, and soldiers along with their families. Besides displaced persons, there were over 300,000 *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans) who had been displaced from central and Eastern Europe. Bauer notes that although most emigrated elsewhere (e.g. USA, Canada, Australia, etc.), in 1948 there were still approximately 500,000 displaced persons in Austria.²⁹

This unprecedented wave of immigration had two principle benefits for the fledgling evangelical movement: not only were the refugees much more open to the gospel, but many believers were displaced in Austria so as to give shape to the emerging denominations. Between 1945 and 1950, the Mollardgasse Baptist church held 15 baptismal services and no less than 150 people were baptized.³⁰ Even with all of these new believers, however, it would not have been possible to constitute a Baptist denomination apart from the large amount of Baptists who were displaced in Austria. Richard Rabenau, the denomination's first secretary, made note of the role which the “scores of relatives of our Baptist churches” in the Balkans, who were

²⁶ Cf. Stuhlhofer, *Frisches Wasser auf dürres Land*, 31.

²⁷ Winter, *50 Jahre Freie Christengemeinden*, 17.

²⁸ Cf. Martin Podobri, *Transformation in Österreich: Kultur- und gesellschaftsrelevanter Bau des Reiches Gottes im freikirchlichen Kontext* (Linz: OM Books, 2011), 131.

²⁹ Cf. Werner T. Bauer, *Zuwanderung nach Österreich* (Vienna: Österreichische Gesellschaft für Politikberatung und Politikentwicklung (ÖGPP), 2008), 4-5., www.politikberatung.or.at, http://www.politikberatung.or.at/typo3/fileadmin/02_Studien/8_Migration/zuwanderungnachoesterreich.pdf (accessed April 28, 2012).

³⁰ Cf. Stuhlhofer, *Frisches Wasser auf dürres Land*, 119.

displaced in Austria after the war, played in helping start three new churches and thus create the need for a Baptist denomination.³¹

The Pentecostals' postwar experience was very similar to that of the Baptists. A report from the denominational secretary reveals the amazing openness amongst the refugees toward the gospel: "This summer in Upper Austria 84 souls were baptized in water; in Salzburg there were 39, in Carinthia and in Styria 17—all together 177....In 1948 another 70 souls in Upper Austria were baptized in water."³² No wonder the FCG could report a total of 1,800 members just three years after it had begun!³³ However, the problem with transfer growth is that it often transfers, in this case immigrating elsewhere. Thus, the 1,800 Pentecostals in 1949 had dwindled down to just 300-400 by 1954, and Winter admits that "until the 1960's the work only developed slowly."³⁴

AN AUSTRIAN CHURCH-PLANTING MOVEMENT

The next period of significant growth for evangelicals at large was not until the 1980's. However, one movement that began in the 1970's is worth mentioning. After serving in Linz from 1954 to 1959, Abe and Irene Neufeld came back again as Mennonite missionaries to Vienna in 1969. Only this time, they wanted to be financially independent as well as give Austrian believers as much freedom as possible to develop their own denominational affiliation and church structure.³⁵ After Billy Graham's televised *Euro 70* evangelistic campaign, the Neufelds received a list of eight people who responded to the invitation. Within a year, 45 people were coming to the Bible studies, which more than doubled by the following year (1972).³⁶ It was clearly time for the new church to buy a building; which they did, and the church still takes its name from the street where it is located: *Tulpengasse* or "Tuga" for short. Most of the new believers were university students, and the Neufelds allowed many of them to take on leadership responsibility in the church such that by 1977 the church was able to begin hiring full-time staff.³⁷

The church continued to grow, coming to a climax in 1976 when they hosted their own evangelistic campaign in which 500 people made decisions for Christ.³⁸ But discipleship was just as high a priority as evangelism. Börner writes, "The

³¹ Ibid., 122.

³² Winter, *50 Jahre Freie Christengemeinden*, 13.

³³ Ibid., 57.

³⁴ Ibid., 21.

³⁵ Cf. Reinhold Eichinger and Christoph Windler, *Handbuch für Missionare in Österreich: Hintergrundinformationen für die Vorbereitung und Durchführung eines wirkungsvollen Dienstes* (Vienna: Published by the authors, 1999), 131.

³⁶ Cf. Börner, *Freikirchlicher Gemeindebau*, 134.

³⁷ In 1977, Willi Giefing was the first Austrian to be hired full-time as a coordinator for the rapidly-growing, new movement. Cf. *ibid.*, 135.

³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

whole church resembled a study group.”³⁹ Believers were encouraged to immediately begin teaching other new believers so that there were no less than 16 home Bible study groups all around the city. The church building—previously a Viennese bakery—was much too small to hold all of the new believers, and thus the young, Austrian leaders transitioned from an evangelistic to a church-planting ministry. Eleven new churches were planted in less than 15 years in and around the city of Vienna.⁴⁰ Many of these congregations played a strong part in the founding of the BEG and continue to be part of the association. The Tulpengasse movement is a unique example of an indigenous church-planting movement in Austria. Another example is a Plymouth Brethren movement out of Salzburg that began in the 1980’s. Over a period of 20 years from 1989 to 2009, it is estimated that the Salzburg Brethren have grown from 600 to 1,900 members in 24 churches.⁴¹ The emphasis on personal evangelism, discipleship by means of systematic Bible study, and leadership training have helped the Salzburg Brethren to become, in the words of Eichinger, “One of the brightest examples of an Austrian church planting movement.”⁴² While the Austrian people have not been the most responsive group to evangelical missions,⁴³ there have been indigenous people movements among them. One characteristic of the two examples above is that they both enjoyed considerable freedom from foreign mission and denominational structures, allowing indigenous leaders and churches to emerge.

GROWTH OF INDEPENDENT CHURCHES IN THE 1980’S

The 1980’s were a period of rapid growth for evangelicals in Austria. According to *Operation World*, “during the 1980s, congregations almost doubled in number, rising from 57 to 97, and attendances tripled.”⁴⁴ Eichinger calculates that the number of churches and church attendance amongst evangelical churches increased by over 200 percent in the 1980’s; and church membership increased by 260 percent.⁴⁵ Whereas an evangelical church was planted only once every ten years between 1869 and 1945, this figure increased to about one church plant each year between 1946 and 1979. Astonishingly, 88 church plants were started between 1980 and 1999, increasing the number of annual church plants from one to almost five!⁴⁶

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Cf. Eichinger, *Handbuch für Missionare*, 101.

⁴¹ Cf. Börner, *Freikirchlicher Gemeindebau*, 130, and Hinkelmann, *Konfessionskunde*, 177.

⁴² Eichinger, *Handbuch für Missionare*, 131.

⁴³ Cf. David Sanford, “Graveyard of Missions Requires New Approaches,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (Apr 1994): 154ff.

⁴⁴ Cf. Johnstone, *Operation World*, 87.

⁴⁵ These figures are found in slide 38 of a PowerPoint presentation entitled *Österreich unter der Lupe* (Austria under the magnifying glass); a presentation completed in November 2006 by Reinhold Eichinger for a course at the *EVAK* (evangelical academy) which he personally sent to me via email on July 21, 2009.

⁴⁶ Cf. Eichinger, *Handbuch für Missionare*, 95.

It was amidst this period of intense growth that the mainline evangelical denomination known as BEG began to emerge. Toward the end of the sixties, several Baptist, Brethren, and Mennonite churches began working together in the form of joint conferences, seminars, youth retreats, and various other events. Over the next decade, this collaborative spirit spread across Austria such that many likeminded, evangelical churches were working together at a regional level.⁴⁷ At a Bible school in Mittersill in 1981, over 30 evangelical churches founded the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Evangelikaler Gemeinden in Österreich* (working partnership of Evangelical churches in Austria), known and henceforth referred to as ARGEGÖ.⁴⁸ By 1989, the ARGEGÖ had swelled to 42 churches and 19 candidate churches from the Baptist, Brethren, and Mennonite denominations, as well as a host of nondenominational churches.⁴⁹

Many of these churches, particularly the independent ones, were discontent with the ARGEGÖ, desiring a much closer partnership with other congregations. More than joint conferences and training, many were interested in working together more closely, especially in order to plant new churches and send out foreign missionaries.⁵⁰ Thus, in 1992, 17 churches formed the BEG.⁵¹ This number has increased to 45 today as missionaries from Baptist, Brethren, and various other independent mission boards have cooperated with the BEG to plant churches (including the author).⁵²

It was also in the 1980's that the first churches now affiliated with the fifth FKÖ denomination, known as "Elaia Christengemeinden," were started. *Elaia* is a Greek word meaning "olive tree" (cf. Paul's discussion of Jews and Gentiles in Romans 11:11-24) and symbolizes the special emphasis that these charismatic churches place on Israel and the Jewish people. Five churches founded *Elaia* in 2006, which have a combined membership of approximately 450.⁵³

GROWTH OF PENTECOSTALS AND BAPTISTS FROM 1990-2009

What the 1980's and 1990's were for independent and BEG churches, the 1990's and the first decade of the millennium were for the Baptists and especially the Pentecostals. In 1986, the FCG was about as large as the Baptist

⁴⁷ Cf. Börner, *Freikirchlicher Gemeindebau*, V. 29 (S.193).

⁴⁸ Cf. Ibid.

⁴⁹ Cf. Ibid., 41.

⁵⁰ Cf. Eichinger, *Handbuch für Missionare*, 165-66.

⁵¹ BEG wasn't officially recognized by the Austrian state until 1998, not as a church, of course, but, as with the other evangelical denominations, the BEG is registered as a religious body with the curious German title *staatlich eingetragene religiöse Bekenntnisgemeinschaft*. Cf. Hinkelmann, *Konfessionskunde*, 114.

⁵² E.g. *World Venture*; formerly called the *Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society* (CBFMS), *Missionshaus Bibelschule Wiedenest*; *The Evangelical Alliance Mission* (TEAM) and *Greater Europe Mission* (GEM). Cf. *ibid*.

⁵³ Cf. "Geschichte der 'Elaia Christengemeinden'," www.elaia.at, <http://www.elaia.at/werwirsind.html> (accessed November 26, 2015).

denomination,⁵⁴ yet in just 22 years, the Pentecostals now outnumber the Evangelical, Baptist, and Mennonite denominations put together.⁵⁵ Membership in the FCG more than quadrupled, and the number of churches increased from 20 to 69 during this period. There are two principle factors that help to explain this explosion.

First, the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 meant that thousands of Eastern European refugees flooded into Austria, especially Romanians. Bauer claims that, “The year 1989, especially the revolution in Romania between 1989 and 1990, and the ensuing wave of immigration resulting from it, marked a further turning point in Austrian asylum and refugee policy.”⁵⁶ Bauer notes that between 1989 and 1993 the number of foreign citizens living in Austria nearly doubled from 387,000 to 690,000.⁵⁷ And many of these immigrants were Pentecostals. By 1993, seven Romanian churches with a combined membership of 300 joined the FCG.⁵⁸ Apparently, however, the majority of the Romanian Pentecostals did not join the FCG. An independent, Romanian Pentecostal denomination, known as the *Pfingstkirche Gemeinde Gottes* and affiliated with the Church of God in Cleveland, is larger than all other evangelical denominations except for the FCG with over 3,000 members in 23 churches.⁵⁹ As in the postwar period (1945-55), the FCG was once again boosted by a wave of Pentecostal immigrants from abroad.

The Baptists had a similar experience. In 1990, the board set a new goal for the next millennium: *Vision 10:2000*, or doubling the number of Baptist churches and members by planting 10 new churches and doubling the total number of Baptists to 1,400 by the year 2000. This lofty vision was almost fulfilled, yet not the way the Baptists expected. Stuhlhofer admits that, “The ministry amongst immigrants appears to be God’s answer to *Vision 10:2000*.”⁶⁰ Indeed, between 1988 and 2000, the number of Baptists in Austria increased from 762 to 1,150, and the number of churches increased from 14 to 20.⁶¹ Eight of these churches are Romanian and constitute approximately 25 percent of the total number of Baptists in Austria.⁶² Podobri notes that, “The reason for this growth was not due to the success of the church-planting initiatives over the past few years....The growth is essentially due to the large number of immigrant churches which have joined the denomination in the past few years.”⁶³ Thus, as with the postwar period (1945-55),

⁵⁴ 745 Baptists compared with 850 Pentecostals; Cf. Börner, *Freikirchlicher Gemeindebau*, IV. 24 (S. 77); Winter, *50 Jahre Freie Christengemeinden*, 57.

⁵⁵ Cf. Hinkelmann, *Konfessionskunde*, pp. 113; 118; 123; 131: FCG (3,546); BEG (1,500); Baptists (1,335); Mennonites (424).

⁵⁶ Bauer, *Zuwanderung nach Österreich*, 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁸ Hinkelmann, *Konfessionskunde*, 125; Winter, *50 Jahre Freie Christengemeinden*, 57.

⁵⁹ Cf. Hinkelmann, *Ibid.*, 135ff.

⁶⁰ Stuhlhofer, *Frisches Wasser auf dürres Land*, 166.

⁶¹ Cf. Stuhlhofer, *Ibid.*; Börner, *Freikirchlicher Gemeindebau*, IV. 24 (s. 77). In contrast, between 1978 and 1988 the total membership of the Baptist denomination only increased from 680 to 762.

⁶² Cf. Stuhlhofer, *Ibid.*

⁶³ Podobri, *Transformation in Österreich*, 140.

the rapid growth amongst the Pentecostal and Baptist denominations in the 1990's was once again more an import of Christians from abroad as opposed to an indigenous people or church-planting movement. This trend has continued today; where in Vienna alone, there are approximately 2,750⁶⁴ members of at least 20 ethnic churches that don't belong to any registered religious body in Austria, which have worship services in English, French, Spanish, Romanian, Serbian, Polish, Hungarian, Portuguese, Mandarin, Korean, Japanese, Thai, Filipino, Amharic (Ethiopian), Arabic, Farsi, and many more languages.⁶⁵

The second reason why the Pentecostal denomination has grown so large over the past two decades is its unique structure, allowing for diversity of expression. If one visits the BEG's homepage, churches are organized geographically according to the province where they are located.⁶⁶ The FCG, however, is divided into different branches according to each church's distinct identity. Besides the Romanian branch (nine churches), there are eight churches known as the charismatic branch, nine churches united under the motto "Vision for Austria" that are devoted to social and cultural relevance,⁶⁷ and ten international or English-speaking churches.⁶⁸ This expansion mainly took place in 2005 and 2006 in which no less than 25 churches (the charismatic and "Vision for Austria" branches) joined the FCG. Admitting these churches into the denomination involved more than just letting them have their own names. There are also differences in eschatological views, the role of women, corporate worship, and spiritual gifts (e.g. healing).⁶⁹ After five years of round table discussions, however, the FCG felt that there was more uniting than dividing them and also believed that, by their union, a prophecy ("Harvest 2000") made within their denomination would be fulfilled.⁷⁰

AUSTRIA: STILL A MISSION FIELD TODAY

Despite the rapid increase in the number and size of churches planted since the 1980's, Austria is still an evangelical mission field in the first degree. Members of evangelical churches still account for less than 0.3 percent of the total population. The recent immigration waves from the Middle East will increase the growth of Islam in Austria, where the number of Muslims grew from 22,267 in 1971 to over

⁶⁴ Cf. Hinkelmann, *Konfessionskunde*, 205.

⁶⁵ Cf. Eichinger, *Österreich unter d. Lupe*, slide 53.

⁶⁶ Bund evangelikaler Gemeinden in Österreich, "Gemeindeverzeichnis," *www.beg.or.at*, <http://www.beg.or.at/index.php/content/view/18/38/> (accessed April 25, 2012).

⁶⁷ Cf. Hinkelmann, *Konfessionskunde*, 126.

⁶⁸ Freie Christengemeinde – Pfingstgemeinde in Österreich, "The churches," *fcgoe.at*, <http://fcgoe.at/> (accessed April 24, 2012).

⁶⁹ Toni Bergmair, "Wir Begrüßen 16 neue Gemeinden in der Bewegung!" *Lebensbotschaft* 58 (December, 2005), 1-2, *fcgoe.at*, <http://fcgoe.at/>, http://fcgoe.at/deutsch/gemeinden/05_neue_gemeinden.pdf (accessed April 24, 2012).

⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 2.

500,000 or 6 percent of the total population in 2010.⁷¹ Secularism is an even greater force as the number of those who do not have any religious affiliation increased from 4 percent (260,000) in 1951 to 12 percent (ca. 1 million) in 2001 and continues to rise rapidly.⁷² Eichinger and Windler claim that the only place in the world that has fewer missionaries per nonbeliever than Austria (1 in 25,282)⁷³ is the Asian continent (1 in 102,477).⁷⁴ Not counting Pentecostal and charismatic churches, Eichinger reports that 47 of the largest 100 cities in Austria as well as 95 percent of all towns do not have even one evangelical church.⁷⁵ Operation Mobilisation's figures are much more current and inclusive, yet the picture they paint is not much more hopeful than that of BEG. According to OM's 2012 *Vision 5000* map, there are approximately 119 cities in Austria with over 5,000 inhabitants and 20 cities of over 10,000 inhabitants that do not have even a single evangelical church.⁷⁶ There is still a lot of work for evangelicals to do.

CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on providing a historical survey of the emergence, growth and development of evangelicalism in Austria since 1945 as represented by the groups of churches in the FKÖ. One of the key findings was the influence of immigration on the growth of evangelicalism, especially in the decade after WWII and after the fall of Communism in 1989. Throughout the short history of evangelicalism in Austria, immigrants have proven to be a receptive group to the gospel, both as concerns transfer growth (i.e. Christians from abroad immigrating to Austria) as well as conversion growth (i.e. immigrants who were not previously evangelical converting to the Christian faith). Therefore, evangelicals in Austria would do well to give greater attention to evangelizing and ministering to foreign immigrants. This is especially relevant as immigration in Austria, along with the rest of Western Europe, is currently reaching record numbers due to political turmoil in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Second, while evangelicals remain a very small minority with less than 0.3 percent of the population, there have been some people movements amongst the Austrian people themselves. The examples provided heavily emphasized mobilization and leadership training of the laity. The Second Republic of Austria has increasingly granted religious freedom to evangelicals, as demonstrated by the 2013 approval of the FKÖ as a state-recognized church.

⁷¹ Cf. Erich Kocina, "Neue Daten: Mehr als 500.000 Muslime in Österreich," *diepresse.com*, February 25, 2010, http://diepresse.com/home/panorama/oesterreich/542461/Neue-Daten_Mehr-als-500000-Muslime-in-Oesterreich (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁷² Cf. Statistik Austria, "Bevölkerung zu Quartalsbeginn seit 2002 nach Bundesland."

⁷³ This figure is suspect, however. According to *Operation World* (p. 87) there were 539 missionaries in Austria in 2000; which means one missionary for every 15,232 people (divided by the general population, not "nonbelievers").

⁷⁴ Cf. Eichinger, *Handbuch für Missionare*, 9.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁷⁶ The *Vision 5000* map was recently completed by Peter Brandes (OM Austria) and sent to me personally via email on April 25, 2012.

Austrian evangelicals must take advantage of this freedom, focusing their resources on raising up indigenous leaders and church planters. May Austrian evangelicals be aware of their unique history and learn from it in order to be even more effective in reaching Austria for Christ in the future.

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