



Dear Praying Friends in Europe,

Demographic trends, religion and Christian faith in Europe

In my previous article (Canopy 174), we looked at the demographic decline in Europe, aggravated by the practice of abortion, and how the population only remains stable due to immigration. In this article we will continue reflecting on the demographic changes in our continent and relate them to religion in general and the Christian faith in particular. This is a very short summary of a chapter in my book *Christian Faith and the Making of Europe* (Nuremberg, VTR, 2021). The trends we mention are based on several sources, such as the Pew Forum Report *Demographics and Religion*.

Firstly, behind the overall figures of population growth/decline there are important differentials that are usually overlooked. The birth rate is higher among religious compared to non-religious women; and even more so in conservative streams within the religion (e.g. traditional and evangelical Christians), compared to liberal and progressive streams. Clearly, religious values are more in favour of parenthood and family, and this is even stronger among those who are more attached to the traditional teachings of their religion.

Secondly, many more people switch from following a religion to being non-religious, than the other way round. This explains why the percentage of the population that identifies as non-religious keeps growing, despite their very low fertility rate.

So, adding these differences up, in terms of only natural growth the future of Europe is religious rather than secularised. More young children in Europe grow up in a religious family and environment, and mostly in a conservative/traditional context.

As for Muslims in Europe, the more they are integrated into society, the fewer children they have. Their birth rate is still higher than that of Christians, but this 'advantage' is diminishing over the years. Also encouraging is that far more Muslims convert to Christianity than vice versa. However, it is still true that the Muslim percentage of the population is increasing, which is largely due to continued immigration.

Another important thing to look at is the birth rate differential between indigenous and immigrant families. Countries with a large influx of non-European migrants in the last decades show a higher fertility rate than other countries. That is because immigrants have larger families than indigenous Europeans, and this is true of those from both Christian and Muslim backgrounds. (The ratio between Christian background and Muslim background immigration has been about fifty-fifty over the last decades – contrary to popular opinion.) Therefore, the higher natural growth of immigrants strengthens both the Muslim presence and the Christian presence in Europe – in existing churches as well as in the many migrant churches. We see both trends in any urban area in Western Europe.



So, immigration is one of the reasons that practising Christians remain a large and influential minority and will continue to do so. We are not dying out! Our number equals that of convinced atheist people in Western Europe, and we largely outnumber them in Central and Eastern Europe.

Finally, since Christian communities have a demographic advantage in terms of natural growth, the challenge for us is how to evangelise and 'retain' our children and young people and encourage them to follow the Lord in their life. If we manage to 'retain', by the grace of God, more than 1.5 children per woman (the average birth rate in Europe), the Christian percentage of the population will increase!

Points for Prayer

- Those of us who follow Jesus seriously tend to have larger families, but we are losing people when they give up their faith. Pray for those who are doubting their faith. May they find Jesus very near to them.
- We don't need to fear that Muslims will take over Europe through having large families, but we should be cautious about Muslim immigration. Pray for wisdom for our governments in this area.
- Christian immigrants strengthen our churches and also form their own churches. Pray for unity between the indigenous and immigrant members of Christ's body in Europe.
- It is vital that our young people follow Jesus. He is worth it! Pray for parents, churches and those who work with children and youth, that they can help young people stand up for their faith as they go their way in society.

Summer Break

We, the Canopy editorial team, would like to thank you all who pray with us for the continent of Europe. We would also like to thank all those who have contributed as authors.

This will be the last issue before the summer break, and we hope you will have a good summer.

The Canopy will return in September, and we look forward to how the Lord will lead us as we pray and seek His will for our continent.

"I thank my God every time I remember you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Phil.1:3-6

Further Prayer:-

1. Praise God that the Bible Proclamation at the geographical centre of Europe in Lithuania last week went well. We read the whole Bible out loud over 3.5 days in 18 different languages! May Europe's future be strongly based on God's Word.
2. Let us continue to pray for the elections in various counties across Europe over the summer. Particularly those in France, Croatia and Austria and also for the UK as it adjusts to the change of government after yesterday's election.

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