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European Mission in Crisis

The economic crisis that began in the summer of 2008 with the collapse of Lehman Brothers reverberated all around the world. Arguably its most dramatic effects were to be found in Europe: the collapse of revered financial institutions, the bailouts of high-street banks and a collapse in share values plunged many European economies into recession and led to a sovereign debt crisis which threatened Greece with expulsion from the Euro and even the survival of the Euro itself.

The impact of the recession on European citizens has been inescapable: rising unemployment, public-sector pay freezes (and in some countries reductions), pensions under threat, welfare spending restricted, to mention just a few of the consequences and austerity measures enacted by governments. We might sum up these factors in a single word: insecurity.

Religion and insecurity

Empirically all of those who are involved in Christian mission know that in times of

crisis people are more open to God. As the saying goes “there are no atheists in the trenches”. However, sociologists are only now beginning to discover just how strong a link there is between religion and insecurity.

Since the 19th Century sociologists of religion have argued that religious belief and practice would decline as modernization provided a more rational and scientific explanation of life, and replaced the social functions of religion with secular alternatives. This process of secularization was considered until recently to be an irrefutable fact. Yet over the last thirty years the secularization thesis has come under attack from many quarters, not least because it flies in the face of facts: an increasing majority of the world population holds a religious worldview, and there are many countries where modernization has not led inevitably to religious decline. Europe, however, has proved to be in Grace Davie’s words, an exceptional case of secularity.

At the turn of the century, the American political scientists Pippa Norris and Ron

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EDITORIAL

Good News for the Poor

*“...to encounter crisis
is to encounter the possibility
of truly being the Church”.*
David Bosch

If Christians have nothing to say in times of crisis then we have nothing to say at all. The gospel is good news precisely because it offers salvation from the most fundamental crisis that besets humanity—our alienation from God. Yet as Jesus himself said, this gospel is particularly good news for the poor, the incarcerated, the blind and the oppressed (Luke 4:18).

At a time of financial crisis in Europe and around the world we wanted to dedicate this edition of Vista the challenge of doing mission in a context of crisis.

The lead article reveals how sociologists are beginning to see the connection between insecurity and religion and how this may provide a unique opportunity for this generation of Christians to speak into the secular arena a message of hope.

Darrell Jackson reflects on the crisis and suggests that the way forward will involve a renewal of the social vision of the Christian scriptures. Jo Appleton surveys some of the ways that churches and mission agencies are already engaged in this, providing real answers to some of the crises that beset 21st Century Europe: poverty, debt, homelessness and human trafficking.

This issue of Vista concludes with two special contributions, a theological reflection by Andrzej Turkanik of the Quo Vadis Institute in Austria, and a book review by Jeff Fountain of the Schuman Centre for European Studies. Our prayer is that you would not only find this issue of Vista an interesting read but also a challenge to action as we seek to preach hope in a Europe in crisis.

Jim Memory

Inglehart put forward a new theory to explain religious variations worldwide. Their book, *Sacred and Secular: religion and politics worldwide*, made use of the data from the World Values Survey/European Values Survey, and suggested that higher levels of religiosity in certain societies can be explained by higher levels of insecurity. In particular they found that two core conditions of economic insecurity (lower levels of human development and higher levels of socio-economic inequality) were positively associated with religiosity (Figure 1).

Further research on the role of contextual economic insecurities (e.g. income inequality) has generally supported Norris and Inglehart's findings. But until recently no detailed study had been made of individual economic insecurities, such as unemployment, nor of existential insecurities such as the threat of terrorism or the loss of a partner.

In a 2011 paper, Immerzeel and van Tubergen, used data from the four rounds of the European Social Survey (2002-2008) to test the theory. They began by making a distinction between two dimensions of security: economic and existential.

Economic insecurity refers to a person's economic experience (level of income, unemployment, etc.) whereas existential insecurity is concerned with the experience of life-changing or life-threatening situations (death of a partner, threat of terrorism, etc.). They also establish a distinction between past and present insecurities, and between individual and contextual factors. Table 1 shows the types of insecurity, the level and whether past, present or both time perspectives figured in their analysis.

Immerzeel and van Tubergen found that both economic and existential insecurities play a role in religiosity and these effects were observed in both private and public dimensions.

Economic insecurity

Current employment. The data clearly shows that the better a person's current economic position, the less religious they are: "employed people with an unlimited (permanent) contract are significantly less religious than people who have a temporary contract, who are unemployed, who are a student, or who are inactive" (p6). Across the 26 countries weekly attendance by temporary employees is 15% higher than permanent ones, for unemployed 31% higher, and students 81% higher.

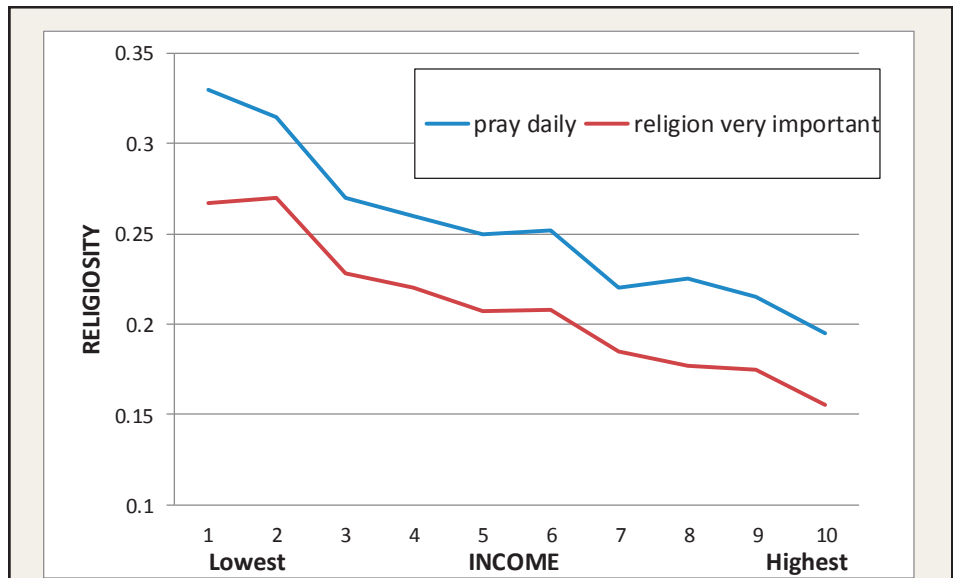


Figure 1— Percentage of the public who pray daily and who regard religion as very important by household income in postindustrial societies (Source: Norris and Inglehart 2011, 109; data from World Values Survey 1981-2001)

Type of insecurity	Level	Time Perspective	
		Past	Present
Economic			
1. Employment	Individual	✓	✓
2. Social welfare spending	Contextual		✓
3. Unemployment rate	Contextual		✓
Existential			
4. Health	Individual		✓
5. Loss of partner	Individual	✓	
6. Threat of terrorism	Individual		✓
7. Experience of war	Contextual	✓	

Table 1— Typology of Insecurity by level and whether the result of the past or present (Source: Immerzeel and van Tubergen 2011, 3)

Past employment. The worse one's experience of employment as a child the more religious one is in the present. This is true both for unemployed fathers and mothers. However, personal experience of unemployment seems to have the opposite effect, leader to lower levels of subjective religiosity and church attendance.

Welfare spending. There appears to be no significant relationship between welfare spending and subjective religiosity but this may reflect the small relative difference between the European countries in the sample and may be significant when compared with other countries with no welfare provision.

Unemployment rate. Immerzeel and van Tubergen found evidence of a relationship between unemployment rate and weekly attendance, but not for subjective religiosity.

Existential insecurity

Health. People who perceive their health as good have lower subjective religiosity scores than those with bad health. In the case of attendance the opposite trend is observed: people who perceive themselves as more healthy are 25% more likely to attend church weekly than those who see their health as poor. They suggest that while people with bad health may be more religious they are less able to attend religious meetings than those who are healthy.

Loss of partner. People who lost their partner (the widowed) are more religious than those who have never lost a partner. In fact the widowed are significantly more religious in both subjective religiosity and church attendance than the married, cohabiting, separated, divorced or single.

War. Once again there is a clear positive association of the experience of war with religiosity: those who have experienced a war perceive themselves as more religious and have an 18% higher odds of attending church weekly compared to those who have never experienced armed conflict.

Terrorism. There is some indication that the more one believes that a terrorist attack is likely, the more religious one is.

Overall the results suggest that economic insecurity is more important for explaining religiosity than existential insecurity. Past and present insecurities and individual and contextual factors were found to influence religiosity in roughly equal measure.

Missiological Conclusions

It is clear that there may be many different reasons for people to feel insecure but whatever the reason, the statistics suggest that insecurity is often correlated with religiosity, even in Europe. In particular, it appears that economic insecurity is associated with increasing religiosity.

The current economic crisis may prove to be a golden opportunity for the churches of Europe, perhaps a unique one for the current generation of Europeans, to demonstrate the hope that Christ offers to all who will come to him. I use the word demonstrate deliberately, since proclamation will not be sufficient. Economic insecurities will need to be met with more than words. Many churches are engaged in action against poverty, in debt counselling, in employment creation and some of these initiatives are featured in this edition of Vista. Yet surely we can and must do more.

As we have observed in previous editions of Vista, secularization may have reached its limit and religious attitudes and values are showing some signs of a rebound. Churches and mission agencies must seize the day and despite our own economic insecurities, demonstrate our faith in the “trenches” of 21st Century Europe.

European Mission in Crisis is not a headline declaring our weakness but rather a declaration of our calling, to take the message of Christ in word and deed into the crises of Europe, in heartfelt confidence that Christ is still the hope for today’s Europeans.

Jim Memory

Sources:

Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge: CUP, 2004, 2011

Immerzeel and van Tubergen, “Religion as Reassurance? Testing the Insecurity Theory in 26 European Countries”, *European Sociological Review Advance Access*, 2011

CRISIS AT CHRISTMAS, EASTER AND THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Darrell Jackson calls for a renewal of the social vision of Christian mission in Europe.

Only four hours before I sat down to start writing this piece, I was asked a question about the impact of the ‘GFC’ on the churches and their mission in Europe. This shorthand for ‘global financial crisis’ may yet go into the dictionary and become as widely used as JFK or RAC. The impact has been multilayered and is certainly complex but it can be presented reasonably comprehensively in the following way.

A financial crisis

Mission agencies, Christian charities and churches have seen their budgets hit significantly by reduced income. Some can point to continued faithful and sacrificial giving by their regular supporters but there have certainly been casualties and cutbacks. In June 2001 the 29 congregations of the Greek Evangelical Church reported a reduction in support for drug rehabilitation programmes and in payments to pastors and pensioners. Similarly, the Greek Orthodox Church was informed that the state-supplied salaries of its priests were to be cut by up to 50%.

The Italian Government is currently considering taxing church property in order to increase tax revenues. Reports surfaced in March of this year that church-owned profit-making ventures such as hotels, restaurants, or stores were likely to be taxed and that as the second largest land-owner in Italy, the Vatican would be particularly hard hit.

In Hungary, by contrast, around 60 recession-hit state schools have been handed over to the Reformed Church and about 40 to Roman Catholic Churches during the latter part of 2011. The Reformed Church’s response was cautious although it believed that the move could potentially offer several advantages, communal and financial, because many of their existing Church-run schools are backed by significant community involvement.

A social crisis

In December 2011 the Conference of European Churches called for concerted action by the EU that meets ‘the needs of the people at the centre of the solution’. Prior to a meeting with the European Council, CEC church leaders said that this was not only a financial and economic crisis. In their view the crisis was political and ethical: we might add that it is also a social and spiritual crisis. Sustainable solutions that put people first were urged by Europe’s Christian leaders. Romanian church leaders spoke out in May



2011 to head off attempts by economic and political leaders to limit church contributions to addressing only the spiritual dimensions of the current crisis. A biblical response places spiritual dimensions at the heart of social and communal networks, suggesting that financially challenged individuals are also spiritual individuals and that these aspects of human experience are inextricably linked. Referring to a social crisis draws attention to the need to account for the human cost of the crisis to be addressed alongside attempts to balance national accounts.

A crisis of values

Few Christian commentators deny that the crisis, fuelled by the ready supply of cheap credit provided by Europe’s financial institutes, is a consequence of crass materialism and naked consumerism. The demise of many of the major credit suppliers seems already to be a fading memory. There is as yet little evidence that the crisis has provoked a widespread return to a more values-driven society, particularly a society driven by Christian values.

Meanwhile, secular commentators have suggested that in the face of predictions of decline, the economic, political, demographic and cultural assets of Europe would be likely to continue to drive the region’s global leadership. Church leaders argue, on the contrary, that without a renewal of the values that underlie the current crisis, further crises can be expected. A renewal of Christendom is certainly not what Europe needs right now but the social vision of the Christian Scripture certainly deserves urgent consideration by Europe’s political and economic leaders.

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MISSIONAL RESPONSES TO THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

Homelessness, debt and human trafficking that have become even bigger issues since the onset of the crisis. How are churches and mission agencies responding?

The figures make depressing reading. In 2010, around 23% of the EU-27 population – nearly 116 million people – were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This means they met at least one of the following criteria: they were below the poverty threshold, experiencing severe material deprivation or living in a household with very low work intensity.

But while less than 15% of those living in the Czech Republic, Sweden and the Netherlands were at risk, over 40% of Bulgarians and Romanians and more than 30% of Latvians, Lithuanians and Hungarians struggled with these issues.

Responding to need – working with volunteers

Serve the City was founded in Brussels in 2005, and “inspired by the life and message of Jesus Christ”, the movement now spreads across Europe and beyond, with the most recent launch being Athens, Greece. As an organisation, they connect volunteers with the local charities or associations working with people in need. Carlton Deal is *Serve the City*'s founder.

“Today we see more homelessness, more refugees, more people with no certain future,” says Carlton. “They have lost their families or their jobs or they are still pouring in from even more difficult circumstances elsewhere.”

“Single men in particular receive very little support. Last year Afghan refugees told us stories of approaching the police and identifying themselves as illegal aliens,

asking to be arrested just to have a meal and a place to sleep indoors. The police ignored them.”

Anyone can volunteer with *Serve the City* – and Carlton considers helping volunteers who are not yet Christians to recognise Christ's love in action to be part of the organisation's missional response.

“We see a decreasing satisfaction in delegated compassion and an increasing desire for personal involvement,” says Carlton. “We believe these are Kingdom values, giving volunteers a new access point to the message of Jesus. People are increasingly motivated to acquire and spend the currency of the kingdom, whether or not they yet recognize Jesus as its King – in fact, I'm not sure we see as much growth in generosity from Christians as we do from those who are not yet followers of Jesus.”

Responding to debt – local churches get involved

One of the indicators of severe material deprivation mentioned above is “the inability to face unexpected financial expenses”, with 36% of the EU-27 population in this category. More than 85% of the Swedish population are able to cope with sudden strain on their finances. Over 75% of people in Austria, Luxembourg, Denmark and the Netherlands are similarly prepared. At the other end of the scale, only 20-40% of people in Lithuania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Latvia could withstand this kind of financial pressure.

There is a clear East-West divide to these statistics. Interestingly, figures for the ratio

between household debt and income also display a divide across East/Western lines, but in the opposite direction. While in 2009, it would have taken two years of disposable income for the average household in Ireland, the Netherlands and Denmark to pay off their debts, in Central and Eastern European countries levels of household debt are such that it would take less than a year. Given that these countries also have a smaller average disposable income, personal debt appears to be a much bigger problem in the more affluent West.



Christians Against Poverty (CAP) is a UK-based organisation offering local churches a practical way to help people around them in debt. In contrast to *Serve the City*, each CAP centre is set-up and resourced in direct partnership with a specific church in an area, so it becomes a ministry of that church. CAP centres offer a free debt counselling service helping clients to work out a realistic budget and negotiating affordable payments to creditors, as well as support if people go bankrupt. Clients have a professional case worker in the main CAP office but they are also befriended by trained volunteers from the local church.

Since beginning in 1996, the charity has grown rapidly and its vision is to see a local church-based centre in every UK town and city. Their free *CAP Money* money management course teaches people “the skills to get more in control of their finances, so they can save, give and prevent debt” and is on offer in Norway as well as the UK.

Responding to trafficking – joined up thinking

“The global financial crisis is having a marked impact on human trafficking... its effects are felt within the EU” (OSCE, 2009). Potential employment in another country is a major pull factor for migrants from areas of high unemployment. In desperation, they are tricked by traffickers who promise them a job - only to end up in prostitution or slavery of some sort when they eventually arrive.

There are many grass roots projects organised by churches and mission agencies





across Europe reaching out the victims of trafficking, as well as advocacy movements such as *Stop the Traffik*.

At a pan-European level, the EEA's *European Freedom Network* (EFN) connects 'active and emerging ministries and other stakeholders across Europe...providing the encouragement, advice, resources and prayer that they need for effective action and cooperation'. A host of resources for

prayer and information are available on the EFN website, and they produce a partners' newsletter with more resources and contacts.

Responding as ourselves

This article highlights just three of the hundreds of ways Christians across Europe are responding to the financial crisis. But the Christian community is also feeling its impact. A 2009 survey amongst over 2800 UK Christians found that almost a quarter struggled with debt or financial issues, and more than half of those in employment "faced high levels of time pressures and fatigue".

57% of people answering the questionnaire saw themselves as 'an apprentice of Christ' and a similar number were "praying about how God could use them to make a difference" - but 63% felt the church equipped them at best 'only a little' to face the pressures in the workplace.

In response to these needs, the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity's *Engaging with Work* project seeks to resource Christians to 'honour God in their work and bring Him into their workplace'. Their *Imagine* project goes further, aiming

to help churches change their focus from 'what happens on a Sunday' to equipping people to live as disciples the other six days of the week.

And so, when considering *mission in a time of crisis* and our role as individuals and churches, our challenge is to respond in distinctive, counter-cultural ways, drawing our strength from God and his amazing love for the world.

Joanne Appleton

Sources:

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- Stop the Traffik www.stopthetraffik.org
- European Freedom Network www.europeanfreedomnetwork.org
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CONFIDENCE IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

A friend of mine wants to get rid of his TV set. The reason: every time he watches the news, he gets depressed. Stories such as the European debt crisis, the status of the European monetary system, unemployment rates with ensuing immigration challenges, increasing medical costs and another paedophile or corruption story permeate the airwaves causing many to feel anxious and uncertain.

One of the challenges with the globalized world is the assault of information through computers, televisions, cell phones and perhaps media that we are not even aware of now but will surely be "vital" to our lives by year's end.

Isolating ourselves from this information is not the answer. We must look for the answers by understanding the underlying causes which include, among other things, a basic human characteristic of greed resulting in excessive consumption, pride and entitlement. There is hope but I believe it is not found in traditional areas where political and economic leaders search.

The solution demands not just a brilliant idea or a rich and well-organized country

that treat the symptoms of problems without addressing the underlying causes, but a person. It is in the darkest moments that the presence of the followers of Jesus can encourage a society which has lost hope.

Believers may feel overwhelmed by the speed and complexity of these challenges, which for many form the predominate concerns of today's world. The good news for us and those around us is we do not need to stare into the face of the crisis and the abyss of despair, but rather into the face of the One who repeatedly said to those around him, "Do not be afraid". The fact that He called us to follow him in Europe today means that it is perhaps for such a time as this we are here and now.

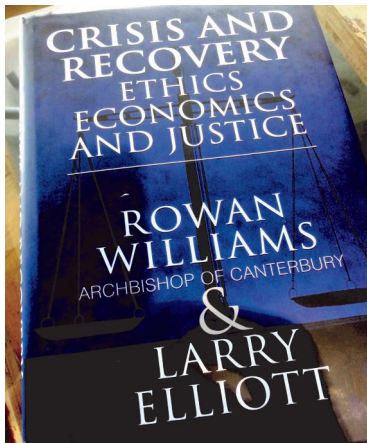
We are neither immune to the problems around us, nor are we in possession of the answer to the issues. Perhaps we feel the tension similar to the one the first disciples felt as Jesus was about to depart. But he deliberately left them *in* the situation giving them the tools to manage. At the very end of Matthew's Gospel, the end of the Great Commission passage, Jesus tells the disciples: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."



The gift of Jesus' presence to the disciples then, as well as to us now, and continuing until the end of time, is a sufficient guarantee that someone has complete control over the affairs of the world, including an unstable Europe. It is He, the great I AM, who promised to accompany the helpless and the hopeless. But as for the first disciples so also for us the challenge remains the same: "go".

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We are delighted to present *Bibliotheca*, a new regular feature where we review a recent book on the main topic in each edition of *Vista*. This first review, of a book on the world economic crisis co-authored by Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, is by Jeff Fountain, the Director of the Schuman Centre for European Studies.



Crisis and recovery: ethics, economics and justice, ed. Rowan Williams and Larry Elliott; Macmillan/Palgrave, 2010

Three years ago, the Archbishop of Canterbury gathered a group of experts together at Lambeth Palace to seek ways to restore ethics and justice in global economics after the financial turmoil beginning in 2007.

A year later, the discussion was published in book form with the title, *Crisis and recovery: ethics, economics and justice*. Rowan Williams, in his foreword, reveals the prevailing sense at the time that perhaps the worst was over, and that the temptation was thus 'to drift towards the default setting of modern liberal capitalism once more'. The point of the book (which he co-edited with Larry Elliott, the economics editor of the *Guardian*) was 'to insist that this would be monumentally irresponsible; as immoral as it is unintelligent'.

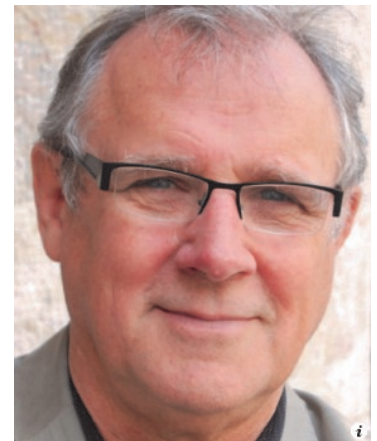
Subsequent developments have shown such language to be fully justified. Two years further on, the crisis continues to deepen, is threatening the existence of the euro, has brought Greece to the verge of bankruptcy and is putting immense strain on relationships within the EU.

The whole scenario is hugely complex and confusing for laypeople like myself. A handy volume of essays based on this consultation would be a welcome primer on the crisis, especially an evaluation in the light of biblical ethics. The pace of events has unfortunately quickly outdated some of the presentations, useful as they are for understanding the background and developments up to 2009.

The consultation was a British affair and understandably the book focuses on the British scene. However, as the archbishop represents a church with global reach, I had hoped for a broader perspective.

Nevertheless the Lambeth Palace initiative was laudable as a prophetic expression of the church. While Williams describes the book as 'a modest collection of reflections on the disasters and follies of very recent times', he adds his hope that it would be 'an unashamedly immodest and ambitious plea for a renewal of political culture and social vision, a renewal of civic energy and creativity in our own country and worldwide'.

The nine chapters from economists, politicians, journalists and the archbishop himself address both economic issues and deeper questions concerning the kind of



society we have become. Elliott offers a very helpful overview of the development of the globalised economy following the collapse of communism, which allowed free movement of capital as digital technology created an unprecedented integrated market. The recent 'near-death experience of the global economy' demanded a fundamental rethink, not just to prevent a future crisis, but also 'to counter the threat of climate change, to divide the economic spoils more equitably, and to provide an alternative set of values'.

Other chapters in the book offer analyses of the crisis from a variety of perspectives and proposals for ethical and just economics. These issues are far too serious to be left only to economists and politicians. Archbishop Williams has initiated a vital debate that deserves to be picked up and sustained by disciples of Jesus in all walks of life, everywhere.

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VISTA: YOUR VIEWS ON MISSION IN EUROPE

The *Vista* editorial team are delighted to have contributions from two guests in this edition, a theological reflection and a book review. However, we want to go further in opening up *Vista* to views from around Europe on the key issues in mission across our continent.

So we want to remind you of what we announced in the last *Vista*, that we invite articles from people engaged in mission research or practice in Europe, based on the theme for each issue. These could include research-based analysis, a topical case study, or fresh perspectives and

comment. Articles should be between 600 and 1200 words long.

Submission guidelines and the editorial calendar can be found online at europeanmission.redcliffe.org. Feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Themes for future issues are:
July 2012: Migration
October 2012: Urbanization
Jan 2013: Training for European Mission

We look forward to making you part of the *Vista* team,

Darrell Jackson, Jim Memory, Joanne Appleton



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