



Dynamics and Stability in Globally Expanding Charismatic Religions

The Case of the Vineyard Movement in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland

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ABSTRACT This article examines processes of religious transfer taking place in the neo-Charismatic Vineyard movement by analyzing the development of the German-speaking branch, Vineyard Deutschland, Österreich, Schweiz (DACH), in comparison to its American sister association. By drawing from first-hand interviews with congregational leaders and analyses of websites and other digital and print material, the article shows that Vineyard DACH is pursuing an unusually collaborative strategy to integrate into the German-speaking Christian landscape by forging close ties to both the Christian mainstream and its periphery. At the same time, it accentuates its identity as part of the international Vineyard network as a global charismatic movement. In this way, it negotiates the tension between the dynamics of expansion and the stability of a coherent self-identity, which is a distinguishing trait of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. This development may be indicative of broader changes occurring in the religious landscape of German-speaking Europe in the early twenty-first century.

KEYWORDS Charismatic Christianity, Pentecostalism, Vineyard, Germany, Switzerland, dynamics and stability

Introduction

Charismatic Christianity, which includes traditions as diverse as classical Pentecostals, Charismatic renewal currents within Catholic and Protestant churches, and neo-Pentecostal or neo-Charismatic churches, is the most rapidly growing strain within Christianity worldwide (Miller 2013; Anderson 2010). Very heterogeneous, its most defining characteristic is an emphasis on the physical and emotional experience of the Holy Spirit, which is communally celebrated by drawing from a variety of ritual styles (e.g. Meyer 2010). Neo-Charismatics differ from classical Pentecostals and Charismatic renewalists in their theological diversity; strongly linked

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to the church growth movement (Wagner 2012), they perceive personal conversion as the central moment of “Spirit Baptism”, emphasize “signs and wonders” as evidence of divine intervention in the world, and engage in different forms of “spiritual warfare” (Zimmerling 2009; Hunt 1997; DeBernardi 1999). However, despite a “fixation on the charismata” (Hunt 2002), instances of glossolalia, prophecy, and similarly ‘extraverted’ practices out of classical Pentecostalism are less frequent in neo-Charismatic circles (Robbins 2004; Ziefle 2016). Instead, seeking to accommodate middle class values such as a sense of spiritual depravity and the desire for self-development (Hunt 2002), neo-Charismatics are characterized by increasingly charismatic perceptions of Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit (Luhmann 2012b, 2012a) as well as simple theologies and a “sentimentalization” of the faith (Brenneman 2014), which promotes religious subjectivism (Marti and Ganiel 2014).

Despite the growth of Charismatic Christianity, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, little social scientific research on it exists for continental Europe (Scandinavia being an exception, see Moberg and Skjoldli 2018). Against the backdrop of secularization theory and the relative decrease of religiosity in this part of the world (e.g. Pollack and Rosta 2015), this article argues that precisely because mainstream Christianity is losing members in droves, an investigation of the Christian periphery is necessary to gain insight into how the Christian landscape is reacting to its own decline and how it might be transforming beyond simply losing members. In fact, a closer look at the periphery reveals active, stable Christian congregations—particularly Pentecostal-Charismatic ones—with high degrees of communalization (*Vergemeinschaftung*, or communal relationships, see Tönnies [1912] 1980; Weber [1922] 1978) and growing membership bodies (Pollack and Rosta 2015).

Regarding in particular the case of German-speaking Europe, while some studies on classical Pentecostalism and charismatic renewal initiatives exist (Stolz et al. 2014, 2011; Bergunder and Haustein 2006; Kern 1998), the other end of the Pentecostal-Charismatic spectrum, namely neo-Charismatic churches, remains underresearched. However, studies on neo-Charismatics in other parts of the world have shown that these churches are attracting disaffected mainstream Christians, particularly younger people, and thereby slowly transforming the Christian landscape (e.g. Riches and Wagner 2017). For this reason, a closer look at neo-Charismatic Christianity is necessary, including in Western Europe. This article contributes to filling this research gap by examining the German-speaking branch of the neo-Charismatic Vineyard movement¹ in comparison to its American sister association. By drawing on ‘dynamics’ and ‘stability’ as analytical concepts,² it traces the process of religious transfer from the United States, where the Vineyard originated, to the German-speaking countries in Europe, where it is slowly but steadily growing. What is striking about this development is the degree of divergence which the German-speaking association exhibits from the American ‘original’, on the one hand, and its strong identity as being part of the same global charismatic movement, on the other.

1 While the Vineyard perceives itself as a movement and I continue to call it that in what follows, by no means do I claim that it matches the sociological category of movement as a social form (see e.g. Schlamelcher 2018 on religious social forms). The Vineyard is comprised of a range of social forms, the most prominent being organization, network, and group (see also Neumaier and Schlamelcher 2014). By referring to Vineyard USA and Vineyard DACH as individual associations, I do not intend to essentialize their internal variety and nuance but, on the contrary, to make use of emic differentiations to highlight internal differences and similarities from an etic perspective.

2 See the working paper “Dynamics and Stability” (https://static.ceres.rub.de/media/filer_public/55/e0/55e030f4-048e-4624-a155-775e30a10330/khk_eric_6_dynamics.pdf, last accessed August 8, 2019), developed by researchers at the Käte-Hamburger-Kolleg *Dynamics in the History of Religions Between Asia and Europe* at the Center for Religious Studies (CERES), Ruhr-Universität Bochum.

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The Vineyard emerged out of the Jesus People Movement in California in the early 1980s and is considered one of the central representatives of neo-Charismatic Christianity (Miller 1997). It caters to a typically younger to middle-aged, predominantly white population of varying educational backgrounds and income levels; its appeal results from a combination of experiential practices, tightly knit communities, and the incorporation of a range of contemporary cultural elements in worship and congregational life (Luhmann 2012b; Miller 1997). As I elaborate below, the Vineyard has expanded from its California beginnings and is now represented on six continents in more than 2,400 congregations, according to its own statistics.³ It considers itself part of a global charismatic movement and has been studied particularly in the American, British, and Scandinavian contexts (e.g. Miller 1997, 2005; Luhmann 2012b, 2012a; Hunt 1997; Moberg and Skjoldli 2018), but not in the German-speaking setting. [4]

In what follows, I will use Vineyard USA—the American branch, or association, of the global Vineyard—and existing research on it as a reference point to comparatively analyze Vineyard Deutschland, Österreich, Schweiz (DACH), the association established in the German-speaking countries of Europe. I will suggest that in the process of expanding to the religio-cultural contexts of these countries, a unique interplay of dynamics and stability is at work. On the one hand, Vineyard DACH integrates by adapting to local and regional logics and circumstances; on the other, it maintains its self-understanding of being part of a global charismatic movement and accentuates this part of its identity. To speak with Robbins, it “at once preserves its distinctiveness from the cultures into which it comes into contact and engages those cultures on their own terms” (2004, 117), thus perpetuating the logics of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity more broadly. [5]

The second section presents a largely descriptive introduction to Vineyard DACH in comparison to Vineyard USA, including organizational structures, theology and beliefs, religious practices, as well as evangelization and ecumenical activity of each association. This section is based on existing literature on Vineyard USA, on the one hand, and first-hand empirical research on Vineyard DACH, on the other. Due to the absence of academic literature on Vineyard DACH—the sole exception being a short handbook chapter by myself (Freudenberg 2018a)—I have conducted qualitative research to begin exploring the field, including interviews with congregational leaders, website analyses, and analyses of digital and print documents. This means that I draw from a mix of existing publications on the Vineyard and my own research to compare the two associations. [6]

The analysis that follows in the article’s third section is divided into two parts to present the initial results of my explorative research on Vineyard DACH. It focuses, first, on the dynamics at play in Vineyard DACH’s geographical expansion in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and its implications for organizational growth; and, second, on three main sources of stability in the Vineyard that provide a shared identity as being part of the same global movement. This section draws especially from my own empirical research: semi-structured interviews with five congregational leaders (four male, one female), based in Berlin, Germany and Bern, Switzerland; website analyses of Vineyard DACH’s website as well as the websites of Vineyard Berlin-Köpenick and Vineyard Bern; and analyses of digital and print material by Vineyard DACH and the congregations in Berlin-Köpenick and Bern. The reason I focused on the perspective of the leadership in the first stage of my fieldwork is because the senior and congregational leaders currently represent the driving force behind the association’s expansion in German-speaking Europe. While there are many active and dedicated congregational mem- [7]

3 <https://vineyardusa.org/welcome/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

bers who are committed to their congregations, Vineyard DACH is a relatively young religious organization and depends on its leadership for guidance and sustainable development. In a similar vein, I chose Berlin-Köpenick and Bern as case studies because most Vineyard DACH congregations are located in Germany and Switzerland; the overall trend is largely the same in Austria, but Austrian congregations are not examined in more detail in this paper.

Vineyard USA and Vineyard DACH

The history of Vineyard DACH reaches back to the 1980s, when a Swiss couple in their early twenties, the Bühlmanns, founded a Christian community in Switzerland following a six-month trip to India. Through contacts in the United States, they were exposed to charismatic evangelization for the first time in their lives and met John Wimber in California. Bühlmann, now Vineyard DACH's senior leader, told me in an interview in October 2017 that Wimber's style "spoke to his heart and mind,"⁴ and that it grew on his wife, too. In 1981, the couple founded an independent Christian congregation called Basilea in Bern which, however, maintained close ties to the Swiss Reformed Church, particularly to currents of charismatic renewal within it. Bühlmann joined the executive board of the European Charismatic Consultation, a pan-European, ecumenical initiative through which he fostered relationships with proponents of charismatic renewal⁵ in Austria, Bulgaria, France, the GDR, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK. At the same time, connections to the Vineyard grew stronger; Bühlmann translated Wimber's speeches and sermons at various European conferences, and Wimber invited him and his wife to a conference in the US in 1987. 1992 saw the founding of Vineyard DACH by the Bühlmanns; its first congregation was Vineyard Bern (formerly Basilea; Freudenberg 2018a). [8]

Vineyard DACH's trajectory developed differently than did Vineyard USA's. Reasons for this include different leadership styles and varying ideas regarding the associations' roles in their respective regions, but also stark differences regarding religio-cultural contexts and expectations on part of members and seekers. At the same time, clear similarities are apparent; this is not surprising, given the fact that both associations identify as part of a larger, global movement. This section of the paper comparatively outlines key similarities and differences between Vineyard DACH and Vineyard USA by drawing from existing research (most notably Freudenberg 2018a; Luhrmann 2012a, 2012b; Skjoldli 2014; Miller 1997) as well as new data I gathered by way of semi-structured interviews with five congregational leaders in Berlin, Germany and Bern, Switzerland and content analyses of Vineyard websites and other digital and print material. [9]

Organizational Structure

The Vineyard reports over 2,400 congregations in 95 countries on six continents, and an estimated membership of above 300,000.⁶ Precise membership statistics are hard to come by. For one, many congregations do not keep records of their members; membership is a fluid [10]

4 All interview quotes as well as quotes from German websites have been translated from German by the author.

5 Charismatic renewal initiatives gained traction in mainstream Christianity starting in the 1960s. For the German case, see Kern (1998).

6 <https://vineyardusa.org/welcome/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

concept in evangelicalism in general, and—as I show in more detail below—the Vineyard values personal spiritual conviction and individual commitment more than an exclusive focus on numerical growth. For another, the group’s relative size is not large enough to appear as a separate entry in social survey statistics; in the US, for instance, depending on the survey, the Vineyard may be included under “non-denominational,” “Evangelical,” “Pentecostal,” or “Charismatic,”⁷ while in Germany, it falls under the listing “free church” (*freikirchlich*) or “free church-charismatic” (*freikirchlich-charismatisch*).⁸ What little information there is on membership comes out of the respective organizations themselves: Vineyard USA reports 600 congregations in the US, most of which are located on the West Coast, in the Northeast, and the Upper Midwest, as well as the American South.⁹ Vineyard DACH reports 90 congregations in German-speaking Europe,¹⁰ most of which are located in Switzerland and southern Germany;¹¹ incidentally, it is for this reason that the empirical material drawn from for this article stems mainly from German and Swiss congregations. Vineyard DACH’s senior leader estimated membership in Vineyard DACH at 10,000 people in October 2017.¹² Judging from my observations, most members seem to be white, middle class, and below 60 years of age, which would mirror Hunt’s (2002) observations on neo-Pentecostalism, but this is difficult to generalize given the association’s pronounced heterogeneity.

In terms of organizational structure, the Vineyard is generally characterized by flat hierarchies and flexibility in planting new congregations. In the United States, lay members are encouraged to start a new church when they develop a sense of divine calling as a result of their work in existing congregations and small groups. While formal seminary training is not required of pastors-to-be, most participate in evangelical ministry schools, the programs of which combine taking classes with practical work in congregations. Students are counselled by Vineyard pastors, who act as spiritual guides in the process of starting a new church (Miller 1997, 164–66). This approach indicates that while new churches can be planted relatively quickly and uncomplicatedly, and while new members are attracted by opportunities to participate actively in shaping congregational life, Vineyard USA’s organizational structures retain a clear element of centralization. Everyone is encouraged to develop a sense of ownership of one’s congregation, but the pastor, usually male, remains the spiritual leader and main authority figure. Miller (1997, 140) calls Vineyard USA a “decentralized movement” to emphasize, correctly, the autonomy of individual congregations. However, it is important to add that congregations are bound to the larger denomination by way of centralized—as opposed to bureaucratic¹³—leadership structures. Individual churches are grouped together under the leadership of area leaders; areas are grouped together under the leadership of regional leaders; and the denomination’s sixteen regions are headed by its executive team, led by executive director Phil Strout.¹⁴

Although Vineyard DACH identifies as a more loosely structured association instead of as a denomination, it is similar to Vineyard USA in terms of leadership structures. Two to four congregations make a “network,” headed by a specifically trained team; three to five networks

7 See Pew Forum (2015, 22) for a detailed categorization of American religious traditions.

8 See Krech (2005) for a helpful overview of smaller religious communities in Germany.

9 <https://vineyardusa.org/> and <https://vineyardusa.org/find/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

10 <http://vineyard-dach.net/was-ist-vineyard/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

11 <http://vineyard-dach.net/vineyards/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

12 Interview October 2017; see also Freudenberg (2018a).

13 Bureaucratic organizational structures are more typical of Mainline denominations in the USA (see Freudenberg 2018b).

14 <https://vineyardusa.org/about/leadership/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

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make a “community,” with one leadership team each; and in mid-2018, the five existing community leadership teams in the DACH area constitute the “Life Team,” guided and counselled by the association’s senior leader. All three leadership levels—networks, communities, and Life Team—are concerned with both problem solving and strategy development, while the former is more typical of the lower levels and the latter more typical of the higher levels. Decisions are made on a consensual basis; controversial issues are returned to repeatedly until a solution has been found. Vineyard DACH’s senior leader speaks of a “circular dialogue” to describe this approach.¹⁵ However, in the case that consensus absolutely cannot be achieved, he himself has the final word. Thus, the association’s organizational structure consists of both democratic and selectively authoritative elements.

As is the case in Vineyard USA, no one is barred from taking up a leadership position in Vineyard DACH, although men seem more likely to do so than women. Leadership couples are also common, indicating an affirmation of traditional gender roles. To become a leader, taking a one-year leadership training program is required which includes emphasis on the association’s core values, biblical and theological knowledge, community-oriented and leadership competencies, as well as the development of certain personal qualities.¹⁶ This type of leadership training is meant to ensure the sustainable growth of the Vineyard as a movement; while this approach is similar to that of Vineyard USA at first sight, the process of church planting within Vineyard DACH is noticeably slower. This is due, in large part, to cultural differences in the religious landscapes of German-speaking Europe: it is much less common to see new religious communities emerging, and skeptical reactions on part of both mainstream (i.e. Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed) churches and the broader, often secular, public are more likely. As I show in more detail below, the association’s leadership is careful to maintain friendly and constructive relations with mainstream churches and wants to avoid coming across as ‘stealing’ members. At the same time, successfully growing a congregation is tricky even in a dynamic religious landscape as the USA’s (Miller 1997, 166), and is even more difficult in a less diverse religious context to foster long-term commitment and engagement on part of members. [13]

In contrast to Vineyard USA, the designation of “pastor” has intentionally been abandoned in Vineyard DACH. Instead, congregations speak of “leaders” to highlight their role of equipping the congregation to actively engage in society. What is more, while seminary training is no formal prerequisite for leaders, they are in fact encouraged to obtain a degree in theology. As the association’s senior leader put it, studying philosophy and theology promotes the capacity to think independently and to argue convincingly.¹⁷ This suggests that Vineyard DACH distances itself from more conservative independent evangelical churches, which typically adhere to a fundamentalist¹⁸ understanding of the Bible and place less emphasis on systematic theology. [14]

Theology and Beliefs

A neo-Charismatic denomination, Vineyard USA highlights individual conversion, the “gifts of the Holy Spirit,” and the proselytization of non-believers. The moment of conversion and [15]

15 Interview, October 2017.

16 <http://vineyard-dach.net/vineyard-empowerment/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

17 Interview January 2018.

18 I use the term “fundamentalist” in the sense of a quasi-literal interpretation of the Bible, though aware that there are manifold “fundamentalist” interpretations, none of which are absolutely literal (Elwert, Radermacher, and Schlamelcher 2017).

being “born again” is considered essential in realizing God’s active role in everyday life; inevitably, it is also crucial in becoming receptive to the “power” of the Holy Spirit (Miller 1997, 71–79). Although the denomination does not typically use trinitarian language, it believes in God as the creator of the universe, Jesus as a role model for everyday life, and the Holy Spirit as the channel to experience the divine. As Luhrmann (2012a, 2012b) has convincingly shown, members of the Vineyard are taught to imagine Jesus as a close friend and trusted advisor. In an act of “suspending disbelief” (2012b, 73), they pretend that he is constantly by their side, that he is “real but not real, not real but more than real, absolutely real for all time but just not real in that moment” (2012a, 378). Furthermore, the charismatic gifts of speaking in tongues (glossolalia) and divine healing play a central part in Vineyard USA’s belief system. Although the charismatic intensity of the denomination’s early years has noticeably abated since Wimber’s death in 1997, its experiential vein remains pronounced (Miller 2005). I return to this issue in the section “Dynamics and Stability in Vineyard DACH” below.

Vineyard USA and Vineyard DACH share theological roots, although their interpretation of them has developed in different directions. While Vineyard USA is a typical example of the “Third Wave” strand of neo-Pentecostalism, which “concerns itself with the emphasis upon evidence of the miraculous ‘signs and wonders’ and ‘spiritual warfare’, and the relationship both have to church growth” (Hunt 1997, 83), Vineyard DACH draws its theological focus more from mainstream Protestant theologians who were central to Wimber’s development. Wimber was heavily influenced by Baptist preacher George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982), who taught at Fuller Theological Seminary and pushed for the acceptance of the historical-critical method of Bible exegesis—a hallmark of American mainline Protestantism since its adoption from European theologians beginning in the late nineteenth century—in evangelical circles. Wimber was also influenced by Lutheran theologian Oscar Cullmann’s (1902–1999) Kingdom of God theology, which he understood as God’s reign on earth as exemplified by the deeds of Jesus as depicted in the Bible, especially the forgiveness of sins, compassion, charity, and miraculous healings (Jackson 1999). The concept of healing is a good example to illustrate how Vineyard USA and Vineyard DACH diverge in their theological interpretation. While Vineyard USA speaks of “bearing witness to the deeds of the kingdom through healing (physical, emotional, and social) [...] and delivering those held captive by evil,”¹⁹ Vineyard DACH speaks of a “healing community” (“*heilende Gemeinschaft*”²⁰) that emphasizes “grace,” “love,” “acceptance,” forgiveness,” “self-responsibility,” “accountability,” and “relationships.” While both groups see it as their task to change society for the better, Vineyard DACH uses noticeably less biblically conservative, exclusivist language; its overall approach is less doctrinal than that of Vineyard USA.

Again, this indicates the different cultural settings in which both groups have developed. While Vineyard USA has statement of faith, immediately accessible on its “Core Values & Beliefs” webpage,²¹ Vineyard DACH has neither a fixed statement of faith nor a ‘complete’ theology. According to its senior leader, both run counter to the group’s self-understanding as a movement that is in flux and constantly evolving.²² Instead, it is oriented towards the Early Church Fathers’²³ professions of faith and is in accord with some of the declared beliefs of the World Evangelical Alliance, although it makes a point to distance itself from doctrinal

19 <https://vineyardusa.org/about/core-values-beliefs/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

20 <http://vineyard-dach.net/unsere-werte/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

21 <https://vineyardusa.org/about/core-values-beliefs/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

22 Interview, January 2018.

23 Christian authors in the first eight centuries of Christendom (Leppin 2007).

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approaches that emphasize fixed creeds. It values individual faith formulations and the continuing development of religious convictions as an ongoing conversation within congregations and small groups. As a result, there is considerable heterogeneity within Vineyard DACH; this is clearly reminiscent of the Emerging Church Movement, gaining traction both in the US and the UK (see e.g. Freudenberg 2015; Burge and Djupe 2014; Marti and Ganiel 2014). As discussed above, Vineyard DACH has anti-institutional leanings in the sense that it values networks and relationships over hierarchy and programmatic structures; nevertheless, it is clearly more structured than the Emerging Church Movement. Vineyard DACH understands itself as a “centered set,” or a group sharing core values and setting flexible goals based on consensual decisions (Watling 2008, 95). The use of this sociological concept suggests that Vineyard DACH’s leadership is reflexive regarding its congregational heterogeneity and aware of the resulting internal dynamics. Overall, compared to Vineyard USA, Vineyard DACH can be labelled as theologically relatively progressive and inclusive; however, it is important to stress that theological positions vary, sometimes immensely, from one congregation to the next, and that it remains an evangelical, charismatic religious current even in the fairly rational religio-cultural context of German-speaking Europe.

Religious Practices

The personal faith of Vineyard members not only shapes worship and congregational life but plays a crucial role in other areas of life as well. As mentioned above, God and Jesus are imagined as real beings and close companions who influence the course of everyday events. A personal and intimate relationship is fostered and continually expanded through prayer and meditation; as Luhrmann notes, developing the ability to discern God’s voice in one’s stream of thought is crucial (2012b, 39; see also Elisha 2013, 314) within Vineyard USA. This is a main characteristic of the denomination as a charismatic group, as “distinguishing between spirits” is one of the charismata listed by Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 12:10 NIV, see also Skjoldli 2014). Inevitably, communing with God regularly in this way requires both a vivid imagination able to “suspend disbelief” (Luhrmann 2012b, 73), putting rationality and doubt on hold, and strong concentration as well as perseverance to formulate prayers and discern answers. Vineyard USA pastors teach prayer as the key competency to establish a relationship with God. [18]

This highly individualized practice inevitably requires grounding in the congregation, in worship as well as in small groups, as a counterbalance. Personal faith and “progress” in one’s relationship to God are strengthened and celebrated through communal singing, praying, and sharing divine encounters with the group. The sermon plays a central role in worship; it typically focuses on one or several passages in the Bible, which are closely examined regarding their message for the everyday lives of members (Miller 1997). Orienting one’s everyday conduct and actions towards the lifestyle and behavior of Jesus is considered a central task (Watling 2008). Charismatic practices such as glossolalia, miracle healing, and prophecy constitute another main part of worship in Vineyard USA, although, as mentioned above, their intensity has abated somewhat since Wimber’s death in 1997 (Miller 2005). [19]

In contrast to the typical conservative evangelical moment of conversion as a “born again” experience,²⁴ conversion is understood as a gradual process of “being initiated into the Christian faith”²⁵ in Vineyard DACH. Again, while conventional evangelical understandings of be- [20]

24 See Bebbington (1989).

25 Interview with DACH leadership couple, January 2018.

ing born again do exist within the association, particularly in southern Germany and Switzerland, conversion is largely framed as learning to apply the Gospel in everyday life and speaking about one's faith with others. To do so, the association has developed the "Godstories" format, in which members give spoken and/or written testimony of their encounters and growing connection with God in order to illustrate their spiritual journeys and ground them in community. My own empirical research in Vineyard congregations in the state of North-Rhine Westphalia and in Berlin²⁶ suggests that the success of the Godstories format varies widely from one group to the next; many members are reluctant to share personal experiences and to talk about establishing a relationship with God. Overall, members in more typically evangelical Vineyard DACH congregations seem more open to the Godstories format, probably due to the central role which the act of witnessing one's faith to others has in more conservative religious circles.

The degree to which charismatic gifts are exercised and celebrated in worship also varies from one Vineyard DACH congregation to the next. While shouting, crying, laughing, and various bodily movements are normal occurrences at typical Vineyard USA services because Pentecostal strains are much more pronounced in the American religious landscape, Vineyard worship in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland is usually slightly more 'subdued,' although regional differences persist. Ritual occurrences of biblical charismata, such as glossolalia or prophecy, are rarer, although they do exist; this mainly depends on the respective congregational leadership and the region in which the congregation is located. For instance, Vineyard congregations in regions of Baden-Wuerttemberg are more open to typical charismatic practices due to the historical prominence of pietism in the region and its lasting influence on the religious culture. Ultimately, Vineyard DACH considers itself to be part of a global charismatic movement, and belief in miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit through acts of individuals is widespread throughout the membership body. As in the United States, regular prayer is seen as a prerequisite to connect with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit in order to build a personal relationship that is believed to have the power to change people's lives.²⁷

Music and musical worship are another central dimension of religious practice in the Vineyard. Members often mention that John Wimber, the quasi-mythical co-founder of the Vineyard, was a musician with the Righteous Brothers (Jackson 1999) before he started his preaching career. Vineyard USA's professional music label, Vineyard Worship,²⁸ produces contemporary Christian music characterized by catchy melodies and simple, emotional, often repetitive lyrics, meant to express every person's worship of God. God is depicted as a loving father and friend, a benevolent figure, never a wrathful ruler. This emphasis on positive emotions and feelings of well-being is indicative of a broader trend in contemporary American evangelicalism which Todd M. Brenneman has called "the triumph of sentimentality" (2014). Interestingly, sentimental lyrics and melodies have gained traction on both sides of the Atlantic.

Both Vineyard USA and Vineyard DACH aim at fostering creative skills among members by offering various types of coachings and events, including band training, songwriting and sound system workshops, and leadership retreats. The goal is to equip members to express their understanding of the Christian message of salvation through music and fellowship, and to attract new members through the intersection of contemporary Christian music and broader

26 I have conducted qualitative research in Vineyard congregations, in Berlin and Cologne, since 2016 in the framework of applied methods seminars which I taught at Freie Universität Berlin and teach at Ruhr-Universität Bochum.

27 Interview with Vineyard DACH senior leadership couple, January 2018.

28 <https://www.vineyardworship.com/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

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popular cultural currents. As Finke noted in 2004, the Vineyard’s innovative approach to worship music was “setting the standards for contemporary worship” (2004); its music divisions have continually expanded since then.

Evangelization and Ecumenical Activity

The importance of the act of witnessing in conservative evangelicalism—of giving testimony of one’s faith and belief in God’s power to change life for the better—has been alluded to above. This is the primary means of evangelization in Vineyard, and the American association strongly encourages lay members to start small groups, depending on the ‘calling’ and sense of responsibility they feel, within which to ‘witness’ and live according to biblical role models in various ways. Miller emphasizes the importance of “giving the ministry to the people” (1997, 134ff., especially 138-139) for the success of the Vineyard; because organizational structures are flexible and pastors support lay initiatives, small groups are constantly being created and continuously grow as commitment on part of members increases. Similarly, as already discussed, church planting is structurally encouraged in Vineyard USA and new leaders are provided with necessary guidance and training. [24]

In Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, the dynamics of growth are somewhat different. Growth is, of course, a primary goal, given the Christian task of evangelization. However, the leadership team is not so much concerned with planting as many new churches as possible at a rapid pace; considering the starkly different historical context and cultural setting of continental western Europe, creating small, self-sustaining religious communities requires more time and different strategies. As I mentioned above and elaborate on below, Vineyard DACH maintains close ties to the mainstream and other independent evangelical churches to foster cooperation and integrate into the existing structures of the German-speaking religious landscape. The strategy here seems to be to utilize existing networks and channels to connect with established religious communities and gain acceptance as well as influence. Vineyard DACH’s senior leader emphasizes that Vineyard DACH does not seek to “steal” Christians from other churches but to “share” its version of the gospel among other Christians and among seekers gravitating toward different Christian groups.²⁹ This approach may be called collaborative—in the sense of cooperating with other Christian players to obtain maximum effects—instead of hostile or at least separatist, as is usually the case with independent evangelical churches establishing themselves in the German-speaking religious landscape. He expressed criticism of the German Evangelical Alliance, known for its conservative and exclusivist social and theological positions (Piek 2015), and mentioned that he disagrees with Vineyard USA’s comparably conservative and doctrinal approach. This indicates the extent to which each Vineyard association’s evangelization strategy and ecumenical engagement is shaped and characterized by its leadership. [25]

However, despite—or maybe because of—this collaborative approach, evangelization work in Vineyard DACH does include planting new churches. Church planting takes place in a carefully planned and structured process spanning several years. Groups develop their “vision” as a congregation in accordance with the association’s values; their leadership receives training; small groups are established under guidance; worship is altered to fit the Vineyard model; and logistical steps, including financial and bureaucratic issues, are dealt with (Freudenberg 2018a). The integration of new congregations into Vineyard DACH is, in other words, an in- [26]

29 Interview, October 2017.

tentionally gradual process in order to ensure long-term and sustainable identification with the movement.

In addition to Vineyard congregations and church plants, Vineyard DACH also consists of 'Vineyard-friendly' groups within Catholic, Protestant, and Reformed congregations that identify with the association's values and practices. Due to the importance placed on ecumenical relations, Vineyard DACH discourages these groups from splitting off from their mother congregations and instead encourages them to openly affiliate with Vineyard DACH while continuing to participate in Catholic/Protestant/Reformed congregational life as regular members. This model of formal Catholic or Protestant affiliation and informal affinity with the Vineyard simultaneously ensures that existing congregational structures are not disrupted—i.e. that Catholic and Protestant/Reformed partners are not angered—and that the Vineyard's values and practices reach a larger number of people. I return to this issue in the next section. [27]

As a third congregational type, there are Vineyard congregations with both formal membership in the association as well as continuing membership in the Catholic or Protestant Church. For instance, Vineyard Bern is simultaneously a member of the Swiss Reformed Church; Vineyard Berlin-Köpenick is both Unitarian and a member of the *Evangelische Kirche Brandenburg-Oberlausitz* (EKBO); and Vineyard Weingarten (near Ravensburg, Germany) is part of the Catholic Church. While this 'hybrid' model tends to entail a host of bureaucratic, ecclesiastical, and practical challenges, the leaders of these and other congregations argue that they profit from the dual membership because members are exposed to various Christian practices and beliefs, which strengthens their Christian identity and, consequently, their ability to evangelize others. At the same time, as I have remarked above, it also increases Vineyard DACH's influence in the mainstream Christian establishment in German-speaking Europe. Nevertheless, Vineyard DACH's willingness to collaborate with the Christian mainstream is remarkable considering its firm identity as a charismatic evangelical movement. The next section offers a first analysis of the reasons for this collaborative approach. [28]

Dynamics and Stability in Vineyard DACH

This section discusses dynamics of geographical and organizational expansion in the Vineyard while at the same time considering its charismatic identity and its origin narrative as stabilizing forces that create a sense of unity in the face of internal heterogeneity. The Vineyard's growth in membership and geographical expansion has affected the group in numerous ways. On the one hand, its structure and leadership has diversified, and the original denomination (what is now Vineyard USA) has had to cede the sole authority over the group's development and begin sharing it with its sister associations as they were established. At the same time, the new associations have had to develop tools and strategies to fit their individual religious-cultural contexts; the logics of the 'mother' culture, i.e. American religion, oftentimes do not apply, or not entirely, in new settings such as the German-speaking countries in Europe. From an analytical perspective, then, the dynamics of innovation and change are pronounced and quite apparent in the Vineyard. On the other hand, all Vineyard associations, including Vineyard DACH, share features that function as sources of stability to ensure a shared identity. As I discuss below, these include a distinct self-understanding as charismatic, and emphasis on Jesus as a role model, and a reverence for the denomination's quasi-mythical founder, John Wimber, all of which tie Vineyard USA, Vineyard DACH, and the twelve other associations together despite sometimes vast regional differences. [29]

In the following analysis, I draw from first-hand research results collected by way of semi-structured interviews with five congregational leaders (four male, one female) based in Berlin, Germany and Bern, Switzerland; website analyses of Vineyard DACH's website as well as the websites of Vineyard Berlin-Köpenick and Vineyard Bern; and analyses of further digital and printed documents created by Vineyard DACH's leadership team as well as the congregational leadership in Berlin-Köpenick and Bern. The reason for focusing on the perspectives of different parts of the leadership—instead of on those of the membership, for instance—is a pragmatic one: due to the relative youth of Vineyard DACH as an association, the senior and congregational leaders currently represent the driving force behind the association's expansion in German-speaking Europe. Although there are certainly a score of dedicated and active members who share the work with the leadership, Vineyard DACH is young enough, and fluid enough in terms of its organizational structures, to depend on its leadership for initiative, direction, and sustainability. As an aside, because most Vineyard DACH congregations are located in Germany and Switzerland, I chose Berlin-Köpenick and Bern as empirical examples instead of choosing a case study from Austria. While Austria, like Germany and Switzerland, has a distinct religious landscape, the overall trend is largely the same and the case studies from Berlin-Köpenick and Bern may be perceived as representative—at least as much as possible in such a diverse association. [30]

Geographical Expansion and Organizational Growth

What began as a single Vineyard congregation in Costa Mesa, California in 1974, then affiliated with the neo-Charismatic denomination Calvary Chapel, and was formally established as the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in 1982, initially comprising eight congregations in Southern California (Miller 1997; Jackson 1999), has turned into an international organization with fourteen associations on six continents. This umbrella organization, Vineyard International, has no superordinate function; each regional association is autonomous, and, depending on its leadership, varies in terms of organizational structure, evangelization strategies, theological focal points, and so forth. All fourteen leadership teams gather once a year under the heading of Vineyard International to discuss the organization's development. The meeting is chaired by "Vineyard International Executive," which consists of the leaders of Vineyard UK & Ireland, Vineyard USA, Vineyard Costa Rica, and Vineyard DACH (Freudenberg 2018a). Importantly, decisions are reached by way of discussion and consensus instead of by vote or the word of the executive committee.³⁰ This suggests awareness for the fact that sustainable, long-term organizational growth depends on maintaining flexibility in terms of the structure and the focus of each association, so that each association is equipped to integrate as easily as possible into the religious landscape in which it finds itself. [31]

Regional flexibility necessarily means that there are clear differences in leadership style, organizational structure, theology, and evangelization strategies in each association. In other words, the Vineyard as an international organization is more than Vineyard USA, although Vineyard USA remains a flagship of sorts for the organization, at least from an academic perspective. For one, key characteristics—such as its unique mix of religious subjectivism and participative congregational structures (Wuthnow 1998; Marti and Ganiel 2014), its tendency to appeal to emotion and experience, thereby sentimentalizing the Christian faith (Brenneman 2014), as well as its embrace of professional communication and branding strategies (Einstein [32]

30 Interview with DACH leadership, October 2017.

2008; Miller 1997)—have typically been attributed to American religion and culture. For another, the vast majority of research on the Vineyard has been conducted in the American context (e.g. Luhrmann 2012a, 2012b; Bialecki 2008; Miller 2005, 1997; Hunt 1997; Perrin, Kennedy, and Miller 1997; Perrin and Mauss 1991), thus an academic bias toward conflating the Vineyard, as a global movement, with Vineyard USA. While associations like Vineyard UK & Ireland are relatively similar to Vineyard USA in terms of theological self-understanding, for instance, Vineyard DACH exhibits clear differences, in terms of both theology and evangelization strategies, to Vineyard USA (see section “Theology and Beliefs”).

Robbins (2004) has famously noted for Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity in general what is also true of the Vineyard: It “at once preserves its distinctiveness from the cultures into which it comes into contact and engages those cultures on their own terms” (2004, 117). In the process of organizational growth and geographical expansion, the Vineyard has developed tools and strategies to flexibly adapt to local contexts and regional religio-cultural specificities while maintaining its emphasis on the physical and emotional experience of the divine and on creating highly cohesive religious communities. In the case of Vineyard DACH, encountering a religious establishment in the German-speaking countries in Europe whose contours, for historical reasons, are much more clearly defined than in the United States has forced leaders to adapt by pursuing a collaborative approach vis-à-vis the mainstream Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed churches. This has set in motion dynamics of innovation and change, resulting in an entirely different ecumenical network than in the USA and, consequently, in clearly different religious practices and modes of self-understanding. [33]

At the same time, while geographical expansion poses the challenge of adapting to resonate in the ‘new’ culture, the Vineyard’s identity as a charismatic evangelical movement must be maintained within Vineyard DACH so that it can prosper. The trick, then, is to find the proper balance between adhering to core Vineyard beliefs and practices, on the one hand, and doing so in a way that works in the religio-cultural environment of German-speaking Europe, on the other. Vineyard DACH’s strategy of working together with mainstream Christian congregations in various ways attempts to maintain this balance. As mentioned above, it does not primarily seek to convert mainstream Christians to the Vineyard’s brand of faith, but to expand an ecumenical network that opens doors into mainstream congregations and enables connecting amiably with leaders and members. In this way, Vineyard DACH reaches ever larger slices of the Christian population in German-speaking Europe, allowing it to slowly but steadily grow while strengthening its ties to mainstream Christianity. [34]

To illustrate, in what follows I provide three examples of what I call Vineyard DACH’s collaborative approach: one from the DACH association and one each from Vineyard congregations in Berlin-Köpenick and Bern. The first is found on Vineyard DACH’s website. On the subpage entitled “Vineyard and church—Vineyard understands itself as a part of the entire Christian church of Jesus,” the following summary of Vineyard DACH’s representation in Christian networks and organizations is provided: [35]

It is a concern of Vineyard DACH that every local Vineyard be well-integrated into its local church context. Constructive, diverse relationships and ecumenical cooperation are emphatically desired. A local Vineyard can engage with its immediate church context in manifold ways. It can perceive itself as a community or congregation of independent evangelical character or be part of an established church, provided that it has been invited to be such. In all cases, we strive towards [36]

a respectful, appreciative interaction with people, communities, and church institutions.³¹

The text continues by recommending that Vineyard DACH congregations establish networks not only with informal groups and existing networks, but also with official institutions and associations, such as the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen* (“Working Group Christian Churches in Germany,” a broad network of Catholic, Lutheran, and independent churches), the Swiss Evangelical Alliance, and the Association of Evangelical Independent Churches and Communities in Switzerland.³² This is followed by a list of working groups and networks which Vineyard DACH is already part of, including the Lausanne Coalition Germany, the Circle of Charismatic Leaders, the Catholic “Gathering of the Holy Spirit,” and an ecumenical initiative called “Towards Jerusalem Council Two.” Clearly, the objective is to foster cooperation and exchange with as many mainstream and independent Christian groups as possible. [37]

A closer look at individual congregations further illustrates Vineyard DACH’s collaborative strategy of integrating into the existing religious landscape of German-speaking Europe. Vineyard Berlin, which consists of several house churches in different parts of the city, called “bases,” and a congregation of around sixty worshipers in Berlin-Köpenick,³³ is part of the *Evangelische Kirche Berlin-Brandenburg-Schlesische Oberlausitz* (EKBO), the regional body of the Lutheran church, and at the same time considers itself an independent evangelical community. In an interview in November 2018, the congregation’s pastor explained this seemingly paradoxical constellation: Vineyard Berlin-Köpenick began as an entirely independent house church, and as it grew it started looking for a larger network or movement to latch onto. It chose the Vineyard for its grassroots movement qualities, he said, and for the values which offered a “spiritual home.” Having integrated into Vineyard DACH, the congregation was keen to establish connections to other Berlin congregations, including Lutheran churches. After some time, the EKBO agreed to incorporate Vineyard Köpenick. As the pastor relates, [38]

EKBO in Berlin was relatively open to including us. Why? I think—and this is my personal opinion—that because we are a fairly young and small movement, we didn’t pose a threat but were more of an asset. The Lutheran Church here has incorporated many groups, such as [...] the city mission, and because we are relatively mission-oriented—we want to win people that are separated from Jesus—we were maybe attractive to [EKBO] because they saw, ‘Okay, here are young people who want to animate others to believe and get them excited about faith, why shouldn’t we profit from that?’³⁴ [39]

The cooperation between Vineyard Köpenick and EKBO seems to exist mainly on a leadership level, however. The pastor described the process of being accepted into a regional leadership council of groups within EKBO and slowly gaining the trust of established council members. He recalled that “the council’s reaction seemed to be, ‘This is something new, this is a change, we need to be careful that this [new group represented in the council, i.e. Vineyard Berlin-Köpenick] isn’t a sect’, and so forth.”³⁵ In fact, the relationship to the Lutheran Church in Köpenick and its pastor was distant even after he had been fully accepted into the regional leadership council. He says this only changed when [40]

31 <http://vineyard-dach.net/vision/vineyard-und-kirche/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

32 *Verband Evangelischer Gemeinden und Freikirchen in der Schweiz/VFG Freikirchen Schweiz.*

33 I obtained this information in an interview with the congregation’s pastor in November 2018.

34 Interview, November 2018.

35 Interview, November 2018.

a lady wanted to be baptized by the Lutheran pastor, but she said she was part of the Vineyard and she wanted me to be present and also baptize her. She wanted this to take place at a lake, not at church. And I thought, wow, what a gift! And because of this lady, the Lutheran pastor and I became a little closer. For the first time we talked for a longer while and both noticed, Hey, we aren't so different, we want the same things for Köpenick. And in this way we formed a relationship that has led to a really fruitful cooperation.³⁶

[41]

When I asked the pastor about ecumenical worship and other ecumenical activities between Vineyard Köpenick and the Lutheran Church in Köpenick, he admitted that for the most part, the two congregations continue to worship separately. There are several larger ecumenical events throughout the church year, and this exchange is important because “personal relationships help alleviate fears”³⁷ and prejudice, but most collaboration happens on the leadership level. He emphasized that the dual identity of being an independent Vineyard congregation and simultaneously a part of EKBO is a work-in-progress that requires continual negotiation—both with EKBO and in terms of Vineyard Köpenick's self-understanding.

[42]

Interestingly, this self-understanding is expressed in different ways on the congregation's website, oscillating between “Vineyard Berlin is part of a worldwide, growing movement with roots in the USA,”³⁸ “Vineyard Berlin is an independent lay movement within [...] EKBO,”³⁹ and “We are...an ecumenically oriented lay movement within the Evangelische Kirche Berlin-Brandenburg-Schlesische Oberlausitz which we support in spreading the gospel among all people.”⁴⁰ When I pointed out these discrepancies, the pastor replied that this broad and somewhat diffuse way of expressing Vineyard Berlin-Köpenick's self-understanding reflects the fact that the congregation's identity is in flux and that there are varying perspectives and opinions on the issue of belonging and identity among the membership.

[43]

In many ways, the situation is similar in Vineyard Bern, the original and founding Vineyard DACH congregation. Vineyard Bern collaborates closely with the regional branch of the Swiss Reformed Church, the *Reformierte Kirchen Bern-Jura-Solothurn*. Together with the *Evangelisches Gemeinschaftswerk*, a pietistic movement within the Reformed Church Bern, and other independent churches and movements, they published a declaration stating communalities, differences, and future commitments in 2013,⁴¹ which clearly reveals an openness to collaboration on all sides. Vineyard Bern is also a member of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kirchen im Kanton Bern* (Working Group of Churches in Bern), the ecumenical network *Miteinander für Europa* (Together for Europe), and the Swiss Evangelical Alliance.

[44]

As is the case in Vineyard Berlin-Köpenick, in Vineyard Bern ecumenical cooperation also happens primarily on a leadership level. In an interview with a congregational leader, head of “Gemeinschaften” (communities), I was told that explicitly ecumenical worship services rarely occur, but that Vineyard Bern has visitors from mainstream churches for worship every weekend:

[45]

We do have Catholics at Vineyard Bern, whom we encourage to be Catholic and

[46]

36 Interview, November 2018.

37 Interview, November 2018.

38 <http://vineyard-berlin.de/wer-wir-sind/die-vineyard-weltweit/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

39 <http://vineyard-berlin.de/wer-wir-sind/die-vineyard-berlin/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

40 <http://vineyard-berlin.de/wer-wir-sind/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

41 A congregational leader kindly provided me with a copy of the declaration.

to remain Catholic, and to participate in Mass. We do not hold worship on Sunday [mornings] because Mass [and Reformed worship services] are held then for people to participate in. The majority [of visitors to Vineyard Bern's worship] are probably Protestant Reformed, but there are Catholics, too. [...] We are very aware that people from other congregations come for a visit during worship. [...] We encourage people to come visit and we embrace them, [but] I encourage people to stay [in their home congregations] and contribute there.⁴²

The fact that Vineyard Bern receives a steady stream of visitors—or possibly regular participants—for its afternoon and evening services indicates a certain degree of being established, possibly more so than Vineyard Berlin-Köpenick. What is striking in the quote above is the respondent's repeated emphasis on the fact that visitors and seekers are welcome but also encouraged to remain in their home congregations as members. The idea behind this seems to be that Vineyard DACH, as part of a growing movement, has more to gain through maintaining various ties to mainstream congregations, both on a leadership and on a membership level, than trying to “steal” Christians from other churches. Clearly, confessional differences between mainstream and evangelical Christianity in both Vineyard Berlin-Köpenick and Vineyard Bern are acknowledged but downplayed and similarities and shared goals are emphasized in the attempt to strengthen the overall Christian identity of the adherents of different Christian traditions. All parties involved hope to expand their own influence and individual values by pooling their resources. [47]

As a side note, it is important to point out that Vineyard DACH, like any religious tradition, is certainly interested in growth. The congregational leader in Bern, responsible for small groups in the congregation, emphasized that pursuing “growth for the sake of growth” could not be successful, but that “growth through a vision and through movement of groups” leads to high cohesion and more committed members.⁴³ Nevertheless, the Vineyard employs strategies out of the church growth movement (Wagner 2012), including in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, for instance in its approach to training and equipping members with leadership potential to take on responsibilities in small groups and new church plants. Vineyard DACH's leadership training program is highly professionalized (see section “Organizational Structure” above). For reasons of scope, however, this article will not focus on Vineyard DACH's leadership strategy in further detail. [48]

What has become clear in this section is that organizational growth and geographical expansion require adaptability to new contexts, and the dynamic aspects of Vineyard DACH's development clearly become visible here. Congregations are granted a high degree of autonomy to ensure a flexible integration into the local and regional religious landscape. As a rule, Vineyard DACH congregations are strongly encouraged to initiate and expand ecumenical cooperation with both mainstream Christian churches and their independent evangelical counterparts; at the same time, they must maintain their identity as being part of a global charismatic movement. For congregations such as Vineyard Berlin-Köpenick, this means negotiating a self-understanding of being an “independent lay movement” with its official membership in the regional body of the German Lutheran Church. For Vineyard Bern, this implies welcoming visitors to become involved, but at the same time encouraging them to remain members of their home congregations and to contribute there, too. While respondents in both churches emphasized that this negotiation is a constant work-in-progress, the degree of collaboration [49]

42 Interview with congregational leader, November 2018.

43 Interview with congregational leader, November 2018.

with other religious traditions indicates that they have successfully established themselves as ‘charismatic yet mainstream-friendly players’ in the religious landscapes of Germany and Switzerland.

Sources of Stability and Shared Identity

Despite its pronounced internal heterogeneity and the dynamics set in motion by global expansion, the Vineyard is arguably able to maintain a relatively stable identity as “worldwide movement” by emphasizing three core characteristics: its self-understanding as a distinctly charismatic movement; the role ascribed to Jesus in shaping adherent’s religious lifestyle; and the narrative of the Vineyard’s founding figure, John Wimber, which is frequently referenced. [50]

Regarding the first characteristic, not only is the Vineyard categorized as a neo-Pentecostal or neo-Charismatic group in social scientific literature (e.g. Luhrmann 2012b; Bialecki 2008; Hunt 2002), but it self-identifies as charismatic. That is, it emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit and the biblical charismata, listed in 1 Cor 12:10 NIV to include speaking in tongues, discerning the spirits, prophecy, healing, and others (Ziefle 2016, 125). Vineyard adherents believe that the Holy Spirit is active among and through people, and that his “signs and wonders” are evidence of divine intervention in the world (Hunt 1997, 83). It is partly for this reason that music and musical worship is so important in the Vineyard; music is seen as a means to forge a close connection with the divine, to create an atmosphere conducive to ‘receiving the Spirit.’ The Vineyard’s charismatic identity thus expresses itself first and foremost in worship, where glossolalia, prophecy, and healings regularly occur, at least in the United States. [51]

As elaborated above, charismatic practices are noticeably less pronounced in most Vineyard DACH congregations, but they nevertheless play an important role in the discourse on what defines Vineyard DACH. All leaders I have spoken to so far at one point or another brought up their self-identity as charismatic, always without being asked. When I inquired further, the answers were slightly evasive and always referenced the Holy Spirit in very general terms. This indicates what I have already suggested above, namely that, due to the more rational religious culture of German-speaking Europe, Vineyard DACH leaders are relatively reserved when speaking about “the power of the Holy Spirit”, and when they do so remain diffuse so as not to make people uneasy. This “power” is typically described as healthy, loving relationships between individuals, as “serving each other”, not as divine forces suddenly taking complete physical and emotional control over people and making them mumble, cry, laugh, etc. Although Vineyard DACH does not officially declare itself as a charismatic movement—nowhere on its website does the term “charismatic” appear as a description—its leaders regularly do so informally, in conversations with adherents, newcomers, and outsiders (such as myself as an interviewer). In this way, it discursively latches on to the narrative of the larger, global charismatic movement of which it considers itself a part. [52]

The role ascribed to Jesus within Vineyard DACH also contributes to the community’s stability in important ways. Luhrmann (2012b) has convincingly shown that a collective imagining of Jesus as a real-but-not-real presence in the lives of members is a defining characteristic. In the German-speaking context, extensive research is necessary to be able to draw a comparison and reveal whether the practice of “playing pretend” exists to a similar extent. What is certain, however, is that Jesus is frequently referenced as the most important figure for believers to model their behavior and lifestyle. On the Vineyard DACH website, for instance, the subpage [53]

“Core values and basis of our faith”⁴⁴ repeatedly refers to Jesus and his role in shaping God’s kingdom on earth. Jesus is not only depicted in an abstract way, but is called the “owner” and the “leader” of the Vineyard community. Vineyard adherents are his “descendants”. Those who are “*Jesus-fernstehend*”, i.e. far from Jesus, are to be inspired to lead “*ein Jesusmässiges Leben*”, i.e. a Jesus-like life. This language is mirrored in the only German-language book publication, to my knowledge, on the history of the Vineyard, *Natürlich übernatürlich* by Marlin Watling (2008).

This type of language is not surprising, considering that the Vineyard evolved out of the Jesus People Movement in California in the Long Sixties (Freudenberg 2018a; Luhrmann 2012b; Miller 1997). It is also not surprising that Jesus is expressly emphasized as a role model because this emphasis inevitably unites Vineyard DACH with other Christian traditions that it is eager to collaborate with. In contrast to its charismatic identity, which it downplays so as not to seem too unusual or ‘sect-like,’ it highlights the importance of Jesus to accentuate common ground that it shares with other Christian traditions. The discourse on Jesus thus functions as a stabilizing factor in two important ways: For one, it allows integrating into the regional religious landscape more smoothly as an independent evangelical yet Jesus-following (i.e. ‘safe’) group; for another, it connects Vineyard DACH to the global Charismatic Christian community because it reinforces its identity as biblically based in a ‘radical’ sense. Donald Miller has called neo-Charismatic churches “postmodern primitivists” because they “acknowledge and utilize many aspects of postmodern culture, yet they find the biblical tradition—in particular, the ‘primitive Christianity’ of the first century—as underpinning for a radical spirituality that undermines the cynicism and fragmentation of many postmodern theorists” (1997, 24). Vineyard DACH’s emphasis on Jesus as a role model in everyday life must be understood as the attempt to reenact, to a certain extent, early Christian communal life in the twenty-first century. It shares this endeavor with numerous other congregationally-oriented Christian communities worldwide, which contributes to a stable sense of identity.

The third characteristic that represents a source of stability for Vineyard DACH is the Vineyard’s founding narrative, which is inseparably linked to one of its founding figures, John Wimber. Wimber was a jazz musician caught up in alcohol and drugs at an early age. His wife almost divorced him, but the couple found a ‘spiritual home’ in the Quaker community and Wimber considered himself saved. He later joined Calvary Chapel as a pastor and then split off to found his own charismatic church, the Vineyard, together with a pastor named Kenn Gullicksen (Watling 2008; Jackson 1999). Following his death in 1997, Wimber has achieved an almost saint-like status in the present-day Vineyard, in Vineyard USA and Vineyard DACH alike. His theological influence (see section “Theology and Beliefs”) was referred to, without exception, in every conversation I had with Vineyard adherents, whether in the United States, Germany, or Switzerland, and he is often spoken of like a benevolent father who devoted his life to creating the best possible faith for his children. Phrases he coined to emphasize the fundamentally Protestant idea of the priesthood of all believers, particularly “equipping the saints” and “everyone gets to play” (Jackson 1999), are echoed by contemporary leaders almost like sacred incantations.

Wimber’s story and his lasting impact on the Vineyard have been told in detail elsewhere, both reverentially in publications out of the Vineyard (Jackson 1999; Watling 2008) and from various social scientific perspectives (Skjoldli 2014; Luhrmann 2012b; Miller 1997). The issue that I wish to raise here is that while Wimber provides a coherent narrative of the Vineyard’s

44 <http://vineyard-dach.net/unsere-werte/> (last accessed August 8, 2019).

[54]

[55]

[56]

common origins, which serves as a factor of stability in the movement's global expansion and its heterogeneous, contextually specific strategies of adaptation, what happens when the generation that knew Wimber personally passes away? Personal acquaintances, such as the senior leaders of Vineyard DACH, are deeply affected and moved by him but are slowly preparing to pass the leadership on to the next generation. Will the movement lose cohesion, setting new dynamics of change and fragmentation into motion? Or has Wimber's charisma been routinized, as Miller (2005) suggested, to continue to offer a coherent identity narrative? Based on my research on the Vineyard both in the United States and in Germany and Switzerland, I expect that a narrative of the Vineyard's origins, closely centered around Wimber, will continue to offer a stable source of identity for Vineyard associations around the world. In my experience, the next generation of Vineyard DACH leaders—younger pastors involved in congregations in both Germany and Switzerland—refer to Wimber and his "legacy" as frequently as do older leaders. Siding with Miller's argument of the routinization of Wimber's charisma, I expect that Wimber, as a quasi-mythical founding figure, will continue to function as an element of stability, together with the charismatic dimension of the movement's identity and the crucial role of Jesus as a real-but-not-real companion in everyday life, in the Vineyard's dynamic process of global expansion.

Conclusion

As the comparison between Vineyard USA and Vineyard DACH has shown, the two associations consider themselves part of the same globally expanding, contemporary charismatic movement notwithstanding obvious differences due to the different religious cultures in which they are respectively embedded. A unique interplay of dynamics and stability is at work in the process of the Vineyard's global expansion, ensuring that Vineyard DACH is able to integrate into the Christian landscape of German-speaking Europe while at the same time retaining its self-identity as charismatic. [57]

The analysis has shown that as an independent evangelical church in the German-speaking religious landscape, Vineyard DACH pursues an unusually collaborative strategy to reach as many people as possible with its message and values by establishing networks with both mainstream and other independent evangelical congregations. This emphasis on collaboration clearly sets it apart from other independent evangelical churches in Germany and Switzerland. While there are numerous ecumenical initiatives in the German-speaking independent church scene, as well as ecumenical cooperation within mainstream Christianity in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, it seems that Vineyard DACH is unique in its degree of involvement with *both* the Christian mainstream *and* its periphery. As the examples discussed in section 3 illustrate, Vineyard DACH congregations may either be entirely independent evangelical congregations or simultaneously part of mainstream Christian regional bodies, such as the *Evangelische Kirche Brandenburg-Oberlausitz* in Berlin or the *Reformierte Kirchen Bern-Jura-Solothurn* in Bern. This implies an exceptional degree of hybridity in terms of congregational identity, requiring the continual negotiation of how congregations perceive themselves and their role in their local religious contexts, on the one hand, and as a part of a global charismatic movement, on the other. I have argued that this tension, while never being fully resolved, is dealt with by de-emphasizing charismatic practices, such as miracle healing (widespread in Vineyard USA), and by highlighting characteristics such as a strong focus on Jesus as a role model, inevitably shared with other Christian groups in the religious landscape of German-speaking Europe. [58]

This strategy becomes evident both in the discourse among Vineyard DACH leaders and their communication with other Christians, whether from the mainstream or the periphery, and in the way the association presents itself to seekers in personal interaction and through digital and print media.

At the same time, Vineyard DACH maintains its identity as a charismatic community that is part of a global movement by emphasizing its roots both in early Christianity—Jesus is perceived as the “owner” of the Vineyard and as an active force in the contemporary world—and in the high tide of charismatic activity in the twentieth century, when the Vineyard was founded. Its quasi-mythical co-founder, John Wimber, is constantly invoked, and while he passed away over twenty years ago, he continues to function as a source of stability for the Vineyard in its process of global expansion by providing a coherent origin narrative. By discursively drawing on both Jesus and Wimber, Vineyard DACH manages to integrate into the broader Christian community in German-speaking Europe while preserving its distinctiveness as a charismatic religious association. This feat is striking considering the fact that independent evangelical churches are typically met with suspicion, fear, and resentment by mainstream Christianity in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. To avoid being cast in the role of outsider, Vineyard DACH is pursuing an explicitly collaborative approach to strengthen its ties to both the mainstream and other independent evangelical groups, hoping to reach more people with this strategy than it would with a separatist, exclusivist position. In this way, the Vineyard manages the tension between dynamics and stability in its global expansion. [59]

In conclusion, the research results on Vineyard DACH support Coleman’s argument that [60]

a global, charismatic ‘consciousness’ should not be understood as a purely cognitive cultural system. The orientations to the world displayed by these Christians involve not merely a set of ideas, but also engagement in certain physical and material activities, including the development of a spiritually charged aesthetic that encompasses ritual movements, media consumption, linguistic forms, and aspects of the external environment (Coleman 2000, 5f.). [61]

This article has presented the results of an initial, explorative study which requires further research in the future, particularly within individual congregations to provide a better sense of the large heterogeneity within Vineyard DACH. A typology of congregations, including their dominant social forms and possible affiliation with mainstream Christianity, would provide important insights into how Christianity as a whole may be transforming in German-speaking Europe. Considering the decline of many Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed congregations, a more detailed investigation of collaborative approaches between the Christian mainstream and periphery is necessary. This also calls for shifting the focus beyond the leadership perspective, moving from the strategy and intentions of Vineyard DACH leaders to the realities of congregational members in order to reveal how they perceive the Vineyard and to which degree they identify with a larger charismatic movement. [62]

The dynamics at play in Vineyard DACH’s geographical expansion and organizational growth in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and the sources of stability that function as a counterbalance and help maintain a coherent identity as part of a global movement are only one of various possible ways of framing the development of Vineyard DACH, and the Vineyard as a whole, in the early twenty-first century. What should have become clear is that in the process of religious transfer from the United States to German-speaking Europe, the logics of worldwide Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity are perpetuated by keeping a [63]

fine balance between adapting to the new environment by way of an explicitly collaborative approach and nevertheless retaining a global charismatic self-understanding.

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