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## Interview of Richard Walker

Richard Walker

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HARDING COLLEGE LIVING LIBRARY OF MISSIONS

This is a recording for the Living Library of Missions. Keith Robinson is interviewing Richard Walker from Berlin.

Robinson: Brother Walker, we would like for you to begin in your own memory and in your own words by giving us a brief history and the present situation of the work in Berlin particularly.

Walker: Well, I've not been involved in the work from the very start. When my wife and I and our two children arrived in Germany in 1949 the church had already been established in several cities. The work in Frankfurt was already going and the work in Munich and the work in Heidelberg, the work in Hanow and we were not in on the very beginning of it but we had the privilege of working in several places once we arrived in Germany. We were in Munich for a year; Frankfurt for a year and in Heidelberg two and a half years and we moved to Berlin.

Robinson: When was this that you moved to Berlin?

Walker: We moved to Berlin in 1954.

Robinson: About how many congregations are there presently, speaking of German congregations in Germany.

Walker: I would have to count them up. I think I can name them pretty well. There is a congregation in Hamburg in the north, in Berlin, in Bremen, three in the Ruhr area, Essen, Cologne and Dusseldorf and there may be very shortly a congregation in Achan. Brother Lloyd Collier said that through the radio broadcast that Gottfried Reichel does from Radio Louxemburg that there are a number of people that may start meeting there shortly. He is going to try to have a gospel meeting in Achan this summer. Then there is a church in Wiesbaden, of course. There are three congregations in Frankfurt, one of them quite small. There is a congregation at Augsburg and in Nurnberg and Heidelberg, Mannheim, in Kaiserslautern, in Bruschtal, Karlsruhe, in Ludwigsburg, in Stuttgart, in Augsburg and in Munich. I don't think I missed very many of them. I may have missed one or two.

Robinson: What about from your own experience and in your work in Berlin, what methods have you used, some that you found not very fruitful and some that you say were maybe the best methods you've used in contacting people, teaching, and evangelization in general.

Walker: Well, it is difficult to say which are the best methods. We've used all kinds of things. When we first went to Berlin, we initially tried to contact people through members of the church in this country. I remember that Brother Gatewood had converted a lady out in Utah who had a sister living in Berlin. We got in touch with this family and this was the first lady who obeyed the gospel in Berlin. Her daughter subsequently obeyed the gospel and was in this country going to school for awhile, is now married to a member of the church up in Long Island. There were some Berlin girls that had attended high school in Amarillo and other places and we got in touch with them and through this girl that was in Amarillo several people obeyed the gospel. Through personal contacts primarily. We held

gospel meetings along and advertised and invited people to attend the services. We went on the theory that we needed first a place to meet and we rented a hall, a sort of a store front. We rented in the course of the first year three of these store fronts. The church developed in two places and did not in one. Then we would hold gospel meetings, invite our friends to these meetings. We had many gatherings in our own home and then we started working with the children. Betty Rimer and Ruth Ronschhof both came to Berlin within the first year and were very helpful in teaching children in these halls. Some of our members were contacted as children in the children's work and through them their parents. I guess perhaps the most dramatic thing that happened in Berlin were the two campaigns that Brother Gatewood preached for us. I would say they were in 1946 and 47, perhaps they were in 1947 and 1948, I can't recall right at the moment. 1957 and 58 I mean.

Robinson: Now, these were preceded by door to door work.

Walker: Yes, Brother Gatewood brought groups of Americans from this country twice and they went from door to door. We had handbills printed and put up a tent right in a very populated portion of town and there was considerable interest in this part of town to hear Brother Gatewood speak. We had good meetings the tent was full and I think in the first campaign we had about 40 conversions and in the second campaign between 30 and 40 conversions.

Robinson: While we are talking about campaigns, what is your evaluation presently of campaigns that are being carried on in Europe?

Walker: I think they are very good. There is this little difficulty that has arisen with regard to the campaign. The churches in Germany are trying to become self-sufficient and also they are trying to get away from the stigma of being an American sect and so when a group of Americans come in on them it more or less makes it difficult for them not to be known as an American sect any longer. I think whereas the campaigns are good; perhaps they should be more or less concentrated on the places where you are just starting out, where you need initial contacts.

Robinson: What about the mortality rate of people converted during campaigns? Do you find this higher than a general conversion? Lower or about the same?

Walker: Well, the mortality rate in every type of conversion is high. I wouldn't say it's any higher. I haven't analyzed that.

Robinson: Still concerning methods, what kind of mass communication media have you used other than just advertising for meetings and campaigns?

Walker: In Berlin, mainly we have passed out handbills and gospel tracts and literature. That has been practically the only mass media available to us because the radio is controlled by the government and in Berlin that's controlled by the Lutheran Church.

Robinson: What about newspapers?

Walker: Newspapers have such a wide circulation that the price is almost prohibitive.

We have done a little bit of this but it is just very very expensive.

Robinson: Do you have any of your own publications?

Walker: We have put out a few little things. We put out a little tract that Dieter Goble wrote and that's been widely used in Germany and even translated into various eastern languages.

Robinson: The German Christians do have a monthly do they not? This is primarily for Christians.

Walker: Dieter Alten puts out the German edition of the 20th Century Christian. This comes quarter yearly. It is widely subscribed to by the churches. They order a bundle and pass these out to the members and to their friends and contacts. There is a newspaper published in Austria by the Austrian workers in German called Des Feste Fundament. This is sent to Germany to some extent. However, its main circulation is in Austria. It has circulation of probably 8000 or perhaps more even.

Robinson: How many congregations in Berlin?

Walker: There is just one congregation. At one time we had three congregations but these for various reasons have been combined and there is just one congregation now.

Robinson: Do you own your meeting place?

Walker: Yes.

Robinson: Was the meeting place bought by raising funds primarily in America? If you were to do it again would you do this again?

Walker: Well, we were facing the situation there in Berlin where we had to do something. There was just nothing available for us to meet in. We were meeting in one of these little store fronts which we had just absolutely outgrown. I think probably we would be forced to repeat that experience. Although in general, I would have some hesitations.

Robinson: This is a pretty hotly debated question upon our brethren today. That's why I asked. You would have some hesitancy even in your own experience maybe in doing this again in certain situations.

Walker: Now in Klagenfurt we made the experiment of not having any places to meet. We've been meeting in public buildings, buildings where you can rent a room, say a school building or something of that nature, for an hour at a time. After two years of just experimenting with that I would say that way of doing it at that place at that time was not successful. Tom Turner has brought funds from the States and has rented a very nice commodious room in which the church can meet and which I think is an advantage. In Berlin we rented rooms from the very start. These were our rooms where we could do what we cared to. I think this is very important.

Robinson: What thoughts would you have on the house church type situation that has been experimented with some I understand in South America?

Walker: I have been reading about this. It appeals to me personally. It is a little difficult to get people in Germany to come into your home unless you are personally acquainted with them. I think it is perhaps advisable there to have a neutral place. It needs to be a modern, a nice attractive place I think. However, I am not opposed to the church meeting in a home. In some cases, I am sure this is the only opportunity. There is a church up in the Austrian Alps that meet in the homes. The church in Heimbonn meets in Brother Miller's home. Certainly, I would not be opposed to this if this is the only thing that can be done but if you are going to put a missionary in a place where he is trying to work it seems to me that the added investment of renting a place would be a good investment.

Robinson: What are your thoughts about the training of native workers? Are you doing anything or have you trained any in Berlin or in Germany in cooperation with other brethren?

Walker: Well, we've not run a training program. We've tried to at different times with various degrees of success. I think it is very fine to train the men. I think we ought to train them widely and broadly. I think we ought to train men in the Bible just like we say that our Christian colleges in America are not preacher training schools necessarily, but we ought to train people with regards to their becoming a preacher, we ought to train them in the Bible. If they want to preach very fine. If they need specific help also very fine. One thing that I would personally not be in favor of is putting foreign preachers on stateside support. This raises considerable problems, just innumerable problems. It raises a problem between the American missionary and the local missionary. To some degree he is dependent upon and obligated to the American missionary that perhaps raised his support. In other ways he is not and should not be subject to him and dependent upon him. If he is working under an eldership in this country, he likely never sees them and they cannot very well oversee his situation. Also it places him in a situation where he is above the local church with which he is trying to work. He gets his money from America. They have no control over it and he is not dependent nor subject to the local congregation. Whereas in America a preacher that is hired by an American church, he can be fired by the American church. It is very difficult I would think for a German congregation to fire a German evangelist who is supported from America.

Robinson: What would be your suggestion as to remedy the situation which you have in Germany? I understand you do have some native Germans being supported and we do have all over the world. How can we remedy or help to remedy the situation?

Walker: I think they are remedying on their own because they realize the tension in which they are placed. They feel a little bit of unease because they are always tempted to think they are representing something foreign to their own people and they are not being faithful to their own people. But we have some fine evangelists and they are, I think, I know Dieter Alten up on Hamburg is just about reaching a situation where he and the church in Hamburg can support him and Brother Miller in Berlin now is working toward that end. He has a book business. He would like to be self-supporting in that.

Robinson: You would say in the future to train people not only in the Bible but academically in other fields and if they need help to train them so they can support themselves. You can depend on part time preachers until congregations can support full time preachers.

Walker: I think this is a very difficult question. It is hard to lay down any general rule. If you are going to help a man get an education, I would certainly try to help him be in a place where he can support himself if possible. I don't know if this is the work of the church to do that, but we do need to avoid the mistake of putting these young people in a position where they have to be dependent upon the church for their livelihood. I think it is fine to support native, local evangelists in a foreign country providing they are doing evangelistic work, missionary work. If they are, however, pastoring a congregation, they ought to be subject to the congregation in which they work. If they are moving about the countryside, going from place to place, I think it doesn't matter where their support is coming from--American or wherever.

Robinson: What is the biggest obstacle you face in dealing with the German people? What is their religious sentiment?

Walker: They are divided. In the southern part they are Catholics and in the northern part they are Lutherans.

Robinson: Are they fairly attached to their religious traditions?

Walker: Very strongly.

Robinson: Do you find atheism among the young people?

Walker: It is a growing problem.

Robinson: With regard to preparation of young people for the mission field, do you have anything that you would suggest? I think you probably know some of what Harding's mission program is doing and what other Christian schools are doing. Would you have any specific suggestions toward training?

Walker: I doubt that I could make any suggestions that you brethren have not already thought of except perhaps to emphasize, which is understandable, that if a person is going to be an effective missionary after he gets overseas, he needs to be an effective Christian where he is now and that anything that will help him be more effective on the homefield will also help him to be effective in the foreign field.

Robinson: Could you say in a few words what you foresee as the future for the work in Germany and Berlin? How are the prospects for the future?

Walker: I think that much of the push in a new community, into new cities will still have to come from America. The German churches are not yet mature enough to have the means to push into new communities and that we still need to send men from this country, not to the old places and not to preach for the established churches, but to preach in new places.

Robinson: Are there any other points you would like to add?

Walker: I don't think so.