

Revival in France

A revival similar to the one in Argentina is beginning in France.

France is a beautiful and prosperous nation proud of its cultural heritage. But spiritually it is dark. I visited France at Easter and learned that centuries of religious wars between Protestants and Catholics (which the Catholics won) have left a tiny evangelical community that makes up less than 1 percent of the population.

I also discovered that:

Despite its official status as the state church, the Roman Catholic Church seems to have been rejected by the French. Less than 10 percent of the population attend Mass regularly.

Both the occult and freemasonry have a great influence on the nation.

More than 5 million Muslims live in France, making the Muslim community 10 times the size of the evangelical community.

Yet I believe revival is stirring in France, and Carlos Annacondia, the Argentine evangelist who has been used by God to bring revival to his nation, agrees. I went to France to attend a crusade in which Annacondia ministered in Paris—the first citywide evangelistic crusade since Billy Graham preached there in 1986.

The spiritual history of France is an interesting one. After the Reformation in 1517 a thriving Protestant community grew up, totaling at one point almost 40 percent of the population. Fervent people called Huguenots spread revival throughout the country.

During the 16th and 17th centuries the Protestants endured great persecution. In 1685 King Louis XIV outlawed Protestantism altogether and required members to rejoin the Catholic Church or be killed. Several hundred thousand Protestants, including my own great-great-grandparents, fled France to gain religious freedom.

The few Protestants left in France had no pastors and were forced to meet in forests or ravines at the risk of death. The abuses were so bad that by the early 18th century, the Reformed Church of France totally rejected any manifestations of the Holy Spirit and adopted much of the rationalistic ideology espoused by Voltaire.

Add to the list of historical influences the French Revolution of 1789, the reign of Napoleon and two bloody world wars, and you begin to get a picture of the forces that have shaped France today. Interestingly, Annacondia sees parallels between France and his own Argentina. Both are officially Roman Catholic nations that have been resistant to the gospel message. Both nations are prosperous and proud.

God broke through the pride of the Argentines when they lost the Falkland Islands war in 1982, and a revival began that some leaders say has seen 3 million people saved out of a nation of 35 million. French leaders see a similar revival beginning in France.

Pastor Max Fleury of Orléans says he sees real spiritual hunger developing. Paul van der Hagen of Lyon believes God will give many descendants of Huguenots (such as me) a heart to pray for France to help bring revival to this leading European nation. Van der Hagen's Huguenot ancestors fled to Holland, but he and his wife moved back to France to be missionaries.

Pastor Vincent Esterman of Paris was born in Australia to French parents. He also came back to France in 1986 and has been involved in starting 23 churches. It was his vision to bring Annacondia to France, believing there is a need for the powerful preaching of the Word to get people saved.

Traditionally, not many people are converted in French churches. Yet when Annacondia preached to a packed-out tent seating 5,000, more than 600 were saved in three days. In a country where a church of 100 is large, that is like starting six churches a day.

Annacondia told me he has never seen such spiritual hunger. During his meetings, several thousand flooded the altars for salvation or prayer, and many received ministry in the tent of deliverance. Hundreds of others gave testimony to healings.

Certainly one evangelistic crusade doesn't constitute a revival. But it is the beginning of a spiritual breakthrough. We pray that this spark is fanned into a flame that will consume the entire nation with passion for God.

Stephen Strang is the founding editor of Charisma. He invites you to attend Charisma's 25th anniversary conference, to be held in Orlando, Fla., Aug. 3-5.

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