

A Growing Spiritual Hunger in Hungary

The passion for revival I saw in eastern Europe this week rivaled what I have seen in Africa or Asia.

Europe is often described as post-Christian, and some people have already given up on the continent. We've heard discouraging statistics about mosques replacing churches in England. We know about dismal numbers of churchgoers in Germany and France. Some people assume that the region that gave us the Protestant Reformation is now a spiritual wasteland.

But that's not what I found in Hungary this past week. On Sunday I preached to a congregation that meets in what used to be a communist hall in the Budapest suburb of Szigetszentmiklos. The Free Christian Church, a lively Pentecostal group pastored by Josef and Lila Gere, was celebrating its 20th anniversary—and the mayor of the town showed up for the service along with the local minister of religious affairs.

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Three-hour worship sessions ... in Europe? Churches filled with teenagers and
young adults ... in Europe? It's all happening in Hungary, a nation that borders**

seven other European countries—and could affect them all.”

The congregation was full of young people. The praise team led us in Hillsong choruses translated into Hungarian. A few people raised their hands when I invited those who were not Christians to invite Jesus into their hearts.

I saw encouraging signs of spiritual life everywhere I went in Hungary, from Budapest and Vác in the west to the cities of Miskolc and Debrecen in the east. After church on Sunday, I met a former communist leader who now pastors a church for Gypsies.

Tamas Soltesz was a former “comandante” in the Hungarian police force, and a teacher of atheist philosophy. But in 1990 he had a dramatic conversion—not unlike the apostle Paul’s—after a strange dream in which a Gypsy man approached him and said, “I want to receive Jesus.” Soltesz told the man he could not, but then he heard the voice of the Lord say, “If I open the door, no one can close it.”

“My father was called like the apostle Paul to preach to the Gypsies,” says Rita Nagy, Soltesz’s married daughter. “He had many influential friends in the police, and they all rejected him. They began calling him *vajda*, which means ‘Gypsy leader.’”

Today,
Soltesz leads a Gypsy church in the village of Serényfalva,
and he has reached many others among Hungary's nomadic Gypsy
communities.

"Today we know Christians in every Gypsy village," Nagy says.

On
Sunday night I spoke at a small charismatic church that meets
in a former
lightbulb factory in the industrial city of Vác. The pastors,
Balint and Eva
Nagy, don't take money from the congregation because most of
their members live
on small salaries. But that didn't dampen the passion I saw in
the
worship—which was led by a 20-year-old college student named
Máté who learned to play the guitar only a year
ago.

When
I gave an altar call for personal prayer in the small church,
people lingered
past 10:30 p.m. to receive ministry. The spiritual hunger in
that place rivaled
what I have felt in some Third World nations where revival is
common. But this
was Europe!

On
Monday I visited the industrial city of Miskolc, located in
what was once a
heavily pro-communist region of Hungary. There I met Zsolt
Budai, pastor of
Olive Church, another growing charismatic congregation. Budai
told me that his
church has begun an outreach to Gypsies as well.

"Recently

in one of our meetings a 16-year-old girl who has been blind from birth received her sight," Budai told me. "And a Gypsy man who was preparing to kill someone with a samurai sword ended up running into the church and giving his life to Christ." The miracles have stirred Budai's congregation to seek the Lord for a strategy to reach the marginalized Gypsy community more effectively.

After visiting Miskolc I went to Debrecen, near the Romanian border. In the 1500s the city was a center for Calvinism. Then, in the 1970s, an unusual visitation of the Holy Spirit hit the tradition-bound Free Christian Church and turned it into a flagship of Pentecostal revival. Today the church is full of young Christians, and its pastor, Peter Lakatos, hosts an annual summer worship school that attracts more than 700 registrants for a week of training.

"Sometimes during the school we worship for three straight hours," Lakatos said, noting that the evening services attract more than 2,000. "There is no air conditioning in the building, but that doesn't stop the people from praising the Lord."

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Hungary, a nation that borders seven other European countries—and could affect them all. I'm not writing off this region. What I saw this week in Hungary was enough to convince me that a new spiritual trend has begun.

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