

She Dared to Claim a Continent

South African evangelist Suzette Hattingh began her ministry by praying for Reinhard Bonnke's huge campaigns in Africa. Today she's reaching the spiritually desolate cities of Western Europe

For a quarter century now, South African Suzette Hattingh, 46, has preached the Word and worked the wonders of Jesus without tiring. In Africa she ministered to millions with Reinhard Bonnke, the German power evangelist. In Indonesia her own mass campaigns reached hundreds of thousands in recent years.

She has led thousands to Christ and watched God perform stunning healings. She has pioneered prayer strategies in an effort to affect nations and has empowered thousands of intercessors from Australia to Sweden and from Indonesia to the United States. But this year Hattingh launched her bravest project yet: "taking the cities" of secularized and seemingly God-forsaken Europe for the kingdom of God.

Working for Bonnke's Christ for All Nations, Hattingh moved to Frankfurt, Germany, in 1986—and hated it. But God's call was clear, and through the years her obedience developed into a passion. She became a German citizen, and when she founded her ministry, Voice in the City, in 1997, she based it in Frankfurt.

"Just think about it," she says, explaining her initial antipathy. "In the '80s I was 'flying with the eagles' in Africa! Everything was happening there, and God moved me to Europe and dropped me among the dry bones of the European

church!”

She recalls being snowbound in Tromsø, Norway—the northernmost city in the world—in 1987, feeling utterly alone and forgotten, even by God. “I really struggled,” she says of being in Europe then. “But then I had a vision. I saw a pen, and it was engraving Europe on my spirit!”

The burden grew. At Christmastime in 1991 Hattingh, while off duty, went out with six friends to feed the homeless in the red-light district in Frankfurt.

“The streets seemed empty of beggars, so we split up to look for them,” she says. “I myself was entering a downtown park when somebody appeared behind me, sticking a gun into my back. He made me move on, and I found myself in a sort of drug den, among a hundred or more people hanging out in the park.

“I saw men and women shooting heroin, I saw prostitutes in full action, and I watched a boy being given injections because they wanted him to prostitute himself. There I was, a South African country girl who had not even heard of homosexuals until she was 18! Imagine the shock!

“The gunman asked me: ‘What do you want?’ I turned around and said: ‘I want nothing from you, but maybe you want what I have got. I want to hand out Christmas presents.’

“And I did. But then I heard the voice of God saying, ‘And where, in all of this, is the church?’ I tell you, that experience marked my life forever.”

It took another 10 years before the plans for Europe ripened in Hattingh. In April and May, Voice in the City, with local churches, staged the first full-scale Taking the City campaign in the south German town of Deggendorf.

“In Europe [the evangelistic ministries] seem to move in and out again without making a deeper impact,” Hattingh explains. “Europe needs a different approach, and I think we have found it.”

In contrast to the typical evangelistic routine, the Voice in the City concept requires a minimal budget for advertisement. Hattingh says God asked her once why people should come to her meetings. “I responded, ‘Because of Your love, God.’

“‘Well,’ God said, ‘then present My love to them instead of dropping a flyer in their mailbox!’”

For a month the local Christians in Deggendorf paired up to visit individual households, asking residents if there was anything they could do that would help them in a practical way. They even set up a “helping hand hot line.” Hattingh told Charisma she is “extremely happy” about the response.

“I had asked myself if the Germans would close their doors on us, but only some 15 percent did,” she says. “People talked to us, invited us in. They were so amazed that we did this for nothing. The concept was so new and appealing that the media picked up on it right away, and we press.

“The Deggendorfers asked us to help vacuum the house or pick up their groceries. There were ladies wanting their hair done and others needing a baby sitter for a couple of hours. For

some needs we offered prayer. We simply served, and by doing it, reached 45 percent of all inner-city households!"

Another key concept of Taking the City campaigns is what Hattingh calls "doing the package." The formula is servanthood plus street evangelism, plus intercession, plus evangelistic meetings.

"In Deggendorf we did not get the expected crowd to the meetings," Hattingh admits. "There was a city festival running parallel, and also we should have planned for more nights.

"But I was still very encouraged. The final meeting gathered 450 people only, but half of them were nonbelievers, and that is an amazing percentage! Also, there was a spirit of conviction that I had not yet experienced in Europe. People truly repented."

In Deggendorf God intervened supernaturally in many ways. A nonbeliever who passed by the tent felt an "invisible hand pushing him in and taking him to the front, where he was healed of complete deafness in one ear and gave his life to Jesus."

Another man was also healed by God and gave his life to Jesus. A few days later he appeared at a home-fellowship meeting—bringing with him nine family members, all of whom accepted Jesus the same night.

"In Africa people run to events, but Europe is different," Hattingh says. "The lost will not come to us; we have to go to them, go from door to door the way we did in Deggendorf. Some people say that God has birthed a new pattern for

[evangelistic work in] Europe, and this is my hope.”

Pastor Günther Geier of Christuszentrum Ostbayern, the Deggendorfer church hosting the campaign, told Charisma that the Taking the City campaign resulted in 140 confirmed, immediate conversions, with many more “backslidden” believers rededicating themselves to the Lord. Geier claims that his whole church is now “on fire” and will “keep going” with an unprecedented 98 percent of the 450 members participating actively.

A Supernatural Start

From the onset, God made it clear that His relationship with Hattingh would be marked by supernatural occurrences.

At age 10, she was caught in a harvesting machine on her parents’ farm in South Africa, and the doctor said one arm had to be amputated. Hattingh’s father—who was, in her words, “religious but not born-again”—prayed in desperation and heard a voice out of heaven speak one word: “Don’t!” Again the voice said: “Don’t!”

Her father told the doctor not to amputate, and the doctor responded in no uncertain terms that such a decision meant death to the child. But for a third time the voice said: “Don’t!” so Hattingh’s father signed his daughter out and took her home.

“I did not die, even though my arm remained partially paralyzed for a number of years until I was completely healed after my conversion,” Hattingh says. “Everybody knew it was miraculous.”

But it took 11 years after the accident for Hattingh to embrace the God who had saved her life. She was influenced by the strong religious perceptions of the Afrikaner, the whites of Dutch descent in South Africa.

“Some time before the accident with the harvester I had started asking questions about God,” Hattingh recalls. “But our church believed strongly in predestination, and my conviction as a child was that I was predestined for rejection!”

Hattingh became a nurse and midwife. A believing colleague was intent on leading her to Jesus, but Hattingh was not impressed. “She witnessed every time we ran into each other. I got so mad! What a religious freak!”

But God intervened again.

“Dying patients started telling me about their near-death experiences. There was an old man, too weak to move, who suddenly sat up in his bed and cried out: ‘I see the living God on His throne, and I am lost!’ I did not even know what ‘lost’ meant. I was a very down-to-earth person, and this terrified me.”

Hattingh also remembers a man who was an elder in a church. In the moment of his death he cried out: “Please help me! My feet are sinking into this pit!” Then he died.

There was a third case, a lady with terminal cancer. “She was in pain and screamed at us and was very difficult. For some time she was moved to another hospital for treatment, and

there she made peace with God. She returned a changed person, so kind.

“When she died I was on duty and sat by her bed,” Hattingh relates. “I thought she was gone already, but suddenly she came back, and smiled with open eyes.

“‘Sister,’ she said to me, ‘do you hear the music? Look, the flowers! People with white clothes!’ Then she turned around and said, ‘Here they come to fetch me!’—and she was gone.”

Hattingh says these experiences caused her to start seeking God again. On March 14, 1977, prompted further by repetitive nightmares dealing with condemnation, Hattingh finally prayed. “‘God,’ I said, ‘if You are what these freaks say you are, do something!’ A light fell on me, and I was born again.”

The life of the young nurse was, in her own words, “turned around completely.” Her fiancé-to-be broke up with her. Her family disowned her for starting to fellowship with blacks because apartheid was as much a part of the Afrikaner lifestyle as predestination. But the relationship was never severed, and a few years later both Hattingh’s mother and father came to the Lord and happily blessed the path chosen by their daughter.

Summarizing the dramatic events that led up to a no less dramatic new life, Hattingh leans forward, saying: “There are people who decide [to accept] the call of God, but with others the call decides for them. That is the way I feel about my life.”

The Greatest Mission Field

In 1980, Hattingh joined Reinhard Bonnke's Christ for All Nations. She worked with the evangelist for 16 years, and even today she says she would "Reinhard, his wife, Anni, and any man who aimed a gun at them."

She witnessed Bonnke's African campaigns grow from thousands to hundreds of thousands to millions in attendance. A key to the success was Hattingh's intercession ministry. "The level we pray is the level we are able to reach out," Hattingh states emphatically.

The step of leaving Bonnke's and founding her own ministry was motivated by a deep sense that God wanted her to be not just the intercessor but also the evangelist. Again, it was supernatural interventions that prompted the actual decision.

"Many years earlier, on the day my father died in 1980, I had one of my very rare visions," Hattingh recalls. "For the one and only time so far, I saw, with my eyes open, an angel.

"I remember him in detail. He said nothing but moved close and poured a huge inkpot over me. It felt like hot oil."

In 1995 God told Hattingh to read Ezekiel 9, a chapter that speaks of an angel with an inkpot. The angel's mission is to mark the foreheads of those who will be spared when God's wrath judges the unrighteousness in the city.

"It was this very angel who had revealed God's plans for me, and now I sensed God saying that I must take the cities—for as many as possible to be spared!" Later God told Bonnke to "let Suzette fly like an eagle."

After the completion of the worldwide From Minus to Plus campaign, Hattingh resigned from Christ for All Nations and in January 1997 founded Voice in the City. In the following years she and her team saw God perform “amazing” miracles in Indonesia.

Apart from healings and conversions, there were several other indications that God’s hand was on the work: Muslim governments provided the logistics for Voice in the City’s Christian mass evangelism, Muslim radio stations broadcast the gospel message, and the ministry received supernatural protection from fundamentalist bombers.

But, for Hattingh, the primary target and greatest challenge in the years to come is the salvation of Europe. “Europe is dry, but I believe that there is no such thing as a country you cannot reach!” she exclaims.

“One problem is that we want to import the revival from other countries, but revivals you cannot import. God has different patterns for different places, and we need to seek God for his pattern in each country.

“God’s harvest fields are not all ripe at the same time,” she adds.

Hattingh believes the fields in Western Europe are ripening now and that the church needs to get ready—fast.

“East Europe moves people’s hearts because of the poverty. But most Christians are totally blind to the fact that West Europe is a desperate mission field in another way. Yes, we are

called to the poor, but poverty of spirit is worse than poverty of body!"

This South African world evangelist calls Europe the "greatest mission field ever" because of the continent's spiritual poverty. Yet she is "greatly encouraged" by the changes in Europe in the last 15 years. "The unsaved were always open, but the churches have opened up and become much more bold," she points out.

She and her team are doing their part to support the churches in claiming the continent of Europe for God. In September they sponsored a Taking the City campaign in London, and later this year a second campaign is scheduled in Germany—the country Suzette Hattingh rejected at first sight but was called by God to love.

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