

France 2004 Report

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THE PRAYER

As many of you know, and as part of our current project, *La Clef*, during the month of July, 2004, embarked on a three week evangelistic and artistic tour of the Languedoc region of south west France. Our impossible prayer was this, *"Lord, is it possible that You would fashion a key, using us, as artists and neglected descendants of France, to unlock the lock that has imprisoned the heart and mind of the French in a 300 year old web of un-belief?"*. "Let us in" became the cry of our hearts.

As such we were prepared to walk through any process that the Lord would use, to fashion us and our lives together for this goal to be realized. Team members, some of our strongest musicians, dropped off. The finances required a late consensus from leaders in all three participating nations, and the Lord spoke detail after detail about the way that we were to present the art. In many ways the years of preparation and the ongoing sensitivity to the process did not prepare us for a positive answer.

For there, on the night of the first concert, as we presented ourselves, our music, our art and our story, the French responded. Did you read that? The French RESPONDED!!!... with applause and smiles, tears and hugs, and I wept, for SUDDENLY we were there on the other side of that ominous and barred door, supping with the French!, passing out cups of water, appearing wet ourselves and praying to find a way to lead our distant cousins to the source!!!

What we thought we take three weeks to hopefully accomplish, the Lord gave to us in one night. And there I stood asking, "Now what?!".

A Reflection

To varying degrees day by day we fought for that contact. We were challenged daily by our local leader to go further in presenting the message of the gospel, though we felt that our task had been to break fallow ground, we were being challenged to plant seed, water, grow and harvest the crop. We were rightly burdened daily with the tension of wanting more while relying on the Holy Spirit to give us the words to say. It seems in the end that we walked further than we ever imagined from our side, but not as far as the local French leadership had hoped.

In all may the Lord be blessed and may He grow us in this mission as He directs us.

Five Measurable Responses

It is important to give an account of the responses that we gleaned from the "French on the ground" as it were. And though we tried to spend time with both the Christians and the audiences after each concert to determine day by day what our bearings were, we ultimately had to rely on the responses that stood out, what I call "measurable responses"; assuming that for each one that had the fortitude to approach us and express themselves, there must have been others who would have felt the same but who would not have had the boldness to "come forward". Below are the five responses that we can recount and that we feel are indicative of our time in France during our 2004 tour.

1.) After our second concert in Rieux-Minervois, a young man named Christophe, roughly 25, came up to me to say that he couldn't believe that we were Christians. Though we had not at this point given any overt signal from the stage of our faith, his spirit bore witness with ours and he was overjoyed. He went on to exclaim that he had accepted the Lord and come to Christ while he was in Kansas City, that he was from the village of Rieux-Minervois, was living with his father and that he knew of no other believers. He was deeply discouraged by this lack of fellowship and longed to come back to the states. We told him about Pastor Jan Koning in Castelnaudary and invited him to spend as much time with us as he could at the Auberge in Carcassonne. He connected with Adam Short almost immediately, and just as the Lord would have it, Adam is now in Kansas City, Christophe is also back in Kansas, and the two have connected here in the States again.

2.) Just before our last concert at Trèbes, a middle aged women appeared at the edge of the stage saying that she was from the mayor's office in Rieux-Minervois and that we should expect to see no one at the concert from her village that night because a baker from the village had spread the rumor that we were "Jehovah's Witnesses" and she had come to find out if this were true. Once again it was Adam, our on stage MC, who intercepted her and explained that it was not true that we were Jehovah's Witnesses, but rather we are Christians who love the Lord and we are part of no cult. While the rest of the audience was decently seated some 20 feet away, she stood right there at the edge of the

stage, like a teen-aged girl clapping, singing, dancing, taking pictures and otherwise being a tremendous source of encouragement and an ever present monitor of how the Lord was using that night's performance. Afterward she could not contain her enthusiasm as she offered an apology for her village, asked me to forgive them and to please return. Someone on the Team has her info, and we should find a way to reach her again.

3.) I had heard mention that among us (mind you we were around many people day by day) that there was a man who had been a catholic priest there in France, had been fingered by Rome to become a bishop, and when he had traveled to Rome he had become so discouraged by the corruption that he saw in the "church" there that he had altogether resigned from the priesthood. His name is Robert, and when we had arrived back in the U.S. I had an e-mail waiting for me which read, "I am a practicing catholic. I was at your last concert and the service the next morning. Your joy, vision and grace have revived my faith in Jesus." Bless God!!

4.) As we had hoped all along, one individual came forward to tell me that he had "followed" us. "My name is Michael...", he said to me in French, "and this is my third concert". "Are you a Christian?", I asked. "No..." he said, "but I want to tell you that the love, the force, the power, and the presence coming off that stage is more than I can describe." "I want you to know that it is obvious to me that God himself has chosen you to come to France and share with us your story. Please understand that there is a spiritual power that controls this country and has caused us to forget our history and the history of our faith." "And you're NOT a Christian?", I exclaimed. "Well brother I am sure that tonight Jesus is ready for you". "I know", he said, "but I am not ready for him." He wanted to take Adam and me to another performance across town that night so that we could witness the stark contrast between what he saw in us versus other musicians that he'd seen. We declined but invited him to keep in touch with us through our contact info. As of the writing of this report I know that Adam has had one short phone conversation with him. Please pray for Michael and others like him who were sensing the same things.

5.) As the Lord would have it we essentially picked up the "beggar at the gate" for the village of Carcassonne. Jean-Olivier is an apparent drug dealer who lives as a social outcast that everyone seems to know and tolerate. With his hair tied in knots and constantly smoking, his appearance immediately distances him to live his nocturnal and strung out lifestyle. He is a producer of raves (underground all-

night youth parties at very spontaneous, and therefore hard to legally monitor, locations around France), and a member and descendant of a Cathar family, a sort of Mafioso connection to a people who were considered heretical by the catholic church. Though the Cathars were subsequently vanquished by the church's armies during the middle ages, today their descendants have a long memory and apparently clandestine connections to powerful holds in the region.

I met Jean-Olivier, whom we soon began calling "Jo", while having trouble trying to call the States in the middle of the night in order to prepare for a sermon the next morning. He was at the front desk of the Youth Hostel all night and ended up offering me considerable assistance. Apparently Jo moves around from one hostel to another living on installments from a family trust fund. I had several amusing experiences with Jo that bore out his story and the Lord easily drew me to him. From the moment we met he was with us; at church, at the church fellowship, at that night's concert in Castelnaudary, at the beach the next day, at dinner, and at prayer. After hearing us perform he became very enthusiastic and assisted us in spreading the news of our events. The pattern of life with Jo continued with only one interruption in that I asked him not to participate with us in our morning prayer and devotion times since those there were disciples, and had requirements upon them that he, not being a disciple, was not able to meet. Otherwise we shared, and he knew, that we loved him and welcomed him at all other times.

Jo was a challenge for the team as he was unpredictable, unattractive, and mentally touched. However, as the Lord gave us wisdom, he never got the best of us and eventually he would hear the full gospel and our allegiance to it. Once he discovered that we were not swayed by his connection to wealth, and indeed proclaimed our complete sufficiency in the Lord, he became somewhat detached. We began to realize that if Jo were to accept Christ, the whole of that wicked village would know it for sure.

We continue to pray for Jo and pray that the Lord would draw him as much in our absence as He did in our presence. We have heard that he has taken the knots out of his hair and that he is trying to find a way to show up in Montréal or Charlotte at any time. We would welcome him.

In Conclusion

Please understand that we learned many things in France, many things we would do differently next time, but we are emboldened in that the Lord allowed us to use *la clef*, the key of arts and heritage to grant us the connection that we prayed for and that is all too often denied the missionary.

The spiritual authorities that control France were not permitted to interrupt the work of touching the people who continue to remain captive and held away from the gospel of Christ and His desire for these lost pearls.