
La Nouvelle Revolution

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Since 1995 I have traveled to and from Québec asking the question, "What about the French?" – that is to say, What is the English-speaking world doing to reach across the divide into a world that at its core is secret, hidden, and cloaked from our eyes and minds? For those who have seen the veil lift somewhat, the pull of both a comfort with English and an abundance of English resources in ministry has often proven to be too mesmerizing to allow any real inroads to reach into the *seulement francophone* world.¹

My observations, backed by anecdotal stories from among those in the field, indicates that by and large the church in French Québec is bilingual, meaning that among the francophones who know Christ, the majority are English-speaking as well, and if not, then likely the ones who led them to Christ are bilingual. It stands to reason then that for those who speak only French, the likelihood of encountering the gospel in their own culture is practically nil. How is this possible among one of the major language groups on the earth? In hindsight we understand that France's 18th-century embrace of the Enlightenment and Québec's throwing off the yoke of the Catholic Church in the 1960s have served to close the doors into these parts of the French-speaking world, shutting out expressions of the true gospel. The result of this alienation is that today a largely first-generation, French-speaking Christian church in Québec is hard-pressed for French-language materials suitable for things as fundamental as children's and youth ministries.

Even if we were able to fund the translation² of English materials to

¹ It appears that among those who are bi-lingual and therefore have the tools to choose which language to operate in, that the practice of relying on English and its access to resources (written materials, access to funding, etc.) is the more common choice.

² The question of funding translation work in order to better equip French ministries really begs a deeper question; Who are the translators? For a legitimate complaint among those who do this work is that translations are most often lacking. For the few skilled christian translators that exist the burden to do all that would be needed remains massive. When asked if it would be possible for the skilled translators to edit the work of the amateur worker, the professional states that editing another's work requires MORE work than taking on the project themselves.

the extent they are needed, as one seasoned French pastor said, "When we translate from English, we get the whole [English] cultural package as well." Indeed, we could regard the current church to be not only bilingual but also bicultural as well, bearing the DNA of both the English-speaking missionary and the Québécois culture. For other North American Christians, whether American or Western Canadian, as different as their cultures are at the core from inherent Québécois expressions, they would have no problem relating to and even predicting the elements of a typical church service in Québec.

Indeed, in one casual interview a bicultural translator exclaimed excitedly, "But the English stuff is sooo goood." We think maybe too good. In the North American church our tastes have become so refined that only the best songs, the best teaching, the best classroom materials will do, meaning that our resources are not only excellent in many ways, but undoubtedly they also very, very English in outlook.

Though there is abundant gratitude towards the English-speaking missionary who has given himself and his family to the ill-regarded mission field of Québec;³ and though the Lord loves His saved church, His bride, fully knowing her bi-cultural makeup; there still remains, a hidden Québec, one that is deeply suspicious and cynical due to a history that is perceived to have brought shame into Québec's world by English hands.⁴

So even from the French-speaking church today, the better part of Québec by all accounts remains distant and hidden. I've often mused, "Why is it that the church here looks like me (a North American anglophone) and not like Québec?"

³ In 1995, at the outset of my quest to find out about the spiritual condition of the people of Québec, I inquired of several mission agencies. A common response was "Aren't they Canadians? Canadians are like us", meaning English-speaking, roughly 30% Christian and considered to be an equal partner in sending out North American missionaries. Not once was Québec, with its raw statistic of .05% Evangelical, characterized as a mission field. Those who have labored there have labored out of sheer passion and often without the proper designations to afford them the supports offered to other missionaries.

⁴ Many historical accounts and current musings about Québec consider the French in North America to be a "conquered people". Somewhat similar to Native American stories, once French Canada was defeated by the English in 1763 the English awarded them a special status called "the distinct society", which allowed them to not only maintain their language and cultural identity, but also relegated them to a second class and shameful status. Mind you France too contributed to this sense of isolation in that after her defeat in North America she silently ignored her cultural link to the Québécois until well into the 20th century with the famous visit to the 1967 *Montréal World's Fair* of the French president

So now the question echoes even louder: WHAT ABOUT THE FRENCH?

In the 20th century history of Québec a similar cry has already risen from a different perspective. Quietly, beginning in the early 1960s this question had more to do with survival and the future, being that access to the institutions of government, commerce, and education significantly depended on one's closeness or conformity to the English-speaking world. In that relationship a threat arose, one with the potential to render Québécois French an obsolete and backwoods tongue unable to come out of its isolated past and remain useful in contemporary North America. It was then that the artists (whom I call the "truth diggers") and intellectuals of Québec began to murmur that this threat was real and imminent. Then they boldly chose for their own lives to walk out a hope that French could be – that it must be, that it shall remain – the sole expression of all of Québec's culture and heritage. No longer could they survive while living by English "say-so," English permission. And so began *La Revolution Tranquille* (the Quiet Revolution).⁵

Without question their choices moved the masses and the politicians towards sweeping resolutions that have ultimately helped Québec emerge today at the forefront of contemporary French expression.⁶ Québec's feigned indifference toward her English and bilingual cousins has hurt the feelings of many and has challenged many assumptions about what defines Canada.⁷ And through it all, a true *renaissance française* has

Charles de Gaulle where he announced "Vivre Québec, Vivre Québec libre!" (Long-live Québec, Long live a free Québec!).

⁵ Ironically the one institution that was the most French, the Catholic Church, was ultimately held in the most contempt. Those thinkers and leaders surmised that if the Church had not used her considerable power and access to the other institutions to help elevate the French plight, then she must have been coddled and in bed with the other predominantly English institutions, who must have granted her such complete and uninterrupted access to Québec's people for her on purposes. Revelations uncovered plans to fill ever-growing numbers of semi-glorious edifices with exponentially more Québécois children, some of whom had been emotionally and even physically abused. The Québécois not only walked out of the door of the Catholic Church they "slammed" it.

⁶ At the turn of the 1970's *La Revolution Tranquille* catapulted members of the newly formed political *Parti Québécois* into control of Québec's provincial government, which formed the *Bloc Québécois*. The parliament quickly enacted a series "French only" language laws that established French as, if not necessarily the foremost spoken language, certainly the most written and visible language; a situation that led to a social phenomena called "*English flight*" whereupon thousands of both English speaking "*Quebeckers*", as well as numerous bi-lingual and bi-cultural francophones fled into neighboring English Canada (Ontario) to avoid the rising politically charged and "secessionist" storm.

⁷ Since the early 1970's waves of secessionist fervor have resulted in several referendum on Québec sovereignty. Each time the gap has narrowed with the last vote of 1995 having maintained a weak *federalist* status quo with a "NO" vote

been poured out on *le monde francophone*. Through their tongue, their literature, their song, and their art the Québécois have offered up fresh, raw, and yes, sometimes faltering contributions to French culture, which at its Parisian core appears to have run out of anything new.⁸ Over the past 45 years the blemish that was Québec has forged an indigenous existence that has both beat the odds and has helped to redefine contemporary French life.⁹ One must ask how it is that a mere 7 million French-speakers have managed such a feat in a sea of some 275 million English North Americans who are not only the pinnacle of world influence, but who are constantly accused of threatening the continued survival of subordinate cultures worldwide? Was it the influence of two, five, or twelve French-speaking revolutionaries? or was it you, Lord, who would not let even *this* tribe be lost before the fulfillment of your desire to see every tongue, nation, and tribe before your throne?¹⁰

I see in these things a model: this example of God's continued yearning for Québécois culture in His kingdom has laid the groundwork for a courageous undertaking.

The First Group

My questions crystallized. I asked the Lord, "Who are the revolutionaries?" I saw in my mind's eye a round table with half a dozen Québécois believers sitting around it and no visible head. They would make a pact among themselves, a pact to separate themselves from English say-so. Now they would abide by one meager standard: "if we don't compose it, we won't sing it; if we don't write it, we won't read it; if we don't research it, we won't preach it." This standard for

winning by only a .04% margin. In 1994 the *U.S. State Department* published a report that predicted not only the break up of Canada over the Québec issue, but the report also determined that Canada's "other" nine provinces would not have the political will, identity or leadership to convene a new and functioning constitution, since the current *Canadian Constitution* doesn't allow for succession. Indeed *McClain's Magazine*, the *Time Magazine* of Canada, in referring to these political turmoils labels the parties involved not Québec and Canada, but tellingly as *Québec and the ROC* (the rest of Canada).

⁸ More on this later, but suffice it to say that cultural expressions in France have run their course as their minds have been closed to the creativeness of the Gospel for close to three centuries.

⁹ It has been noted that much of post-modern culture, including artistic offerings in music, literature and especially media are being produced in the heart of Montréal's St. Laurent, St. Denis and Plateau Montréal districts.

¹⁰ Barry Whatley, a longtime missionary to Québec raised the proposition that if the Lord had allowed the sea of English-speaking North Americans to wash over Québec, we could reasonably expect the population to measure between 25%-30% evangelical compared to the .05% measurement of today. The implication exists that perhaps the Lord is more interested in bringing this tribe before his throne than to let them disappear altogether.

expression demands that at the core they embrace the arts, that they become "truth diggers." They are young, and as with all such movements their youth will provide them idealism and stamina. They are bilingual just like in other revolutions, where the leaders are "half-bleeds", torn inside by contradictions, able to see the injustices and ultimately make their choice. And last, they are Holy Spirit anointed as He wills through them to gather Québécois culture into His kingdom.

The Second Group

The Lord would call upon the bilingual, educated, aware, and broken men who are in leadership of the parachurch organizations that are uniquely perched over the threshold of Québec today.¹¹ Understanding the uniqueness of their posture for this hour, He calls upon them to stand in a circle with their backs to the movement and their faces toward both the bilingual and English churches in an effort to deflect the misunderstandings and criticisms that will come. Among these revolutionary youth, innocence and idealism for the Kingdom will predominate. But I sense that the bilingual church, the one the Lord birthed and loves, will undoubtedly feel judged and have true misgivings, though there are some in the bilingual church who have remained closer to their French roots than others and who will fall back into the bath that this movement will create to soak their aching French soul, one that has long cried out to the Lord for a fresh move in the heart of Québec.¹²

This movement of the Lord will be so indigenous in its expressions of the gospel in Québec that it will hardly be recognized through English eyes. This movement of the Lord will be so indigenous in its expressions that the Catholic Church – the largest land-holder in the province which has been brought to her knees by the Lord with little hope of resurrecting – yes, the Catholic Church will give this movement

¹¹ We have had the privilege of submitting our desires to reach the French Speaking world to representatives and leaders of several well respected para-church organizations in Québec such as *L'Armée du Salut* (Salvation Army), *Direction Chrétienne* (Christian Direction), *Jeunesse Pour Christ* (Youth For Christ), and *Jeunesse en Mission* (Youth With A Mission).

¹² The French-speaking believers of Québec, which statistically count as a remnant of the Church, have been sustained only by the work of the Holy Spirit. Many of them have faithfully prayed and yearned for a revival in the heart of Québec. But I believe that the Lord has tarried, not because of their unfaithfulness, but in order to burn away any semblance of the wrong DNA in the indigenous church.

its properties. Those empty edifices at the heart of every village and neighborhood, those cultural icons, those places where the name of Jesus was last uttered, ignored, and maligned, will capitulate.¹³ No storefront churches in this movement – they will wait for this gift.¹⁴ Because the often-jingoistic English-speaking North American church will not be able to grasp how this could be possible in the Kingdom, the knowledge of this gift could evoke cries of “Heresy!”¹⁵

But oh, how this movement will distance itself from the English-speaking church. For ingrained in French history is that from the epicenter of the French world,¹⁶ her people have both denied and shunned the gospel in favor of a wayward culture considered paramount.¹⁷ There they remain, after two centuries, unsuspecting of just how much Jesus has pined for France and her slaves. In a desert they crave forgotten and overused expressions of her once-royal culture and they thirst for expressions of life, French life, real life—unaware that only He brings life.

The groundwork is being laid. Sooner or later France will hear and learn, witness and yearn to taste. She will be drawn to forgotten Québec, despised Québec, abandoned Québec, and then . . . France will beg for this movement. It's in her secret world that I believe these things will happen.

It should not surprise us that in the economy of the Lord's kingdom He should use those who are marginalized, forgotten, and even despised to seek to humble any high and proud nation which over time would posture itself against the memory of the Lord. Therefore it is in response to our time and our calling that we seek an answer; for scattered across

¹³ There has been a continued emptying of the buildings of the Catholic Church, so much so that some even charge an occasional admission fee. Though empty, there is a resistance on the part of many in Québec to see these buildings converted into any other thing. Merely vestiges of their former selves, one minister of culture in the Québec government was reported to remark, “France has her chateaus, Québec has her cathedrals”. Something of the soul of Québec is in those buildings. Time has reduced the voice of the crimes and harsh feelings that were fresh a generation ago, while the distance in years has retained some of the nostalgic feelings about God and community life.

¹⁴ Again there is something deeply iconic about these edifices. Church for most of us in English North America can to varying degrees be just about anywhere. But for the Québécois the last church that they believed in was in the middle of their village and has yet to be replaced with any other form.

¹⁵ The mingling of the Protestant and Catholic worlds is ripe for misgiving.

¹⁶ France's centralized bureaucracy emanates from Paris while French culture worldwide constantly bears the mark of France.

¹⁷ During the *French Revolution* of 1787 a prostitute was hailed and paraded down the aisle of the famous *Notre Dame Cathedral* as a sign of the changing times and the ushering in of the *Age of Enlightenment*.

the Americas are remnants of France's imperialism, remnants that have born the mark of France but without her blessing. These remnants, which reasonably have teetered on extinction, have been supported by a Lord who cries through them.¹⁸ And what is our cry other than we are connected and cannot be separated? Further, we will not be forgotten and we will no longer be distanced from a destiny that seeks to see the Lord Jesus glorified by the best and most expressive elements of our cultural heritage.

Surely there is much more to know and discern. But this we can be sure of: even though France has forgotten Jesus, He has not forgotten her. For He alone is faithful to gather all of those within her former borders and under her long shadow.

In closing we bless the Lord, His long-suffering, His work through the Holy Spirit, and the name of His son, Jesus.

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¹⁸ Including French in the Maritimes, the Caribbean and throughout the northern reaches of Canada's provinces. The French that was transmitted to my family survived in the Acadian (Cajun) region of South Louisiana, placed there as a result of the expulsion of the Acadians from Canada's eastern shores in 1755. As of this writing my 80-year-old aunt still speaks French as a first language.