

Why Has the Evangelical Church in France Grown by 1000%?

The number of evangelical Christians has increased in France from 50,000 in 1950 to 500,000 today. Can we identify the causes of this growth? Is this growth reproducible elsewhere? What lessons can be learnt from the French context which could be valid for other European nations?

David Brown has been involved in church planting in France since 1976, and has planted three churches (two in Nancy and one in the Paris suburbs). At present he is “replanting” a church in central Paris (Église Protestante Évangélique de Paris-Villiers). For the last ten years he has also been involved with the GBU (Groupes Bibliques Universitaires), the French student movement affiliated to IFES, firstly as General Secretary, and until recently as chair of the board. He also chairs the Evangelism Commission of the French “National Council of Evangelicals” and teaches church planting at the Geneva Bible Institute. He is married to Mary, and they have four adult children and a growing number of grandchildren.

I. Obstacles for the Gospel in France

A. Catholicism

1. The “normal” religion
2. Catholic anthropology

B. Philosophy

1. Salvation through man
2. Anti-clericalism
3. “Laïcité”

II. The progress of the Gospel in France

A. The increase in the number of evangelical churches

B. The number of evangelical Christians

III. The motors of this growth

A. AoG between 1935 and 1960

B. Foreign missionaries between 1960 and 2000

C. The charismatic movement between 1970 and 1990

D. Immigration between 190 and 2010

E. French church planters since 1995

IV. The reasons for this growth

A. The religious and political situation in France

1. The decline of the Catholic church
2. The general feeling of social despair
3. Easier to debate than in some countries

B. A growing acceptance of Evangelicals

1. No longer “a sect”
2. 74% of the population has heard of them
3. A lot of hard work on the local level.

C. The growing spiritual and structural unity of Evangelicals

1. The CNEF (National council of French Evangelicals)
2. The slogan “1 for 10 000”.

V. Conclusion

A. Two surveys

1. BVA on attitudes to the communication of religious beliefs
2. CNEF pastors

Suggested Readings:

- **Church Planting in Europe** (edited by Evert van de Poll and Joanne Appleton) WIPF & Stock, Eugene, Oregon 2015 (in particular my chapter on “What kind of church for postmodern Europeans?”)
- **Servir à nos Français** David Brown, Editions Farel 2009 (in French only)