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Spreading the Gospel where it's thinnest

Café Conversations

I have been a part of the team that is reaching out to North Africans since 1990 living in several countries. After losing a visa in 2008 and not being able to get another, my wife and I felt we should settle for a while in Britain, partly to recover from a lot of moving around. There are many North Africans in Britain, especially from the country most on our hearts. We discovered most were based around one city, so we moved there. The North Africans we meet come from every strata of society; lots are doctors and mature students but there are also economic refugees looking simply to improve the life of their children. More recently, a number of political refugees have come here to avoid oppressive regimes.

Many folks need or want to improve their English and this has given us a natural contact, helping with conversation practice or proof reading theses. My wife, now retired, has held separate English classes for the women who are often uncomfortable with mixed gender classes. We have used varying approaches over the years, sometimes the general lesson material provided by the government, sometimes lessons based on the Jesus Film or selections of Biblical material. There are however more and more who have come to this country, studied or gotten jobs and have attained a good level of English. We need other ways to reach out to them.

There are other groups in the city reaching out to students and we have been collaborating with them in some of their activities. One of these is a weekly Café for International students where they come to make friends, practise their English and learn a little about Britain. The café attracts students from a wide range of nations and they all need to hear the Good News. We are always glad when God brings North Africans across our paths.



A lot has been written in recent times about the way that God, as we have not gone to the unreached, is bringing the unreached to us. Certainly, this is true, but even though we have come closer in proximity, we still need to work to come together socially. It is not at all automatic that they will be interested in our spiritual views. We need to keep looking for ways to meet "heart to heart" so that they will be hungry to hear the good news.

'John' left NZ for North Africa in 1990, and met his wife while in France with the same team. They're currently based in Britain, working with others among the North African and migrant community.

John (pseudonym)



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WEC International



reaching people | planting churches | mobilising for mission

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Belgium: Small Country, Big needs

Mission involvement in Belgium impacts all age groups. Our fellowship is reaching out to children, youth, women, couples, elderly people and immigrants (e.g. Russians, Latinos and Eastern Europeans).

Through an exciting variety of ministries we are seeing new disciples trained, and local leaders, who previously did not believe in themselves, passionately sharing the hope of the gospel with a secular generation.

A True Story

Romeo and Michelle, are a Belgian couple with two children. Romeo used to be a multiple national boxing champion. Following an amazing experience with Jesus, he is now reaching out to many people through his life and testimony, and is training to become a pastor. Michelle won a national singing competition and used to be a professional singer. Also transformed through a personal encounter with Christ, she now leads community worship and together with her husband serves as one of our elders. This is but one of many examples of what a small seed of obedience can do.

The Need in Europe

Belgium is a “free” country. But we face different challenges to India, where we served for 10 years. Here we face materialism, secularism, rationalism and occultism. God is often put aside, because many people have not grown up with a “Christian culture.” In fact it’s described as “something from the past.”



Lauro, Romeo and Michelle

Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther said that the righteous should live by faith (Romans 1:17). However, faith has gone cold on this continent. Most people seem to have tried everything to sort out their problems, and yet have found no answer.

Belgium and Europe have become huge mission fields. The needs are enormous. Likewise are the opportunities! It’s time to bring “new wine” in a “new wine skin” (new types of faith communities). The continent waits to see the manifestation of the “sons of God” (Romans 8:19).

Are you willing to change your perspective on this mission field? Would you be willing to stretch your view of what spreading the love of God to this generation looks like? We’re always open to new ideas and ways for the Holy Spirit to move. Could it be through you?

If so, may God grow faith in the face of constantly rising living costs. Serving in this expensive nation is difficult for most missionaries, who rely on the support of churches and friends abroad.

Paul spoke of a “vision” in which he received an urgent call, to “pass over into Macedonia and help” (Acts 16:9). From big miracles to small acts of faith, there is space for you to contribute! The only question left is, “Are you willing?”

For more information about Belgium, or other European ministries, contact WEC NZ.



Lauro and Rosane

Europe: A Missionary’s Challenge

One would expect that the 500th anniversary celebrations should be met with joy and thanksgiving throughout the continent where it all began. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Instead, those of us serving here are increasingly worried about its spiritual condition. None of us would deny that Europe is one of most needy mission fields today.



There are four main concerning aspects of Europe’s spiritual state that supports this conclusion:

- 1) Secularism**
After World War II a wave of materialism and secularism took place on the continent. Religion has become a neglected aspect in the life of most people. Faith has lost its value to money, career, comfort and entertainment.
- 2) The rejection of Christian faiths**
Distrust in traditional faith expressions, whether Catholic or Protestant, is now rampant in Europe. Church attendance has sharply declined in recent decades, and church-goers are in the main elderly. This has somehow extended to the new Evangelical movements also, which are often perceived as cults.
- 3) A growing interest and search for occultism**
Among those who still have some kind of spiritual interest, there is a growing engagement with occultism. In newspapers and magazines across Europe one can find lots of advertisements for astrology, witches and all sorts of sorcerers. There is also a growing interest in a new kind of paganism, inspired by the pre-Christian religions of the Germanic, Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon peoples.
- 4) The spread of foreign religions**
One of Europe’s main issues has been migration, currently at the forefront of debate with the recent Middle East refugee crisis. In countries like France, Belgium and England immigrants now number

half of the population of many towns. While new believers and migrant churches are to found in many of these contexts, some scholars predict that, at such rates, Islam may become the largest religion in Europe within 80 years.

Such a scenario presents a major challenge. But it is also a window of opportunity - for not only European churches, but for Christians elsewhere to once again go to Europe with the powerful, transforming and passionate message of the Gospel. Because of democracy and freedom of speech, Europe might be one of the best places where ethnic groups from all over the world can be reached.

We do not envision a new Reformation, instead, a great harvest reaching out to the younger generation who has not heard the Gospel in a way they understand it. We dream about a new beginning of a healthy movement of churches that live out and show the life of our Lord Jesus Christ in power of Holy Spirit. Come and join us!



A graduate of Theology and Philosophy, José Sobrinho and his family have been working with WEC Portugal for almost four years, following 12 years service in Central Asia.

José

500 Years – 900 Words! (continued from cover)

Luther's Reformation can best be seen as the rediscovery and re-assertion of two key Christian principles: the New Testament gospel of salvation by grace, through faith in Christ, and the primacy of the Word of God over every other authority.



From those two principles, all else flowed. These caused Luther and those caught up in his reforming movement, to re-examine the faith they had been raised in. Rejecting everything they saw as unhelpful to the Gospel or as contrary to scripture, they refined or reformulated much else. Many beliefs and practices that obscured the Gospel, or implied that salvation could be earned by works (or sold and bought), or which were not firmly rooted in Scripture, or were superstitious, were abandoned. These included monasticism, the mass as an offering to God, transubstantiation, masses for the dead, the veneration of Mary and the saints, purgatory, indulgences, relics, pilgrimages, feast days, the papacy, the mediating role of the priesthood, priestly robes, confession to a priest, and obligatory clerical celibacy.

In place of all that, there were new emphases on proclaiming the Gospel and teaching the Word. The Scriptures were to be available to all; (available in the people's own language, printed, and used both in church and at home). Priests (whose task was to offer sacrifice) became pastors (whose task was to teach the Word), church services were in the vernacular, congregational singing, and a flood of printed booklets and catechisms explaining the faith all contributed to this.

In matters of religious authority, the primacy of the Word of God was asserted over every other religious and secular authority: over church tradition, popes and canon law, philosophy, human culture and opinion, and worldly rulers. Luther recognised these lesser authorities still had a place, but the Protestant principle he established was that the truth of God revealed in Christ and the Scriptures must be paramount. Before Europe's most powerful ruler, he famously declared, "my conscience is captive to the Word of God".

These changes in belief, practice, and the locus of authority had huge implications for the shape and flavour of the Christianity that would later be taken around the world by the Protestant missionary movement. At least in principle, Protestant missions and the churches they planted would be Gospel-centred and Bible-based. Providentially, the Reformation re-established good biblical foundations for worldwide mission.

Nevertheless, the connections between the Reformation and the modern worldwide expansion of Christianity are more complex than may at first appear. Obviously, vast amounts of mission took place prior to the Reformation, establishing the church in Europe, the Middle East, and parts of Asia.

For some centuries after the Reformation, it was Catholics rather than Protestants who were heavily involved in mission to other parts of the world (primarily through the Spanish, at

that time at the height of their international influence). During that time, Protestants showed little or no interest in overseas mission. They were preoccupied with establishing and defending the Protestant faith in their own societies. They had no energy for – and little access to – the rest of the world. Among Lutherans and Calvinists, commitment to reformed confessions was foremost, but the evangelisation of the world was (yet) barely thought of. Today, many parts of Europe once transformed by the Reformation now need re-evangelisation.

The first significant stirrings among Protestants for overseas mission began among the Moravians, a passionate movement of spiritual renewal in the eighteenth century. Moravian missionaries, committed and prayerful, went to hard and desolate places with the Gospel, expecting never to return.



The eighteenth century saw revival among Protestants on both sides of the Atlantic. This saw the emergence of evangelical Christianity as a highly dynamic new movement transcending denominational boundaries; it not only embraced the Reformation commitments of salvation by faith and the authority of scriptures, but also was eager for rebirth, discipleship, evangelism, along with the transformation of societies. By the end of the century, evangelicals were becoming much more alert to the need to disseminate the Gospel to all parts of the world.

Merely being Protestant is no cause for pride: there has always been much in the Catholic tradition, which is admirably Christian, and much in the Protestant tradition that has been less than biblical (including our own lapses into formalism and legalism, and our selectivity in regard to Scripture). Further, being Protestant has never been a guarantee that a person will have a heart for the Gospel, for evangelism, and for making disciples. As always, those things require a living faith in Christ, inspired by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

At this time when the church is commemorating Luther and the Reformation, we do well to recall the two key principles of the Reformation: the New Testament gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, and the absolute importance of the Word of God. Both principles have deep implications for worldwide mission.



Previously Vice-Principal of Laidlaw College, Dr Lange is currently senior minister at Massey Presbyterian Church and a Senior Research Fellow at Laidlaw. A noted historian, he wrote and presented the DVD Te Rongopai: 200 Years of the Gospel in NZ.

Dr Stuart Lange



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More Info

Recently in researching for an upcoming sermon, I came upon the following comment, "Galatians has been called the "Magna Carta of Christian liberty... In Luther's hands, the book became a mighty weapon in the Reformation arsenal... Luther, by rediscovering and teaching it, restored to the church its spiritual heart and freedom" (James Montgomery Boice).

It got me thinking about law, freedom, and grace and how, even 2000 years after Paul wrote this book, it is still a major issue today.

We live in an age of supposed freedom especially strongly espoused in the Western World. Yet the presence and power of addictions to drugs, alcoholism, pornography and the like would suggest we are still slaves. The freedom promised by Paul is still far away. In his letter to the Romans, Paul declares, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (10:9). You will then be able to escape the curse of sin and the law, and live a life in genuine freedom. Freedom of mind and spirit.

Even in my own life as a confessing Christian, I still wrestle with this concept of true freedom. Surely there is something I need to do to ensure I am worthy of being saved. The idea that something so precious as true freedom is a gift to all and cannot be earned is, I believe, a message we need reminding of frequently.

I am saddened that millions of people worldwide have still not heard the message that brings true freedom. They are busy trying to earn their way to heaven. My question to you is, "what are we going to do about that?"



Having served in Asia for a number of years 'Chris' and his family are now serving in our NZ branch.

Chris

18th - 22nd January 2018

Registration and start: 2pm
Wrap up and finish: 1pm

THE AMAZING
RACE
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Eastwest College of Intercultural Studies is sponsoring a camp for MKs/TCKs who are entering Year 10 up to age 23.

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\$120 per person

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