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Interview of Richard Andrejewski

Richard Andrejewski

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HARDING COLLEGE LIVING HISTORY OF MISSIONS

This is June 20 in Reims, France. I am Winfred Wright, and I am talking today with Richard Andrejewski. Richard preaches for the church in Lille, France, and preaches regularly on World Radio in the French speaking countries and does a great deal of evangelistic work. He has preached for both the Geneva and Reims campaigns. We have just finished our campaign here in Reims and he is getting ready to leave and go back to his work in Lille.

Wright: Richard, we appreciate your taking the time to express some of your viewpoints concerning mission work in France. Since you are a French person yourself and had a lot of experience in the States--you've had two years at Harding College--you can understand a lot of the needs and problems for mission people in France. You can also understand a lot of the mentality of the American people and know some of the things they need to learn in adapting to French culture. I'll ask you first to give us a brief background of your work since you began full time work of the church in France.

Andrejewski: My full time work, Brother Wright, began in 1960. I came out of the military and spent about two and a half years in Morocco. 1960 was also the year of my marriage to a Belgium girl, Nellie. I spent the first year working with Brother Hilton Terry in Brussels.

At the end of this period, the Broadway Church of Christ in Houston asked me to go to Lille and to replace Brother Robert Grigg who had worked in Lille for several years with Brother Douglas Marsh. It was a pleasure to answer that call and to go to Lille first because Lille is in the part of France where I was born. The dialect spoken by the people there in the north is one with which I have lived in my boyhood and also because of the fact that Brother Marsh was in school with me at Harding. We had some contact together and it was a pleasure to have a co-worker with one I knew very well. I have been in Lille since 1960.

Brother Marsh left us, I believe, in 1962. I had the opportunity to go to the States upon the invitation of our sponsoring congregation. That was, I believe, in 1964 and while there, I was able to contact my former roommate, Dale McAnulty, from Harding College. He was in Denver, Colorado, Lakewood precisely. I was able to find words to persuade him to come to Lille and to help me in the work there. Dale came in 1965 to Lille with his family and has been with us ever since. Our work in the north of France, in Lille, has been like any other work. We've tried to contact as many people as possible and at the present time, after an effort of approximately 18 years in Lille, it seems like the church is reaching a point now of stability and dignity and permanence because of the young elements that were added to the church as of late.

Wright: What particular methods are you using in Lille? How did you contact these people that are stable? What suggestions would you make concerning methods of evangelism?

Andrejewski: That has always been the question among all missionaries. No one knows what the method is and it seems like an accumulation of all efforts will bring the desired results. There is no magical way I believe to reach people. We have many obstacles to overcome. I believe we will deal with this a little later. The way in which we have contacted these, our present membership, in Lille is varied.

One of the most stable families in Lille are Brother and Sister DuBois and their five children. They were contacted through the radio program. Brother DuBois is a male nurse in a psychiatric hospital. He had to wake up early one morning and just happened to turn on his radio when a lesson was broadcast. He liked it and wrote in for the lesson. It was what he had always been looking for. He contacted us personally in Lille. There were just five or six I believe meeting that Sunday morning and because he had heard a radio sermon and through the radio broadcast he had the impression that it was a very important big group. He came and he saw how few were there but he persevered and he was contacted in this way and converted.

Brother and Sister DiNelse is another story. Brother DiNelse just slipped a note under the door of our meeting place asking for someone to come over to tell him what the Bible was. Naturally, within that week, someone went there and we studied for about a year and a half, twice a week in his home with his young bride. He is a faithful member of the church. He is a barber and contributed \$4000 this year toward the purchase of a new meeting place.

Then Brother and Sister Gallee were contacted through distribution of invitations. I believe that in the French speaking world we have found that the Concours Biblique, a Bible contest, a win a Bible idea, has brought more results than anything else that we have tried. Perhaps you are already familiar with the idea. Invitations are passed from door to door inviting people to subscribe to enter the contest with the idea in mind to win a Bible. It is very easy and free and challenging and interesting. They answer the first set of questions with the gospel of Mark and they will receive another set of questions with the New Testament and then they will receive as a gift, because they have won actually through their own studies, the whole Bible. By the time they receive the whole Bible, they have read most of the New Testament. That is really the amazing thing. Naturally all of this takes place by mail but the Bible is delivered to them personally so they know who we are and by that time they have spent many hours with the New Testament, with us in mind, in their subconscious, more or less, and that way contact has been established. Then, it is time to establish cottage meetings in their own homes or suggest a Bible correspondence course. This to us has been a very fruitful means. Nothing sensational or overwhelming but it has allowed us to go into people's homes without forcing their door. We were more or less invited in because of the questions they have answered.

Wright: Actually, the person who enters the contest is in competition with himself. He is not in a contest with someone else but if he does the study and the work, he does receive his Bible.

Andrejewski: Yes. We have finally understood that after many years we have for too long a time taken for granted the fact that people knew, for example, who the Corinthians were or Thessalonians. We often say John 3:16. To them, it sounds like some kind of Calvinistic cult or phrase that only the highly initiated could understand. With this Bible contest we teach them in the very beginning to read their Bible reference and to become familiar with those strange Bible names. It is a discovery. It is really a discovery. They find out the Bible is not that difficult. It is a black book but not a magical one and not a dreadful one, but it is one that speaks to them. It is a challenge.

Wright: I think this indicates to us that for people who haven't grown up in an evangelical atmosphere your work has to be on a much more elementary basis here in France than it does say in the United States. Much of the time you have to tell them what the Bible is.

Andrewjewski: Very definitely. I remember that personally I had never seen the Bible until the age of 14. An American missionary showed me one. It was a total Discovery. I could read of Christ in it and of the apostles and of things which were familiar to me. I was so surprised and overwhelmed by this discovery that I took it candidly to the priest thinking that he had never seen one himself and that I had discovered something that I wanted to share with him. He took it away from me. That really aroused my curiosity and Brother Anderson gave me another one.

Wright: Also the fact that you studied for a year and a half with this couple would indicate, I think, that the most stable converts do require a certain amount of teaching. In other words, you don't go in and teach one lesson and baptize very many people who remain faithful, do you?

Andrewjewski: That's right. It is a very very long process. People seem to be so encumbered, so bogged down with ideas strange to the Bible--traditions, superstitions that the work is not even plowing yet. It is pulling out those long obstinate roots and rocks to first discover the soil and then you are able to plow and then sow. It is a very very long process. To me it is always a sign of tremendous victory when I see an elderly couple, for example, go down into a swimming pool to be baptized. They have traveled a long long way. They know that they would be looked down upon and perhaps ridiculed by the people who know them and it really takes a lot of faith because this is just not seen, baptism by immersion. It takes a lot of conviction. It truly takes lots and lots of conviction. You can really see the work of conversion, one that comes out of darkness, ignorance superstition into the light of the gospel.

Wright: Would you enlarge a little bit more on the background, religious background of the people that you work with?

Andrewjewski: Yes, we find that France is a Catholic country, but even the most objective Catholic scholars recognize that France itself from the standpoint of Catholicism is also a mission field for them. It seems that although by tradition France is a Catholic country there is no faith in God, practically no faith in God. When you ask people what they are religiously, they instinctively say I am a Catholic. But paradoxically they will say they are not practicing--that means they don't go to church--and very often they will claim disbelief in the pope's authority, in Mary, and in most of the dogmatic teachings of the Catholic Church. But they still consider themselves a Catholic.

Wright: This is very interesting. There has been a Frenchman about 37 years old who attached himself to us and as the chorus from LCC sang out in the park yesterday, at the end he jumped out in front of the group and in front of the French people who were assembled and said, "I don't believe in anything; I am an atheist. I'm not anything at all, but I have been hearing these singers for three or four days now and if you come and hear them tonight you certainly won't regret it." It was only about 15 minutes later that he told me, "I'm a Catholic but...." He's a Catholic but he doesn't believe in God.

Andrewjewski: It is purely a matter of tradition. They will have their baby baptized in the Catholic Church because that ceremony just needs to take place. They will instinctively marry in the Catholic Church and they will be buried by the Catholic rites. That's about the sum total of it. There is another thing which

we must state. Catholicism has been such a character of religion and has disappointed people so much that naturally they do not know another expression of Christianity could exist. They have become disgusted, indignant and they have become unbelievers, doubters first and then unbelievers and many of them have become communists or atheists.

Atheism is very very prominent in France. In fact, after the war, there was a wave of philosophers who found many attentive ears, especially among the young. Now, Sartre and Camus are often studied and are the champions of doubt and skepticism and militant atheism, aggressive atheism. They attack religion, not realizing that what they attack is actually Catholicism as the only expression of Christianity that most people know in France. So there is this traditional superstitious Catholicism and then there is this militant atheism and then there is the indifference of people. I believe these are the three obstacles that we must overcome.

I find that our success with people is with those who are really dissatisfied. They have not chosen yet the alternative which atheism offers, but they look for a purity. For example, Brother DuBois said he looked everywhere. He studied with the Jehovah's Witnesses for two years and finally had to expell them from his home. He finally said to his wife, "I think we will have to found our own church." Within that month he heard our radio program and he found that people were existing who thought like he did and searched for the same truth.

Wright: Richard, understanding the French, religiously and culturally and economically, and also understanding Americans as you do, what suggestions would you make for missionaries who are planning to come to France as far as preparation. How can they prepare to meet the culture, and the religion of France?

Andrewjewski: I believe that the American missionary must not come with the idea that he will meet in the streets and have most of his conversations with philosophers--people will discuss Sartre and Camus and atheism. He will meet just ordinary people like everywhere in the world. People who like to laugh, they like what is pure, what is true. Many of them have never seen expressions of purity and truth but they deep inside they appreciate this.

The indispensable to me is one that makes plans to come to France or to any other mission field first would be naturally to learn the language. It seems like that is one of the avenues which leads not only to the comprehension of the language but also of the mentality of the people and their culture. Naturally when you study a language you come in contact with the culture, their way of thinking, their way of expressing themselves and then you learn to love them.

I don't believe that one should necessarily come prepared as a student of philosophy. One must come, if possible, with a knowledge of the language. If you can learn it beforehand so much the better. He will polish his language on the field, but he must come with naturally a good knowledge of the truth and he must come with the love for these people. I have met many missionaries who were not necessarily highly educated, but I am thankful that I have found people in the past such as Melvin Anderson and Maurice Hall who have come just as Americans, who could not hide the fact that they were Americans, but they have transformed many

lives in France because they could show and prove that they loved the people. They loved to come in contact with them. They taught them the truth; they loved the truth. They tried to understand them and have a lot of affection for them. This is to me the contagious thing, it is the secret for success in evangelism.

Wright: What are a few things that we need to be aware of in the French culture so as not to be offensive to them or so as not to drive them away from us as we try to teach them the truth?

Andrewjewski: That is a very very difficult question to answer really because I have made some mistakes and I've had to change my opinions. An American is naturally more extrovert, more expansive, than the usual European. Especially if he presents himself as an evangelist, he is expected to be poised and dignified. It would be shocking to the French at first contact to see a boisterous, laughing loud evangelist because that just does not fit with the picture, with the opinion that they form of an evangelist, what an evangelist should be. Naturally, he must not present himself as a long faced preacher. I remember Stanley Shipp. He came to our home on the way to Switzerland. He said, "Richard, as a Frenchman, I want you to tell me what is expected of a pastor." Can you imagine Stanley Shipp, if there ever was an extrovert? I told him exactly that. I said the people expect an evangelist or pastor to be calm and poised and dignified. He just shook his head and took it in. He remained Stanley Shipp all the way through and it was good because Stanley Shipp was Stanley Shipp but he was also a Christian. I found this out. In Lausanne, people loved him because he was natural. He did not try to put on an air and he truly loved and really wanted to get the message across and contact people and love them and understand them. I believe that Dale Carnegie would agree with this in contacting anybody there is this genuine desire to understand them and not to impose an opinion but to try to share and understand and love. This is a feeling that will open many doors and break many shells.

Wright: You are aware of the discussions in America concerning support for French preachers in France. You've been supported from the States for a long time. I would like to get your viewpoint. What are the advantages of having support from America? What are the disadvantages as you see it?

Andrewjewski: The disadvantage is the fact the French brethren who consider me as one of their own know that I am being supported by American churches. It is almost unnatural. It takes a lot of teaching on my part to make them understand that these brethren in America are more numerous than we are and they send missionaries and they try to convert these people and when there is an evangelist ready to go full time into the field he needs to be supported and therefore he needs to receive funds from where funds exist. I try to point out also that we must build strong enough churches in France which will be able in turn to be free from this dependence on American churches and strong enough to support people such as me, evangelists and perhaps also send missionaries to other fields. The advantage is not different. I think there are more disadvantages than advantages.

Wright: Have you encountered any real problems in your own personal life?

Andrewjewski: In the beginning we have tried to examine the wages of the French and we have wanted from the very beginning in 1960 with the elders to have a salary that would not put me into the upper bracket. We have examined the salary of salesmen, of a school teacher and so on. We have tried to adapt our salary with a medium bracket, but we have failed to take into consideration that we did not get the privileges of the French. For example, the French have their Social Security which is much different from Social Security in the States and the fact that

the doctor is free, medical care, hospitalization, dental care and also allowances for children and also allowances for house rent. All of this help the French considerably. These are privileges which we do not enjoy.

Wright: You fit into a category of self-employed without a lot of this.

Andrewjewski: Right, so we ran into a lot of difficulty and finally we had to appeal for more help. Now lately I was in Belfast, Ireland and I talked to Brother Joe Nesbitt who used to be a newspaper editor. Brother Nesbitt told me in the beginning when he went into full time mission work, he wanted his salary to be what it used to be in his secular work. But he said after awhile he just could not make it. It seems like a missionary here, I don't know why, spends so much more money. You know he runs around so much in his car and then he has people always in his home. I know every Sunday we have at least two or three people in our home for dinner and sometimes during the week.

Wright: Normally, French families do not do this?

Andrewjewski: That's right, but it is almost expected of a missionary, of a preacher to be hospitable in that way. So it seems like there is just more money being spent and it is impossible for us to save any money. I see that by asking questions to other missionaries it is the same thing. We have no money in the bank; we are always in the red; we have no retirement plan. Sometimes my wife asks me what are we going to do when we get old. The Lord will provide. I believe that the French now understand our situation is far from being enviable that actually it is really purely vocational in spite of the fact that outwardly we seem to be well off.

Wright: We appreciate your being frank in your discussion of this because I think this is one area where we have not been as understanding even though we have wanted to be. It has been hard for us to arrive at a solution that would be advantageous in every way. Just briefly how do you feel about the future of the work in France?

Andrewjewski: Very optimistic because of the potential that exists in our young people. We have learned to be more careful, more positive in our approach and especially more patient. We understand that we must sow, and sow and keep on sowing and not be too impatient to expect results right then. The Lord will provide them.