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Interview of Bob Grigg

Bob Grigg

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Today is June 15 and we are in Geneva, Switzerland. This is Winfred Wright and I am talking to Bob Grigg who was for several years a missionary in France and who now preaches for the church in Cordell, Oklahoma. Bob is here for the campaign in Geneva and will be staying on for a few weeks to help in follow up work of this campaign.

Bob, we are glad to have you take a few minutes out of your day and share with us some of your experiences in mission work. Would you tell us briefly about your part in the work in France?

Grigg: I arrived in France in January, 1955. I was for six and a half years in the north of France in a place called Lille. I had followed Brother Melvin Anderson who had started the work there about three or four years before. Also for some two years before I came, Brother Floyd Davis and his wife had been working there and continued working with me for about eleven months. At the end of that eleven months I had to try to begin doing the work and, of course, not having had any French background at all before that, it was very difficult.

Just by way of background I might say that when I first came there, there were a few Christians. Many of them had connections with the Protestant groups in France. Some of them had come out of independent movements. One of the most stable works was done, however, in Eaiecaillon about thirty miles to the south from Lille. With these people worked the Andrewjewski family. Richard, of course, now preaches in Lille. He was in the States studying at Harding College when I arrived. The work in Eaiecaillon, while it did not grow very much was, nevertheless, one of the most stable works I guess in the French speaking world. It certainly was a benefit to all of us.

By the way of religious background the people are about 90% Catholic. However, only about 10% or less are actually practicing Catholics. The people from the Catholic Church consider it to be a missionary nation. I don't know what else you would like to have as far as background.

Wright: This is very good. Would you evaluate some of the differences between the French culture and American culture?

Grigg: Of course, it is totally different. We had no particular trouble I think assimilating ourselves into the French culture because we came with the idea of not being Americans but being Christians. I think that is one of the very important things that all of us need to learn. I believe that most of our missionary brethren have come with this idea. We love the French people.

Of course, there are many differences. One of them is, of course, when you go into their home they always want to bring you something to drink, and this is wine, generally their best bottle. I don't think that my family ever shocked anyone by refusing it because we always told them that we would like something else to drink if they had it. We didn't just refuse it abruptly but we told them that we were just not use to drinking it and they were always very kind to bring us coffee.

Sometimes I wondered maybe if my stomach wouldn't have been better off had I drank not quite so much because many times I would come in and my stomach would taste bitter all night long because I drank so much strong coffee.

The customs are somewhat different as have been mentioned. These are things that really need to be learned that you will not cause the cause of Christ to be set back by your being impolite. For example, just table manners. In America, we do not eat with both arms on the table, but in France we do. In France, also, we must always say instead of just hello, use at least sir or madam as we addressed them. This is a kindness. We do not wave across the street, but we cross the street to shake hands with a friend that we have met. Also when a person leaves our home we go down and stand at the door until that person has gotten out of sight just about. When you are invited to dinner, you always take a gift either for the children or flowers for the woman of the house and you do never forget a dinner appointment because these people have gone to a great deal of trouble and expense preparing a meal. These are just little things but they are very very important to the French culture.

Wright: Do you know of any source, a book or other source, that would give more of these cultural differences that a student or future missionary might have access to?

Grigg: I think if a person speaks French, especially the Alliance Francaise has some books which is a French course that is actually one of the best that I have found to tell us something about those customs. The Alliance trains thousands of people every year. I believe this year there are about 35,000 enrolled in the Alliance which is almost unimaginable just that many foreigners learning the French lesson. Because of this, they have spent a great deal of time compiling books that are very very good in going right to the heart of French culture. I believe it is one of the very finest.

Wright: You have been out of the French work now for several years now, Bob. But thinking back on when you were here, what were some of the serious challenges or problems that you had to meet and overcome?

Grigg: I've been out for about three years but as you mentioned there were some challenges and a good deal of problems. One of them, oftentimes we found couples that were not married but living together. I've even baptized some of these people not knowing the condition of their lives before they were baptized. I remember one particular couple back near the beginning of my stay in France who were in this condition, and I was unable to explain to them very thoroughly but I was able to show them in the Bible where all these passages were and we were able to help the lady. The man was not willing to be helped and he was very indignant about it.

Of course, one of the other things we learned was that we must be careful about how much we help in a financial condition; we want to help them. This is good. Christians ought to be willing to help other people and to share with other people. I think we have lost some people sometimes by being over helpful. To help people to help themselves, yes. But, otherwise we begin to ring dollar signs, I think, in the eyes of people and they think of us as rich Americans rather than as brethren in Christ and on their level.

There are, of course, a number of other things. One of them is, I think, never be dogmatic. I believe we need this in America. We need to know what we believe and why we believe it and just rely upon God's word. I think I have learned a great many things from some of the French people who were not Christians in the sense, and I believe that they needed to know a great many things about God's word, but there were some things that they knew that I needed to learn. I've learned a great deal from them, I think. I have a great deal more to learn from them, I believe. I thoroughly enjoyed working with the French people and meeting their problems.

One thing that I would like to say before I leave here is that every preacher, regardless of what he says and how much he teaches, will still be regarded by most young Christians as a pastor. That is, they are going to say that whatever his suggestions are, even though he says, "This is not Bible and I don't give this as a rule, just as my advice from my learning, from my own feelings," they are going to take it as an order and either they will accept it or reject it generally. Of course, as they get older in the faith, then they learn that really he is just a brother in Christ and he is speaking as an older brother in the Lord rather than as an authority. This is difficult to teach them.

Wright: In thinking about cultural adaptation, you and your wife had children when you came to France, did you have any particular problems in adapting and in your children's integration into the schools?

Grigg: Yes, a little bit and yet I think the problems were easily overcome. Now, we had one son who was in the third grade when we came. He had had polio and because of it he had missed some school before he came. We came in the middle of the year. I would suggest that no one come in January. Come at the beginning of the school year, preferably even in the beginning of the month of June so that you will have a little time. As the children play with others, they rapidly learn the language. This will help a great deal. However, our children, we took them to school and they said, "Well, do they speak any French?" We said no. They said, "Well, it's just like taking them to the swimming pool. We'll throw them in and let them learn to swim." That's just really what happened. So, for about six months or so they didn't learn anything in school. After that they began to understand. However, to show you that it wasn't a serious problem, my two children, whom we had at that time, we adopted others later, but these two children have done quite well in school. My oldest son is now teaching at LCC. He is teaching French. My other son is very interested in the Lord's work and I believe will orient toward work with youth groups. In fact, he is doing that this summer.

I think that the cultural advantages that they had far outweighed the cultural differences and shock that they felt. They did feel some and for awhile were lonely and they for awhile felt they were foreigners and they really felt this foreign element. I think though that that also helped them to understand maybe the problem that our black people have in America because here they were the minority. I think also we learned a deeper dependence on God than we had ever learned before.

Wright: What particular methods did you find successful during your work in France?

Grigg: Well, I could you tell you more that were unsuccessful than I think were successful.

Wright: We would like to know those too. Which ones would you say were unsuccessful to the point that you would not recommend them?

Grigg: Well, of course, there again it would be difficult to point them out but I did do a lot of bungling and fumbling along. I found that one of the best things, and, of course, this is true in America, is just personal work. You really have to get to know people and I think sometimes we try to go too fast. I think that is one of the methods that failed. We thought people knew more about God's word than they did. Most people in France have never even had a Bible in their hands. Some of them do not have one in their homes. Many of them, in fact, do not although it only costs a very small amount--75¢ at the time I left France. So many didn't even have one. They had never read it; therefore, all the training they had ever had about the Bible really came from their work with the Catholics in some way or maybe a Protestant group and they had more mis-training about the Bible, more misunderstanding about the Bible than they did any Bible knowledge.

I think though that the Jule Miller filmstrip which we now have in French was a good method. An open Bible study of some kind is always a very excellent method of study. Some people will have a good many problems. Of course, I might just mention this in passing that many times you will find people that have bounced from one religious group to another and they come to you not because really they are really seeking what the Bible says but seeking what agrees with their own opinions. This often happens in the early work of the church anyway. I think the church in Lille has been established for a long time. They have recently baptized several people whom they have been teaching for over a year. I believe that some of these will make a fine nucleus for the church. In fact, I have great hopes for the church in Lille. I do in Paris and also in other places where it has been established for a long time. We had to learn many things. In fact, the brethren are still learning and I think maybe I have learned a few things during the nine years that I worked with them also.

Wright: Operation French World has for the last few years been using large campaigns each summer. I think you have taken part in perhaps most of these campaigns. Evaluate for us campaign work in foreign countries. How do you feel about it? Is it good? Is it bad? What are the advantages and disadvantages? What do we need to do to make them better?

Grigg: I have participated in all of these except the one last year. I did not participate in that and I regretted that I didn't but I just couldn't work it out. I am sold on the Operation French World type campaign. I know that we can always find better ways to do it and I think this campaign this year was one of the very finest if not the finest that has been conducted. We have learned that young people even though they cannot speak the language, nevertheless convey to people by their attitude, by their bearing, by their joy, and by their love of one another that is expressed and seen by so many, I think they show Christianity in their lives. Paul said, you know, that we are a letter or epistle, written in hearts of flesh, read and known of all men. I think that is especially true. These people see Christ before they learn about Christ. This helps a great deal, of course.

We could wish that everyone could speak French. This is an impossibility because foreign languages have not been stressed in America until recently. We hope that in the years to come that this will become more and more reality. Of course, we could also use more French speaking workers who have been or are in the field. This year almost everyone who is in the field and certainly everyone who could come and a number came back who had been former missionaries such as myself, Gene Arnold and Al Waller and so many others, yourself also. This has been a great help.

Follow up work is always a problem. It could be hoped that in the years to come brethren in America could see fit to send their preacher who has been a missionary on the field to send him for three months work in the summer each year. I know this is a great deal to ask, and, yet, if brethren could only realize that really in this way, they are having a fellowship in really establishing the cause of Christ in Europe in a very real way by sacrificing their preacher for three months out of the year. Especially I would recommend this to congregations that have an associate minister so that the minister can be spared during that time. If we could have worked out a plan where they could have even been able to have gotten a man to come and work with them for that three months, they would have sent me. I hope this can become a reality with several of our brethren.

Wright: I think that's a good suggestion and something we should pursue somewhat, perhaps encourage our brethren at large to consider.

Griggs: Could I at this time before we go to something else just say a word for World Radio? I really would like to see someone be able to come and do some follow up work with World Radio. That was really what I had planned to do during at least six weeks of this time in Europe. This is badly needed because I have done some of this follow up work. I believe that it would be well worthwhile. These people are isolated and they need to see someone at least every two years or so who can help them again to reaffirm their faith in the Lord. Of course, they read the Bible but can you imagine being all by yourself, to be in a hostile world, hostile to Christianity, trying to remain faithful to the Lord? Yet, it is possible; they are doing it. I correspond with several of them and if we could have some of the workers who have been here before to come and do that work, it would be a wonderful thing. I know that Broadway in Houston has been looking for a man who could do this full time but they did want to evaluate the work first to be sure that it would work. They had agreed to send me but since I could not come for this length of time I hope someone can.

Wright: Do you have any idea about how many isolated Christians we have in the French speaking area?

Griggs: I could not tell you but I know there are several. I know there are a number of others who definitely need to be contacted and who without doubt are very very near the truth, just ready to be baptized with just a minimum of teaching. I think probably a day or two at each place could convert these people and confirm them enough, to strengthen them enough in their faith, that they could continue to be just as faithful as possible where they are. Of course, we will have to leave all this to the Lord, but we know the gospel is a powerful thing. WE know

that God's love for them will be such that he is his power and goodness and mercy can help them even apart from an organized congregation of God's people.

Wright: Another thing that we are always interested in is the training of national Christians, new converts. What experience have you had in training local people for leadership?

Grigg: I have participated in a number of the training programs that were nationwide, in fact, international back in the early days of trying to train local brethren to serve the Lord. At one time I remember in Lille we had about 12 young men and older men. This program, of course, was not ideal in that it was just for about two weeks in each place. However, it was the best we could do at the time. If we could establish a school on the order of the Vievier language school or something of that sort that could really continue to function regularly because personnel would remain there and people would be available to teach them, this is the ideal situation.

Men need to be trained on the field. They need to be trained, I think, partly in classroom work and then work with a missionary somewhere. Actually go out with him in cottage meetings, actually have part in preaching of the word, actually have a part in the many problems that come up from time to time. Help them to feel their way along. This is sort of a Paul and Timothy arrangement that certainly is a good arrangement and one that I think would work. I do hate to see our men sent to the States because so many times we have lost them either to the Lord or to the work in Europe at least. They have gone and many times have been led astray because of cultural shock to them and many think the affluence of America is very great and most people in Europe are not ready for that.

Wright: Are you suggesting then that with the present needs in France perhaps an apprentice type training is better than a formalized school situation?

Grigg: I think as it presently is yes. I don't think we have enough people in the French-speaking world at least to justify a real school at this time. This is my own personal feeling. It is perhaps not shared by everyone and maybe they are right but that's my feeling.

Wright: The fact that we have had a few schools that have been tried and haven't been able to continue might indicate that we are just not ready for it yet.

Grigg: It would seem that way to me.

Wright: How do you feel about American support for French preachers?

Grigg: Of course, that is the only way it can be done at the present time if they are to work full-time. I do think that it is a situation that I would like very much to see remedied. I do believe that any time that this is done that the church supporting the native worker should lean heavily upon the advice of men in the field, American workers in the field. Those American workers should inform themselves of the real conditions existing among the people who live and work in the field and not to rely upon what they receive from their own congregation because many of the things that we use our money for--sometimes we use our personal money for working fund. We also many times may help people out of our pocket who come to us in need in some way. I never gave money. I always gave other

things, but I always felt that I could help. Of course, we usually have bigger houses, we drive an automobile. There are many expenses that some of them will not have. However, our native workers will need some kind of transportation by which they can get around.

I don't think we ought to say because they are native we will not support them but we do need to be careful that that support does not become the thing that will maybe keep a man who is not really dedicated to the Lord and not really wanting to serve him but may be interested in the financial support.

Wright: What problems does it present in the working relationship between the native preacher and the American preacher when the American preacher is in somewhat of an overseeing capacity, kind of a watchdog for the American supporting church? Have you had any experience along this line?

Grigg: I have never worked with any one in the same kind of capacity for any length of time, not long enough to where it presented any problems. Of course, in fact, about the only work I have ever had was with Richard and Richard is a very special type person. I am thankful to the Lord for Richard. I wish we had a thousand Richards. If we did, we could all go home. Even if we had just 15 or 20 of them, I think we could.

I know of instances where this has caused a definite problem. Of course, missionaries, the very fact that they are missionaries, usually have very strong personalities in some way. They are very definitely committed to certain ideas. It is very hard for us to change those ideas. Maybe this is a good thing in lots of ways because we are constantly fighting a battle. On the other hand, we must be very careful that we are kind and gentle and docile to the point of being teachable on anything that we do. I don't know of the actual problems that this might cause.

Wright: What trouble have you encountered in raising money for work in France? Do you find the brethren in America particularly favorable towards supporting missions in Europe? What is the trend as you see it?

Grigg: First of all, let me say that I never had a bit of trouble. My God was with me and perhaps by my knowledge of certain brethren it was easy for me to gain support. In fact, the first time the support was looking for me. The second time it was quite easy also to find. I do know that today support is far more difficult for Europe than it has been in the past. I found it easy to gain support for my three month travel over here for example. That was largely because the two congregations involved in Lille, France, where Richard is the speaker for World Radio were themselves willing to do a great part in sending me. Also the local congregation with which I work helped. So I would say this is a special condition that happened here in my own particular case that does not in most cases, especially for a new man who has not yet come to the field.

I think possibly the major cause for this is those of us who have been missionaries not keeping our brethren as informed as we should. I regret very much the fact that I did not. I did not write for journals. I felt that I didn't have time, but I do realize that our brethren, because they have sacrificed in sending us, do need to know more about what is going on. It is very difficult for us to

report very much progress because our progress is slow. It cannot be measured in the number of converts only nor in so many converts per dollar. We have to do a lot of sowing but I do believe that God is ready to move in Europe. I think there are signs of this. It seems to me at least there is. Maybe I've been optimistic before like this but today it really seems that there is a greater trend toward and a greater desire toward the truth than there has ever been before in Europe.

Wright: This was actually the next question that I was going to ask you. You've been here for several years. You were here during the early part of the work in France and you're back now and you've seen the work in several countries. What do you think the future is for the French work?

Grigg: I believe it has a good future. One of the things that just thrills me beyond words is what has been happening in Lille. Of course, my heart's there. The fact that in one week's time three couples, one couple was 25, one in their 30's, and the other in their 50's, and then soon after that two others were baptized. They think there are others about ready to be baptized with whom they are studying. There are other studies going on. This just thrills me beyond measure. I just can't express myself. By the way, let me say that those contacts were gained in the small campaign that they had last year. In some cities, perhaps a small campaign like that is far better than a big campaign like we have had here but in Geneva I think the big campaign was necessary.

Wright: You've had experience in Europe and now you are living in America and you can see this thing from both sides. What do you think that we in America, perhaps more particularly those of us at Harding College or in other training centers, what can we do to help the work in Europe?

Grigg: Well, of course, one of the things is to encourage people to become missionaries. I think every Christian has to be a missionary in some sense. I don't mean that he has to go to a foreign field. He doesn't even have to leave his home town but he must be ready to carry the good news to those who are lost.

Certainly, I think as far as the French speaking field is concerned, teach them language and customs and encourage them to come to this field.

Another thing all of us can do perhaps who have been in this field is do more writing. I hope that the brethren here can just drop me a few words from time to time telling me what is going on. I've committed myself to write some articles if they will do it and I think they will. I know they will if they can just get time. But, brethren in America, please know that these brethren are working. They spend long hours, many sleepless hours, working for the Lord. Many times they just don't have the time to do it and they don't have the clerical help. Maybe if brethren in America could understand that just giving them a little clerical help would help tremendously. This clerical help might not be able to write their English writers but they could take care of their French correspondence and relieve them of many hours of just secretarial work that we all have wherever we preach.

Wright: Thank you Brother Grigg for this time that you have given us. We want you to know that we appreciate you for your many years of work in France and for your continued interest in the field here.

Grigg: Be sure and pray earnestly for everyone of them and mention their names to the Lord.