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## Interview of Bill Burchett

Bill Burchett

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Today is June 21. We are in Reims, France. This is Winfred Wright and I am talking today to Bill Burchett who has been working here in France for three and a half years.

Wright: Bill, we appreciate your taking the time out to discuss with us some of your feelings about the mission work here in France. You've been busy the last several days in directing a campaign and doing a very good job of it. Could you give us a brief background outline of the work in Reims and also of your part during the work in the last three years?

Burchett: Yes, Winfred, I will be very glad to. I am happy to be able to talk with you about mission work in France. I am particularly interested in the missions program at Harding College, a program that I feel will be of great importance in the years to come in the mission fields throughout the world.

The work in Reims began about thirteen years ago actually when Brother Maurice Hall was working in Paris. He soon began to hold meetings in various French cities. Reims was one of the cities that he selected. He began coming to hold meetings and to meet on the week ends and a good beginning was experienced in the work at that time. The preachers who were working in Paris continued to come to work with this small group. I believe there were about ten conversions in a period of four or five years in this sort of week end endeavor.

Preachers from Paris continued to come from 1958 until 1962 to preach on Sunday mornings. Then in 1962, Brother Gerald Rowden and his family moved here and established residence and began working as we say full time with this particular work. They left last year after having been here for some six and a half years. We came in January of 1967 and have worked with Brother Rowden since that time until his departure last year.

Wright: Then this leaves you as the only American preacher in Reims and also the national preachers who at one time worked here are no longer working. How do you feel about the work in Reims now? How does it look to you?

Burchett: Brother Wright, we, at this moment, are here by ourselves as the only American family. Also the national preachers that you just mentioned are not working here any longer.

How do we feel about the work in Reims in general at this particular point? Well, naturally, we feel very optimistic about the work having just experienced a wonderful campaign last week. Really, the campaign was last week, but we feel like it has taken place over a period of months. Truly we feel that the situation is optimistic because of what we have seen as a result of the campaign this summer and also because of some of the stability that we began to see on the part of the few Christians that make up the congregation here.

Wright: The campaign, the closing night, we noticed 25 visitors in the congregation. I believe that is about the most you've ever had isn't it?

Burchett: Yes, I have never known at any given time since the beginning of this work of any particular meeting bringing 25 visitors from the city of Reims, French-speaking visitors, into an assembly like there was the closing night of the meeting. We felt this 25 was extremely encouraging.

Wright: Could you go on and talk just a little bit about how you feel about campaigns in general? You've been involved in several over here during the last two or three years. What do you feel like are some of the strong points and what are some of the problems involved in directing a campaign such as the one you have just directed?

Burchett: Certainly the strong points in a campaign, those things which make campaigns really profitable and worthwhile, would be the experience or I should say the experiences that come to those who participate in such efforts. Those people who leave home and who spend a week, two weeks, three weeks, on a mission point working with the people of a particular city, working with the preacher's family there, the experiences gained, I feel are most valuable. In every campaign I think we can say good is accomplished. In our particular campaign, during the meeting itself, there were no conversions. But the visible results of touching this city by the work that went into this campaign, the publicity, the coming of particularly the young people that made up this campaign group, really touched this city. Those 25 visitors that we had never seen before, I think, are an indication of that. So we feel that very definitely that those results are good and were good.

Campaigns are good because they introduce families or even single individuals to life on the mission field to some extent. I realize that sometimes it is a touristic experience but nevertheless they are introduced in this case to a foreign country, a foreign language, foreign people and when they go back home then missions become more of a reality in their life and certainly they are much more likely to begin thinking and preparing for future mission work than those who never come nor who never give thought to participating in a campaign.

Then, again, as you have indicated, there are some problems and there are some difficulties with campaigns. One of the greatest problems that we experienced during the past several months is that of coordinating the work of preparation here with the work of preparation in the States. Coordination is a very difficult task in almost any endeavor and certainly when you are separated by the Atlantic there are a great number of problems that cannot be coordinated as they should. That creates such problems as how many workers are actually coming, how much publicity must we or should we prepare, is a chorus group coming with the campaign group so that you can put this into the publicity that you want to put out. These, of course, are vitally important in the preparation on the field. So I would say that one of the problem areas is coordination between the mission point and the origin of the campaign group. Difficulties, once the campaign is underway, are varied and I don't think we need to go into those because they would be too different in too many different cities to go into detail.

Wright: Your main experience is that there needs to be a little bit closer coordination between Stateside and European leadership.

Burchett: Very definitely.

Wright: What other methods of evangelism have you been using in Reims besides the campaign that have proved to be effective?

Burchett: Of course, we are blessed here in the French-speaking world with World Radio France. Brother Richard Andrewjewski is the speaker for that weekly radio program. Here in the city of Reims we have contacts from that radio program. As a matter of fact, just a week and a half ago we baptized a lady here in Reims who had originally been contacted two or three years ago through the radio program. So this is one of the means, one of the methods, that we have in France to work with the radio program and following up the contacts.

We have used various forms of distribution to mailboxes. We've distributed reading materials in tract form. We've distributed those in some quarters of the city on a regular basis, one particular subject each week for a period of six weeks. In one quarter, I recall, we distributed up to twelve weeks different subjects that we felt would be of interest to some people in that quarter. Naturally, we didn't expect all to read that which we put in their mailboxes. Then, in other quarters we've tried distributing this reading material with cards that they could mail back in to us requesting monthly magazines or copies of the radio text. Then, in other quarters, we distributed simply cards to mailboxes in trying to get people to enroll in correspondence studies.

I think finally we need to mention this idea of the concours que, a Bible contest program where we distribute cards in the city and people enroll in a Bible contest. The purpose being, I suppose for the most part, to win or to gain a copy of the Bible once they have completed the contest or the program. This has been one of the most effective means of finding contacts since we've been here.

Wright: What methods have you tried here in Reims that you have felt to be ineffective means so much so that you no longer use them?

Burchett: We have discontinued the reading program, that is the distribution of reading materials, to a certain quarter of mailboxes week after week after week. We felt that the response from a simple card distribution was just as great if not greater in some cases than the response that we could see, that we could gather, from the distribution week after week of reading material. So we have discontinued that distribution of printed tracts at least for this time.

I also feel that some of our newspaper publicity has been a failure. I do not know really why it has been. I believe that with some work, particularly with someone of the French nationality--I think of people like Brother Andrewjewski and Brother Jacq Marshall--perhaps if we could get together with them to discuss the possibilities presented by the newspaper that the newspaper still would be a good medium for reaching people with the gospel. Our experience, the results have been somewhat disappointing, but I do not rule that out as a good means of evangelizing. We certainly can improve on the type of newspaper work that we have done.

Wright: I believe that the mass distribution of periodicals, religious journals, religious magazines (Vie et Verite & L'Evangile et Les Hommes) has also been dropped for the time being.

Burchett: Yes, we distributed quite a few copies of monthly magazines, particularly the latter that you mentioned. Then we distributed some cards offering some subscriptions to these magazines and we've received a few who wanted to

get that monthly magazine. Unfortunately this magazine has been suspended, the publication of the magazine has been suspended. We hope temporarily.

Wright: At the present time there is no regular publication in the French speaking world?

Burchett: That's true. There is no regular publication.

Wright: We are changing the subject here for a while. What are some of the obstacles or challenges that you've had to face, you and your family, since you have been in Reims?

Burchett: Brother Wright, the first great obstacle that we had to overcome was adjustment to living in France. We had never traveled extensively when we left the States. We really didn't know what life was like in Europe. We came and we came in the dead of winter while France is very beautiful, sometime during the year, it is not in the winter. We came in the middle of winter and very quickly we began to experience the homesickness and culture shock that many people speak of. When we came, we did not speak French. Neither my wife nor I had ever taken a course in high school or college in the French language. So we could not communicate. This was our first big problem, our first big difficulty, was in getting adjusted and that in the face of loss of friends and family and not being able to communicate to make friends here, this was very difficult.

The next big problem I suppose was trying to get the children into school and well adjusted, into a school system where they couldn't even understand what was going on. That was a much smaller problem than we had anticipated because children certainly adapt easily and in our case, as in many other cases, that was true.

Wright: They are happily involved in schoolwork here then.

Burchett: They are most happily involved in schoolwork. Both have now regained their positions, their grades in school. As a matter of fact, our daughter this year is in the first year of lycee or secondary studies and was chosen as the president of her class by her French friends. Our son also has done extremely well and he will enter lycee next year,

Wright: I think this speaks quite well of you and your wife also and your attitude because the children wouldn't be able to adjust if they didn't have some help at home and examples to follow. What have you found in the French culture to be particularly different from America or areas that you've had to adjust to and that the American missionary should be aware of when he comes to France?

Burchett: That's easy to answer and yet is difficult to answer. When you say culture, I will assume that you are speaking of society, of life socially that you encounter in France. We have found that the French people socially, and I understand that this varies from one French locality to another, but in this particular city we have found that socially the French are much colder even among themselves than the people that we knew in the community from which we came in the States. Naturally this makes it difficult for a new family moving into the city.

Social problems that you encounter, certainly one of the greatest, is that of drinking. We are in the center of the world's champagne industry here in Reims,

and in order to become acquainted with people and to have friends and so forth sooner or later you will encounter this problem of what are we going to do. In the community from which we came, this was not a problem. Here it is. It's a way of life. It has to be faced up to. Above all it has to be dealt with reasonably for the sake of your own children and their future.

There is the problem of entertainment. There are some similarities certainly. There are some differences. One has to be careful. I think again of the children, in trying to select the kind of entertainment and amusements that are available.

Wright: How about the economic differences between the French people and the American people? How would you summarize the economic level of the majority of the people with whom you work?

Burchett: Most of the people in this city now drive automobiles. I start with that point economically because it says something on the subject. A few years ago this was not true in France. I can look back now to January, 1967, three and a half years ago and I remember even at that time many, many more bicycles and motor bikes on the streets than I do now. That number diminishes each year and the automobile traffic problem increases year after year. Economically, the people of this city, for the most part, I say drive automobiles.

A great percentage of them have private homes. It's true that the majority do not because the majority live in apartments but often times they own these apartments that they live in.

Their salaries vary tremendously. I think, in general, we could say their salaries are less than similar occupations in the United States, but, at the same time, when you really get to talking with an individual about his economical situation, you find that through the socialistic aspects of his government he will receive many many benefits that the American family will not receive and that adds a great deal, not to his salary, but to his economic status.

Wright: So, it's pretty hard really to compare the two systems if you take only the salaries but even with the social security benefits wouldn't you say generally that the French income is quite a bit below that of Americans?

Burchett: Yes, I think that we would have to say that. I wouldn't emphasize that it is quite a bit below, but I would say yes, that in general salaries and total benefits are less than they are in the States.

Wright: Does this present any problems for you in mission work? I assume they look at you as they have at many of the rest of us as the rich American in the community.

Burchett: I don't know that it really has presented any problem for us, for our family. I will agree with you though concerning rich Americans. It is the concept on the part of the people with whom we have come in contact. It is natural for them to think in terms of the rich American and regardless of who you are and what your economic background is, if you come to France wearing a nice suit, a nice pair of shoes, driving an automobile and living in a nice apartment, this may have been your, shall we say, your middle class standard of living in the States, but here you would be automatically classified as another rich American. While in

reality many of those who are classifying you as such drive an automobile and live in an apartment equivalent to yours. It is an image that we have. I don't know what to do about it. I don't worry too much about it. I've had no particular problem in trying to make contacts because of economics.

Wright: The next question that I am going to ask you may be a little bit more difficult for you to answer. You've had in Reims, I understand, at least three French preachers who have been supported either partially or completely from the States. I understand also that there has been a little bit of problem along this line and that in the last year some hard feelings have arisen and even some have left the church because of problems that have arisen. Could you give me your feeling concerning the advisability of French preachers being supported from the States? Under what conditions would you think it advisable? If not, why not? It's a pretty big thing to answer, but would you give it a try?

Burchett: Yes, I certainly will try to answer that as best I can. I realize that in my answer there will be some things that need to be weighed in light of the city, the country, many things need to be considered, but I shall answer for our particular case here. I feel very strongly after having lived with and worked with some national preachers who were supported from the States that in most cases French preachers should not be supported from the United States immediately. Now, let me explain that. That's not a very clear statement. It is difficult to answer briefly. My feeling is that in Reims, as in other places in France, new converts have been taken and because the American preacher wanted to see rapid progress in the work in France, because progress was needed, because help was needed, too often the American preacher has rushed in to a situation with a new convert and has begun talking to him immediately almost about what you could do for the cause of the Lord in France if you would just work full-time in the vineyard. Many have been persuaded by American preachers that that was the thing to do. Without being able, without being capable to analyze the situation for their own good, and for the good of the work. So many French new converts have been put on the American payroll and in almost every case, I repeat almost every case, time has proven that to be a mistake. I would not rule out supporting a French preacher with American funds completely, but I would certainly rule it out in every case where the individual had not proven himself first.

Wright: Thank you very much, Bill, for this time.