

being a Christian in France

Sandra King and Owen Chadwick write about the challenges French converts face living in a society that is largely

"For a long time France has seen itself as being without need of God," says Sandra King. And she would know - Sandra has lived in France for the past 15 years.

"Christian values are no longer upheld in French society," she continues. "Often Christian students from West African countries are shocked by the advertising, the sexual immorality, the individualism, the godlessness of French society."

Despite its history as an evangelised nation, France's current resistance to the gospel has led to it being labelled a post Christian society.

"Many of the traditional churches are dying," says Sandra. "Fewer people are attending church. Few people have ever held a Bible. Few people know of the stories of the Bible."

Undo centuries of popular thinking

To become a Christian in France is, in many ways, to go against the values of society. This presents real pressure for French people seeking to convert to Christ.

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Owen Chadwick has been working with students in France since 1991. He says that French people who come to know Christ as their Lord and Saviour, "must 'undo' centuries of popular negative thinking towards the Christian faith."

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"To the average person, Christianity, in the little that they know about it, is a thoroughly spent force, irrelevant and unable to answer the major questions in life," explains Owen. "The rise of Islam, as well as the influence of cults, has also made many people suspicious of any form of religious fanaticism."

Challenges converts face

New Christian converts face varying degrees of hostility from their families, some of whom think they have joined a sect. In fact, anyone who says they believe in the Bible or have some religious affiliation, are accused of being involved in a sect.

"Sect is the magic word," explains Sandra. "If you accuse someone of being in a sect, you discredit that person."

Added to this, French Christians can struggle to find a Church where they can receive regular teaching and encouragement. "Outside the big city centres, good churches are not easy to find," says Owen. "Many medium-sized towns in country France would have no evangelical church witness. The average church across France would have an average of 50 adults in church on Sunday."

Religion: a private affair

It is difficult to speak publicly about faith in France, as 'religion' is confined to the private sphere.

School is a 'religion-free zone', with Scripture teaching banned in almost all regions of France. Prominent religious symbols such as a large Christian cross or the Muslim hijab are actively discouraged. Universities seek to stay a-religious.

"The place of debate about faith in the public arena is not always understood by Christians," explains Owen. "Religion is seen as a private affair."

"The separation between church and state dating from 1905 means that the individual can believe anything they like and practise any religion, provided that they respect the law of the land."

"This is obviously a great thing. The flip side, however, is that because it [faith] is private and personal, it is considered incorrect to engage in debate in public."

Yet things are changing, as Sandra notes: "Despite the efforts of French leaders to keep religious beliefs out of the public arena, it has not been possible. Every week there seems to be a magazine that deals with Jesus, the reliability of the Bible, did Moses really live, or can Islam and Christianity live together."

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"There are also a growing number of evangelical churches and the existing evangelical churches are growing."

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Sadly much of Europe is turning away from Christ.

4 ways you can help

1. Pray

Prayer is vital!

Pray for France and other European countries who have known about Christ for hundreds of years, and then let go of the truth about Jesus.

Ask God to strengthen converts who live in a society that is indifferent and hostile to the gospel.

2. Send Christian books and sermons

Living in Europe can be spiritually draining and it is not always easy for missionaries to find edifying Christian literature. Sending a book or CD series can be a great way to encourage and support missionaries.

Owen Chadwick and Sandra King work in student ministry in France, telling students about new life found in Jesus Christ. Their long term aim is to raise up and train leaders for the church in France.

3. Give financially

It is estimated that only 0.5% of France's population know the Lord Jesus and the French church is desperately short of pastors. Your financial gift to CMS will keep missionaries like the Chadwicks and Kings in Europe, and help ensure that French Christians are trained to serve the church in the future.



4. Welcome the Europeans who come to Australia

Sandra writes: "we have met several wonderful French Christians, who were not in the least bit interested in Jesus in France. But when they moved to Australia for work or for study reasons, they met a new, fresh, living Christianity that they have never seen in France. They gave their lives to Christ while in Australia and have come back to France full of passion for the gospel."