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Religious Travelogue

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Although four months of tourism in half a dozen countries does not make one an expert on the religious conditions of nations visited, a short account of some observations may prove mildly interesting.

The port of embarkation was Quebec and therefore we must needs drive through Canada. Though Canada is another nation, its people are not usually thought of as 'foreigners'; but actually France is less foreign than the province of Quebec, where the roads are bad, where English is seldom heard, and where the priests wear their robes on the street. In Montreal a friend of ours told how some nuns had escaped the Chinese communists; but the communists were brutal, she said, not merely to the Christians, they were brutal to Protestants and pagans too.

In one Roman church there was a sign assuring all those who bought candles that they would be completely burned: if extinguished they would be relighted, and even after burning down to the end, the wax would be scraped up and completely consumed—thus the faithful would get their full twenty-five cents worth of forgiveness.

PARIS

During our three weeks in Paris it was possible to make contact with four institutions. M. Pierre Marcel, editor of the *Revue Reformee* and prominently mentioned as the likely successor to Professor LeCerf, is the pastor of the Reformed church in St. Germain en Laye. The day we attended his church, it was crowded, for he was confirming a score of young people who had completed three years of catechetical instruction. The next week we went to the Oratoire, built on the spot where Coligny died in St. Bartholomew's massacre. Although I had not expected anything very orthodox in this fashionable church, I was still taken aback by the frank and complete neo-orthodoxy of the sermon. The historical accounts in the *Biel* were explicitly branded as mythological and the usual mystic anti-intellectualism was recommended.

In addition to these churches I visited two Bible Schools. The first is the under the leadership of M. Jules-Marcel Nicole, brother of Roger Nicole of Gordon Divinity School. The four of us worshipped in the school's chapel on Lord's Day and had dinner with M. Nicole and the students. The work here is eminently praiseworthy. Under great financial handicaps M. Nicole provides prospective missionaries and Christian workers with sound Biblical instruction. Together they also engage in local evangelism. The school is worthy of wholehearted support from American Christians. If a person finds it complicated to send a foreign draft to the Institut Biblique, 39 Grand' Rue, Nogent sur Marne, (Seine), France, I would suppose that the brother at Gordon would be glad to forward a check.

In contrast there is another Bible School that I visited run by Americans. The wife of the president told me that in their local evangelistic efforts they announced themselves as being neither Catholic nor Protestant. When I asked her impolitely whether she thought it was honest to advertise that they were not Protestant, she got flustered, tried to backtrack, and changed the subject.

In the compartment of the train as we rode from Catholic France to Protestant Switzerland, there was a mother and her young daughter. They told us that they were Protestants and had friends in Aix and in Lausanne. I asked the mother if she knew Dr. Rene Pache. It happened that she did, and so we carried her greetings to the Emmaus Bible Institute in Vennes sur Lausanne. We arrived for the graduation ceremonies, at which a dozen young people received their certificates and prepared to leave quickly for various mission fields. One of the students was a Greek. He described the persecution that Protestants undergo at the hands of the Greek church, a member of the World Council.

I asked Dr. Pache whether in his work with Catholics or Europeans generally he denied being a Protestant and avoided talking about images and the worship of the Virgin. He replied that he did not begin by preaching against image, but “unless we soon explain the difference between their worship and ours, we never win them.”

Although it was not possible to visit the Calvinistic seminary in Aix en Provence, I received information from several sources. In the late thirties the Reformed churches of France adopted a creed and formed a new organic unit. Because this creed was explicitly stated to have no binding force, about fifty Reformed churches refused to enter the new organization. These churches are served by the seminary at Aix. Some of the students and some of the younger ministers recently petitioned their Synod for permission not to baptize infants. The Synod refused. Let us pray that these fifty Calvinistic churches remain true to their heritage and maintain the doctrine of the covenant as against unscriptural fancies.

The forms of worship in the various countries vary somewhat. The hymns and music of the French churches struck me as noticeably superior to the more jazzy American style. In the German-speaking churches, both of Switzerland and Germany; the music, by reason of a strange succession of major and minor chords, was often difficult and unpleasant, at least to me. The Free Church of Scotland had the worst music of all, led by a precentor without instruments; but it had the best sermons. In England the music was more like our own. In some churches the people stood up to sing and sat down to pray. But usually they stood up for prayer and sat down while singing. On the continent a person upon entering the church would offer a prayer standing, before he sat down. In America we sit down first, and perhaps forget to pray.

ENGLAND

Mention should be made of the Sovereign Grace Union in England. This is an organization of about two thousand members of various denominations, but all high Calvinists. I preached at one of their prayer meetings on a Friday evening at 5:30. The room was filled. This organization holds frequent rallies throughout England and keeps alive the Reformation doctrines of sovereign grace. It also pushes a modest publishing program. A similar work, either in conjunction with the English group or perhaps more practicably in independence of it, ought to be put into operation in this country.

On the ship homeward bound a Methodist minister, conducting a group of students, took charge of the Sunday service. He spoke sweetly about pink pacifism, commended some subversive organizations, and criticized the United States. No doubt the USA has many faults; but when a man loudly deplores lynching in the USA (none has occurred for three years) and at the same time can find nothing amiss behind the iron curtain, his omissions are noteworthy.

Our religious journey ended with a fine missionary service in the Calvary Church of Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. It could not have had a better ending.