

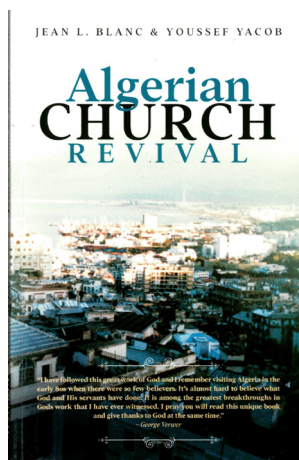
## Algerian Church Revival

By Jean L. Blanc & Youssef Yacob

2020. Private non-commercial edition.  
148 pages.

Review by Keith Fraser-Smith

*Keith Fraser-Smith, a British citizen from the north of England, served eight years as an Anglican pastor in the Middle East, eight years as a director of a media ministry (six years of them in France), five years as an Arab world Regional Leader with Arab World Ministries (four in Cyprus), five years as a pastor in the UK, seven years as AWM's Director of Global Mobilisation, and three years as Pioneers UK Area Leader. He is married to Janet, and they have three adult children and five grandchildren. Keith currently ministers to asylum seekers, disciples BMBs, mentors, and writes. His hobbies include walking, reading and gardening.*



“Algeria, you are mine—signed God.” So reads the translated title of the 2006 book by the late Jean L. Blanc (“Algérie, tu es à moi! – signé Dieu”), now translated into English by Youssef Yacob. Rev. Blanc served the Lord in different ministries in Switzerland; he was a friend of our Algerian brothers and sisters, and he died from aggressive pancreatic cancer in 2016. Rev. Youssef Yacob is a native Algerian, born and raised in a very conservative Muslim family, who came to faith in 1980. He and his wife have been serving the Lord in Algeria with Operation Mobilization since 1988 and have played significant roles in the revival movement.

The strength of the book is in providing the English text of Pastor Blanc’s record of this exceptional church growth movement in Algeria

over the past 40 years, especially the early years. Pastor Youssef has also added two short chapters entitled “Persecution and Harassment” (Chapter 11) and “Advocacy” (Chapter 12).

The frustration of the text is that none of the current numbers of believers, churches, or media statistics have been brought up to date (Wikipedia currently reports between 100,000 and 150,000 believers in 40–50 “parishes”), either in the footnotes or in the additional material. In addition, several evolving ministries have been omitted. Even Pastor Youssef’s conclusion (Chapter 13) is a translation of Blanc’s 2006 closing piece. We must assume that the reason for the unamended text, the omissions, and even the conclusion are for security reasons. Putting aside the frustration and focusing on the strengths, the text is of immense value as it describes the growth of the church in Algeria among mainly Kabyles, but also Arabs, since 1981.

This movement of God is also part of Arab World Ministries’ history, people, and media department.<sup>1</sup> The Ecole Radio Biblique (ERB), based in Marseille, had the privilege of serving alongside our Kabyle brothers and sisters with other agencies on radio programmes and literature projects in the late eighties.<sup>2</sup> I had the privilege of being the Director of the ERB at the time. Our radio department technician helped the Kabyle radio team build a recording studio in Paris and we gave administrative support to their team in the Kabyle adaptation of Vernon McGee’s “Thru the Bible” series. Our Publications Department also helped develop designed, customised letters unique to the Kabyle script for a revised Kabyle translation of Mark’s Gospel.

The reader must note the use of the word “revival” in the title.

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1 North Africa Mission changed its name officially to Arab World Ministries in 1987, and AWM merged with Pioneers in 2010. Several names of NAM personnel appear on page 80. I had the privilege of preaching at Peter Longley’s funeral in London. He died on 8 May 2014. Eva Longley died on 16 November 2018.

2 David Lundy, Gary Corwin, and Gail Martin, *The Desert is Alive: Streams of Living Water from Muscat to Marrakech* (Authentic Media, 2007), 75. The ERB building was sold last year (2020) to a property developer.

Chapters 3 and 4 locate this exciting move of God in the context of the rich history of the North African church. We are reminded of the vibrancy of this early church under Roman persecution, the influence of the great theologian Augustine, various heresies, and the slow decline of the church after the absorption of North Africa into the Islamic *ummah*. Chapter 5 brings the reader into the 19th and early 20th centuries and marks the establishment of the Protestant Church in Algeria in 1972 (EPA), reminding us of those who laboured without seeing much fruit as well as those who died for their faith. Therefore, the current movement is correctly described as a “revival,” against the backdrop of a thread of faithful Algerian believers throughout the ages.

The authors trace the revival from a soccer camp in the Djurdjura mountains in 1981 to the present confrontation between the EPA and the state. From beginning to end, the book is full of testimonies of Algerians who have been converted through the work of the Holy Spirit. This makes for good reading and puts flesh on the events and dates so carefully recorded for us. One example is a man from Ghardaïa who contacted the television station, Channel North Africa, and related how, as a result of listening to one of their Kabyle programmes, he had been healed. As he appealed to Jesus to heal him, he had seen the face of a man looking at him. He describes the moment his illness left him, and at a subsequent appointment with his doctor, his healing was confirmed. Another brother’s testimony relates how during his time in the army there were several occasions when he should have died. He believes God kept him alive so that he could be a model to his brothers.

The current challenges with the Algerian government are also elucidated. Under the Algerian constitution, equality and freedom of religion are granted by law, but are also subject to extensive restrictions. In Appendix 1, the legal code pertaining to churches, known as Article 11:1 of Ordinance 06-03 (28 February 2006), is explained. Over the years, the EPA has repeatedly tried to register their worship centres according to the law without success, while the government has imposed its restrictions on

individual believers by controlling evangelism and literature distribution. In the new chapters, 11 and 12, Pastor Youssef illustrates the persecution and harassment encountered by today's churches and Algerian Christians, and appeals for global Christian advocacy on behalf of the church.

Those seeking to discover what drives "revival" in such a hostile religious environment will not be disappointed. While there are many pertinent comments throughout the book, chapter 10 collates many of the characteristics of "revival" for us:

- The Word of God and its accessibility in the language of the people.
- Prayer and fasting
- Dreams and direct revelations
- Miracles, especially healings
- Freedom from fear, allowing increased zeal for evangelism
- A passion to impact, through love, those who do not yet know Jesus – a missional church
- Biblical teaching (Appendix 2 provides a sample of an introductory course)
- Engaging with the needs of the nation
- The testimony of Arabs and Kabyles loving one another and serving together
- The emphasis on being an Algerian church and asserting its healthy independence from external influences, especially Western denominationalism
- The impact of media partnerships<sup>3</sup> and effective local follow-up of seekers by Algerian Christians

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3 The ERB Radio Department helped with the production of the J. Vernon McGee "Thru the Bible" series in the latter 1980s and early 1990s.

With the staggering growth of the Algerian church, it was inevitable that persecution and suppression would result. Pastor Youssef's supplementary chapters draw our attention to the current challenges of government-closed churches and pastors under incredible pressure. The book is a call to prayer and advocacy.

I recommend this book to those who are interested in church planting and church-growth movements. It is a book for the beginner and a mine for the practitioner. It is an exciting and readable mission story and, for those who have already encountered revival or have a passion for church growth, there is plenty to be read between the lines. For those who want follow-up reading to David Garrison's book, *A Wind in the House of Islam*,<sup>4</sup> it is an excellent source of illustrative material.

When the time is right, I look forward to Pastor Youssef bringing the Christian world up to date on the "revival," but for now may this translation of Pastor Blanc's 2006 text feed our souls and inspire us to fearless witness.

Copies of the book can be purchased by contacting Pastor Jacob – yhto@generalmail.com or +34 651 646544

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4 David Garrison, *A Wind in the House of Islam* (WIGTake Resources, 2014).

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