

Book Review: **ALGERIE, TU ES A MOI! signé Dieu**

reviewed by Eva Longley

ALGERIE, TU ES A MOI! signé Dieu, Jean L. Blanc (Editions Sènevé, 2006).

‘Algeria, You are Mine! signed God’

‘Couldn’t you write a book about the revival in Algeria?’ Jean L. Blanc, a pastor in Geneva, recounts that this question, put to him by one of the Algerian church leaders, came as a big shock! His interest in and deep affection for Algeria stems from the time in 1962 when he was involved with a group of Algerian scouts who visited Switzerland. So, accepting the challenge, he carried out the necessary research and gathered the testimonies of many who had been part of the remarkable events described. This book is the result.

In the very first chapter Jean Blanc sets out clearly what he aims to do.

This work does not claim to be an exhaustive account of all that happened in Algeria in the past, not even in the past twenty-five years. Nor does it list all that exists in the country now. It is intended simply as a testimony to the reality of God’s work and an encouragement to continue to pray for and support a country where the Church seemed to have disappeared and in which, today, the evangelical church is

numerically the third largest, after Egypt and Sudan, among Arab countries.

This is the story of Arabs and Berbers being touched by the love of Jesus and from this, finding love for each other. It tells of worshipping groups springing up all over the country.

How did it all come about?

In the answer to this question lies the particular value of this book. Many books have been written about the origin of Christianity in Algeria and about the vitality and devotion of the church of Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine and the martyrs, with analyses of why this glorious church disappeared. Blanc devotes a section to this, as well as tracing the history of the modern missionary movement and its impact on Algeria. A number of books have been written about this, too. In addition, different reports of the present remarkable work of God in Algeria have appeared over the past years, but as far as the reviewer knows, this is the first time that there has been a collation of the events leading up to the present situation. Estimates put the number of believers now at thou-

sands – even tens of thousands according to some – whereas in 1980 there were just several hundred, two hundred according to Blanc, found mainly in the cities of Algiers, Oran and Biskra.

In particular, it is noteworthy that the story since 1980 is told very much through the eyes and in the words of the Algerians whose lives were touched. As Blanc points out, this is a work of God through *national* believers, with a strategy they have followed prayerfully, and with their vision of the future. Blanc does not minimise the efforts of foreign Christians: he pays homage to those early missionaries who, as he writes, were told in their orientation that their ministry might never bear visible fruit, but who continued with their witness and service. Their sacrificial lives paved the way for the rapid church growth of today.

How did it start?

While the movement did not really ‘snowball’ until around 1990, a decisive event took place in 1981 – the famous *Camp in the Mountains*. A young Kabyle Christian in Algiers felt that God was calling the church to organise a summer camp in the Djudjura Mountains where young men from many villages camp out for an inter-village football tournament. After months of prayer and fasting together with other believers – Algerian and expatriate – at La Bonne Nouvelle, a group comprising Arabs, Berbers and

one young French teacher held their camp. Blanc entitles the chapter describing what happened next as ‘Djudjura, the place of meeting with God’. The believers’ joy, harmonious relationships, effective praying and witness to a God of love who could be known through Jesus touched many of the footballers, and before long, forty of them professed faith in Christ. Not surprisingly, perhaps, when news got out, the police and military came to visit and the camp was closed! (The next year, 1982, La Bonne Nouvelle in Algiers was also closed and several expatriates were expelled.)*

However, the fire had been kindled and could not be put out. Not all forty remained firm, but those who did so returned to their villages taking the Good News with them. The fact that the camp had involved both Arabs and Berbers, with the collaboration of expatriates in prayer support and logistics, was also important. Blanc quotes Youssef: ‘The Kabyles will always be grateful to their Arab brothers for having brought them the good news of Jesus’. It is important that the Church does not mirror the tensions that exist in the society.

Rabah, one of the original footballers, now a pastor, explains the three-part strategy decided upon at that time, which has been very

*Two small errors occurred in this chapter of the

book: the wife of Bill Call is Peggy (not Betty), and for Langley read Longley.

important for the growth of the church:

- First, establish a Christian group in every locality of Kabylia
- Then, reach out to all the other regions of Algeria
- Finally, spread the witness to neighbouring countries.

Radio and television have been crucial in carrying out the second part of the strategy, as has been the movement of believers within the country. For example, Rabah, after serving the Lord in Kabylia, transferred to Oran in Western Algeria.

It is vital that what has been achieved is not lost. In Chapter 10, Blanc sets out a list of **indispensable ingredients for ensuring continuation**:

- Faith in the Word of God, which must always be made accessible (written or audio-visual). This includes Bible training.
- Fasting and prayer (which has always been the main strategy of the church in Algeria)
- The supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. (Many churches have opened as a result of a miraculous intervention by God.)
- Dreams and direct revelations (important in a context where people think of God as distant and indifferent)
- Deliverance from fear so that evangelistic zeal is maintained

- Desire to reach out in love to those who do not know Christ. (This includes the 70,000 Chinese workers currently in Algeria. More than 300 accepted Christ as Saviour and Lord in 2005.)
- Practical identification with the needs of the nation. (Two examples are: help to all without discrimination, as after the 2004 earthquake, and the creation of micro-enterprises for which outside financial help is needed.)

Two appendices close the book. The second is an extract from the training manual *Spiritual Milk*, while the first contains the law of 28 February 2006 regulating non-Muslim worship and making it illegal to attempt to shake the faith of a Muslim. There have so far been some repercussions, but nobody knows what the long-term effect will be. The believers are not afraid. As Blanc comments: 'You are Mine, says God, and the protection of the One who is Master is guaranteed.'

As Blanc stated at the beginning of the book, it is by no means an exhaustive account of either the past or the present situation. More could have been said. However, although no two countries are identical, this work should be of interest and help to Christians, both national and expatriate, working in similar contexts. It is a pity that it does not exist in English.