



MINUTE FOR MISSION

Decber 1, 2007

Witnessing the Gospel as a Christian Minority (France)



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Some years ago, I was appointed as a pastor in Nantes, a city of 500,000 people in the west of France. I went to the bank to open an account. The man at the desk asked, "What is your occupation?"

I answered, "I am a pastor."

"What? An actor?"

I replied. "No, a pastor!"

"What does it mean?" he asked. Yes, this man had never met a pastor. Today in France, the majority of people have never met a Protestant. Protestantism is



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"What does it mean?" he asked. Yes, this man had never met a pastor. Today in France, the majority of people have never met a Protestant. Protestantism is

very small and not very well known. We 1.8 million Protestants are 3 percent of the population—more than Jews (1 percent), but less than Muslims (7 percent).

This situation is closely linked to the history of the country. Established in 1520, the Reformed church met with strong opposition from the royal power faithful to Roman Catholicism. In 1598, under Henry IV the Edict of Nantes gave the Protestant minority political rights but deprived it of any possibility of expansion. During the seventeenth century Protestants were under strong pressure to become Catholics. The Edict was revoked by Louis XIV in 1685. To remain faithful to their beliefs, almost one-quarter of the 900,000 Protestants left the country. The eighteenth century was a time of severe persecution. To maintain their faith, our ancestors had to hide. They gathered in forests or caves, always in small numbers in order to escape easily if soldiers were to come. Those caught were put in jail for years or hanged. A handful of the faithful kept the flame of Protestantism burning. They knew that where two or three are gathered in Christ's name, he is there among them.

French Protestantism recovered its freedom in 1787. Today, we are still small in number. But even though it is not always easy to be small, it can be an opportunity. It makes us more sensitive toward minorities and those rejected by society: during World War II, for instance, a number of Protestants were involved in saving the lives of Jews. Being small keeps us critical of any political power that would use religion to legitimate its action. Being small requires us to be open, to be ecumenical, to work with partners. If we don't go out of our small church to breathe fresh air, we'll suffocate.

Pasteur Didier Crouzet, Relations Internationales
Eglise Réformée de France

Do you have a mission story to tell? Would you like to read inspiring stories of Presbyterians in mission? Visit the Witness Season Web site: www.pcusa.org/witness. New minutes for mission are posted on the 1st and 15th of each month.

For more information on the Witness Season mission education emphasis contact Billie Healy, Associate for Mission Education Resources (888) 728-7228, ext. 5689, or Bhealy@ctr.pcusa.org.

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