

Why France is Anti-American

**Hating America is hardly the same thing as hating God,
but in France the two are closely linked**

by Johan D. Tangelder

France is famous for Paris, its romantic capital city; its Sorbonne University, already famous by the year 1200 AD; the Grand Louvre, one of the world's greatest museums of art and culture; the Arc de Triomphe, built for the emperor Napoleon; and the Eiffel tower, the world's tallest building at the time of its construction.

But these days France may be best known for its anti-Americanism.

For example, in the current war against terrorism, France acts as if the danger is coming from America. France's President Jacques Chirac refused to support the United States in its war against Saddam Hussein and spearheaded the vetoing of any NATO troops going to Iraq. He even vetoed sending NATO's new rapid-reaction force to Afghanistan.

And earlier this year France embraced a film that is highly critical of President Bush and the actions his administration took both before and after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. *Fahrenheit 9/11* was produced by Michael Moore with the sole aim of preventing the re-election of Bush; when it was shown at the French Cannes Film Festival it received their top prize, the prestigious Palme d'Or.

The roots of anti-Americanism

France's anti-Americanism has deep roots and is closely tied with the French's sense that theirs is a country of culture and refinement that has much to teach the world, and America specifically. The French magazine *Le Point* put it this way: "Could the Americans have an inferiority complex toward us? Could they be jealous of our culture, our sophistication, our taste, our subtlety?"

Through recent years this elitism has been expressed in different ways. In 1958 President Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970), a fervent nationalist in pursuit of French greatness, pronounced: "France must fulfill her mission as a world power. There is no corner of the earth where, at any given time, men do not ask us what France has to say. It is a great responsibility to be France, the humanizing power *par excellence*." De Gaulle was fiercely opposed to American domination of the West and suspicious of Britain's close links with the United States. He twice vetoed Britain's application to join the European Economic Community, fearing that it would undermine the Franco-German axis, and be a way for the Americans to interject their influence into the group.

When French President François Mitterrand visited the United States in 1984, he told the Americans: "France is a much older nation and to us the United States is still

quite young...I believe that our civilization carries a message that is not for us alone, that it can be understood and accepted by the greater part of humanity."

In April 1986, after Libya set off a bomb in a West German discotheque killing 2 US soldiers and injuring 79, the US decided to retaliate by attacking military targets in Libya. But the French closed their airspace to U.S. F-111 aircraft en route from Britain – U.S. aircraft had to fly around France, adding 2,600 miles to their aerial assault on Libya. President Reagan was acid: "I see no justification for this." Across the United States people fumed. One veteran noted that he was happy France allowed Americans landing rights on the beaches in 1944.

The French Revolution

Ultimately France's anti-Americanism is rooted not in recent political history, but in a revolution that happened more than 200 years ago.

France still breathes the spirit of the 1789 Revolution which, starting as a reform movement, ended by abolishing the monarchy and executing the king. But far from weakening the state, the Revolution and its aftermath strengthened it and gave it a new basis. The revolutionary doctrine of popular sovereignty – that all power derives from the people – allied with the doctrine of nationalism, which insisted that the French people are a single entity, laid the basis for a stronger and more centralized power.

The French Revolution is more than a historical event; it is a symptom, an idea that took hold of people. God no longer had a place in public life. God was no longer the Lawgiver. It found its sharpest expression in the words: "ni Dieu, ni maitre!" Neither God, nor master!

This principle puts man in the place of the almighty God. It is a principle that no longer wants to hear about God or obey Him. It dethrones God and enthrones man. This spirit expects everything from this world and increasingly looks to the state for help. It speaks of rights but is not too eager to hear about responsibility.

This revolutionary spirit greatly contributed to the de-Christianization of France. And it contributes to anti-Americanism today. A nation such as France looks down its nose at America precisely because many in the US still look heavenward to God.

The de-Christianization of France

The bloody French Revolution stripped away the Roman Catholic Church's former influence. She lost her grip upon the people and never regained her authority. In 1943 French Roman Catholics were shocked by Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel's book *La France: Pays de Mission?* which said that at least a fourth of the population of France was atheist and that the entire working class suffered from an almost total lack of religion. The authors maintained that only a tenth of the adult population of the country were practicing Roman Catholics.

Cultured and sophisticated France is reaping the barren fruits of 200 years of secularization. Even large sections of rural France, once solidly committed to Christianity, have been de-Christianized. The decline of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church is reflected in French values. Although the pope forbids contraception and abortion, the state legalized the former in 1967 and the latter in 1974. One in four

marriages ends in divorce. There are 22 abortions for every 100 births. That has contributed to the overall aging of the nation: almost one-sixth of the population is over 65.

De-Christianization in France is more obvious than anywhere else in Western Europe. France has become a pagan society born out of their rejection of Christianity. It is far tougher and more resistant to the Gospel than the pre-Christian paganism which missionaries have encountered in Asia and Africa. Alain de Benoist said, "Paganism has never been far away from us, both in history and in the sub-conscious mind, as well as in literature, and so forth."

Christianity is attacked as a life-denying faith, repressing the natural instinct of human beings, spoiling the joys of human kind. There is no sin in the program of neo-paganism. Struggle for life is natural, and the survival of the fittest is the rule of life. American missiologist Professor Herbert Kane (1910-92) referred to France as "the most pagan country in Europe." France is a mission field. This is the opinion of both Roman Catholics and Evangelicals alike – though this idea would horrify most French. There are numerous Christian missionaries from North America, the United Kingdom, Holland, Germany, Scandinavia, and Switzerland serving in France. Many of the newer evangelical churches in the metropolitan areas are being founded with help from missionaries.

However, France is a mission field not only for Christians, Protestant and Roman Catholics, but also for Muslims, Buddhists, and the sects and cults. In France's spiritual vacuum numerous false cults find a happy hunting ground among the unchurched masses. Paris abounds with fortune-tellers and other charlatans. In France fortunetellers have a thriving business. The French are known to spend millions per year on sorcery. Already in 1974 there were 40,000 indigenized home Bible studies through which the French Jehovah Witnesses established a solid base for expansion.

Barriers to the Gospel are many – intellectualism, rationalism, widespread involvement in the occult, individualism and a nodding acquaintance with institutional Roman Catholicism.

France is not only spiritually needy, but also hardened to the gospel. Today, the nonreligious are estimated at just over 19 per cent; another 8 per cent are Muslim. Though over 70 percent claims to be Christians, the church attendance rate is only 13 per cent. Less than 2 per cent are Protestant, just over half of which are evangelical.

France and Islam

Today, France's anti-Americanism is an attempt to court the Muslim and Arab world. President Jacques Chirac is positioning France as a mediator and a bridge between America and Islam.

France was for a long time the dominant influence in the Middle East and it still has strong ties with the world of Islam. The impotence of the Islamic world, when confronted with Europe, was brought home in a dramatic form in 1798, when the French revolution, in the person of General Napoleon Bonaparte and his expedition, arrived in Egypt, and for the first time subjected the heartlands of Islam to the rule of a Western power and the direct impact of Western attitudes and ideas.

According to most historians of the region, the modern history of the Middle East begins with Napoleon's conquest of Egypt. In *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* Bernard Lewis comments, "The French revolution was the first movement of ideas in Europe that was seen as non-Christian or even anti-Christian, and some Muslims therefore looked to France in the hope of finding, in these ideas, the motors of Western science and progress, freed from Christian encumbrances." He notes that it is only in comparatively recent times that Muslim religious thinkers of stature have looked at secularism, understood its threat to what they regard as the highest values of religion, and responded with a decisive rejection.

During the 19th century France built her empire in North-west Africa, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. It was also involved in Syria and Lebanon. Consequently, France persisted in regarding itself a Muslim power, mainly in view of its North African possessions. But the dissemination of French revolutionary ideas in the Islamic world was not left to chance, it was actively promoted by successive French regimes, both by force of arms, and, much more effectively, by translation and publication. The penetration of Western ideas into the Islamic world was greatly accelerated when, from the early nineteenth century, Muslim students in Africa were sent to institutions of higher education in Europe in increasing numbers.

Although France is no longer a colonial power in the Middle East and Africa, it continued to take pro-Arab positions on various aspects of the Arab-Israel conflict. This included support for Palestinian-Arab rights to self-determination and to a "homeland" or a state. France also supported the admission of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to various United Nation bodies. Among Europe's leading statesman the French were the first to meet with Yasir Arafat and other PLO leaders, and France was among the first European countries to allow the PLO to open an office (1975).

France is one of the Arab nations' major arm suppliers. In 1969 De Gaulle sold 110 Mirage fighters to the new leader of Libya, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi. Chirac, then prime minister, visited Iraq in 1974. He negotiated a major exchange of arms for oil under terms that were not made public. The French also built a nuclear power plant for Saddam Hussein, which was later bombed by the Israelis.

But history takes its twists and turns. France the Middle East's invader is now experiencing its own invasion. By the mid-1990s, approximately 4 million Muslims lived in France. But Muslim communities have not been integrated into their host culture and show few signs of doing so. We must keep in mind that the Muslims did not leave their religion behind when they left their homelands. They also don't seem to appreciate France's close ties to the Arab world and its anti-Americanism. What is secularism to the Muslims in France and their militant leaders? It is for them the code of a debauched society that wishes to impose on Islam's children the ways of an infidel culture. What loyalty, at any rate, is owed to France? The wrath of France's Muslim youth in the suburbs is seen as a revenge on France for its colonial wars.

The growth of Islam has been mainly through immigration and a higher birthrate. One out of every three babies in France is a Muslim baby. Furthermore there may now be as many as 60,000 to 150,000 French who have become Muslim – mostly through marriage. This means that France will eventually have a Muslim majority.

Conclusion

France's anti-Americanism should be understood within the context of its nationalism, de-Christianization, the rise of neo-paganism, and the political and social tensions as a result of the influx of Muslim immigrants. The spiritual needs of France should lead to greater missionary effort and prayer support by Christians who understand their times.