- 15 -

THE WHITE HOUSE

After the adventures of "Le Château Blanc", you may also be interested in a more personal story concerning "La Maison Blanche" or the white house.

After many years of living a community come nomadic lifestyle I had never thought of getting a home for my own family. When we moved to the north to spearhead the Château project it was our third move in two years and we were able to put all the worldly goods of a five member family into the back of a Ford Transit van.

Our aim was to stay in the Château, but as the place had been closed down for fire security reasons we found ourselves camping in one ground floor meeting room. The circumstances pushed me to ask the Lord about future accommodation prospects. One day as I was reading through the Bible the following words of God to King David struck me.

"The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you."
2 Samuel 7 : 11

I then found myself at a conference in Bordeaux which was concerned with building up networks throughout the French speaking world. At the end of one session I was approached by my friends and colleagues, Garry and Pam Pilkington, who were then strengthening the base at Bourg St Andéol in the Ardèche. Without knowing of our situation, Pam said to me.

"I felt the Lord telling me that he wanted to give you a house."

She added that I should not minimise God's ability to provide. What she didn't tell me, because of her wisdom in not wanting to pressurise me to an agenda, was that God had clearly told her that I was to have the house within a week ! She told this only to her husband at the time and they made a record of this revelation. I'm glad that she was wise enough not to tell me as I had a hard enough job just believing God for the house itself.

I returned that Monday night and shared the encouragement with my wife Sylviane. We decided to take an evening walk around the village and see if there were any signs of houses to rent.

"Our problem ,"

I said to Sylviane.

"Is that we are newcomers to this area and don't have the local contacts who could lead us to the right places."

I then stopped in front of an imposing looking house and continued,

"This house for example. We don't even know if something like this might be up for rent or not. Many folks have told me that it's virtually impossible to rent in a village like this and we've no money to buy."

We then went home challenged to believe God's word rather than the less than promising circumstances. The following day I visited the local Estate Agents in the next village and asked them if they had anything to rent in Thumeries. The lady there explained that renting in Thumeries was a rarity and that even houses to buy were getting harder to find.

"You might be interested though at this house that has just come on the market in Thumeries, "

she uttered hopefully, showing us a picture of a big white house which was indeed the very building we had paused in front of the night before. We agreed to make a visit. The house was quite run down but sound. It had three bedrooms, a large attic for two more and the most wonderful walled garden which contained a beautiful apple tree.

We loved the place and felt that this would indeed be the ideal home for us. However we also felt that we were walking in fantasy land as we came to terms with the fact that this house was only for sale and that we didn't have any money. I dared to ask anyway.

"How much does the owner want for this house ?"

"It's on the market for 470.000 FF plus tax."

That was about £48,000 and way beyond anything we could envisage. We thanked the lady and made our way back to our one room at the Château.

"It's good to dream"

I said, having decided through fear and unbelief, under the disguise of common sense, that this house was not for us.

The Wednesday morning I awoke and needed to travel to the next village. As I passed the Estate Agent's an inner intuition seemed to give me a new faith and boldness as I remembered my friends' words about not limiting God's ability to provide. Some unseen hand seemed to guide me into the offices and I could scarcely believe my ears as I heard myself saying.

"I would like to make an offer of 400.000 FF (about £40,000) for the house we visited yesterday."

The lady asked me to put the offer in writing and explained that it was a serious business to make such an offer and that I would be informed of the outcome the next day. When I got home to Sylviane I was a bit shell shocked.

"I may have done a stupid thing."

I said.

"If he accepts our offer where will we find £40,000 ? No bank in there right mind would give a loan to someone with no salary or security to offer. I've not even properly looked around the house or had it surveyed !"

I went to bed a worried man, almost wishing to be let off the hook by a refusal of our offer. The Thursday was our team prayer day, so it was in an atmosphere of praise and worship that the phone rang with the Estate Agent on the other end of the phone.

"Mr Reeve, your offer has been accepted and you will need to sign the official contract (compromis de vente) at the solicitor's tomorrow morning, bringing a down payment of 10% of the price."

I hung up not knowing whether to be pleased or petrified !

The immediate challenge was for £4,000. I decided to be bold and shameless and rang my parents to ask if they could lend me £5,000 and put it in my bank account straight away ! It wasn't easy for them, but with the promise of certain re-imbursement they agreed. Amazingly I was also to receive gifts, and squeezing dry every possible source of personal finance I managed to raise another £5,000 !

Encouraged by this provision I went with confidence that afternoon to a bank in Lille to ask for a loan of £30,000. This bank was linked to the bank I had just left in the Ardeche and I hoped that they would be sympathetic as I had banked with their group for a number of years. I felt intimidated by the smooth professional atmosphere of the bank and felt very much out of place. A sophisticated lady received me.

"Well Mr Reeve, what can we do for you ?"

"I'd like a loan to buy a house."

I replied. The basic details were shared and we got to the delicate question of what I did for a living. To my shame I was threatened by the secular environment and didn't have the courage to state clearly the evangelical element of my missionary vocation.

"I work for a Christian humanitarian organisation"

I said, trying to make a good impression.

"Oh, very nice. What is your salary ?"

came the reply.

I felt stupid as I bumbled out something about not receiving a regular salary but living by the generosity of friends and churches.

"You are joking ! Mr Reeve ?"

enquired the lady, incredulously and with a certain amount of disdain in her voice. She realised that I was indeed serious and, no doubt because of my weak compromise about my faith, shot back at me the following withering statement.

" You must be mad to think anyone would give you a loan without you having a salaried job and pay slips to hand. You can leave now."

I was rudely shown the door and I left vanquished and crestfallen.

Back home I shut myself into prayer with God. Firstly I repented at my lack of boldness concerning my work and for the fear of man which had gripped me. It was then that, feeling welcomed by grace into the presence of God that I seemed to overhear the following directions in my spirit.

The Lord said that He forgave my weakness but that he wanted me to testify boldly for him in the local bank of Thumeries. This bank is a "Crédit Agricle" and I had never even set foot in one of their agencies before. I felt the Lord's leading to ask to see the bank manager. Before leaving the Lord advised me to wear a tie for the meeting.

I walked into the bank and asked to see the manager who just happened to be available. He welcomed me into his office and as we were about to sit down I launched into a bold declaration.

"I'm a Christian and I love Jesus Christ. I work as a missionary sharing my hope in the resurrection of Christ. I do not receive any salary but trust God to provide for all my needs through the Church."

Seeing that he hadn't yet kicked me out I added for good measure.

"And I would like to buy a house in Thumeries and need a £30,000 loan."

"Which house ?"

he questioned.

"The one in *Rue Gambetta.*'

"Well, that's interesting. I was also after that house……. ; but in the end my wife chose somewhere else. It has a nice garden. How much did you offer ?"

How amazing. This man had been after the same house. A certain rapport was created and I was simply overwhelmed when he said to me.

"I like what you do. I will do all I can to make sure that you get your loan of £30,000."

So when Friday morning came I was able to sign the contract with the promise of the loan to pay the final "acte de vente" in six weeks when we would be moving in. As the ink of my signature dried on the crisp document I realised that it had taken from Monday to Friday to buy a house ! It was only a couple of months later when we had already moved in that I had a visit from Garry and Pam who then joyously shared how God had given them the revelation of one week !

The adventure went on as the couple who were occupying the house didn't look like moving out in time for our coming in ! I went to see them the day before our move to let them know we were coming. He owned a little lorry so was willing to let us use his lorry to move our stuff while he then took his stuff out. It was a real nightmare with chairs, tables and all sorts of objects flying in every direction, but we finally got there in the end.

Under French law I am known as "Le Président" of "Le Château Blanc." It's only natural for the Président to live in the White House !

This house has proved a real haven for our family over the years and has also been a place of prayer and welcome. We were indeed able to welcome the wonderful gift of our fourth child, Myriam – our "Nordiste", into its warm security and blessing.

I often think back to that early word given at my commissioning service at the Anglican church which spoke about buildings and temples. With my white castle and white house I'm no match for Solomon but I hope, at least in some small way, that the Lord may find a home here.

"…the one whom God has chosen is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the Lord God."

1 Chronicles 29 : 1