

ness to the great salvation and proclaim the Word of God.

2. *When shall we witness?* There is no set time of day, week, or month. The early-century Christians were busy daily. Our life is a witness and will be until we die. Maybe we are very busy with our business earning money and have no time at all to witness for Christ. But the Bible says, "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Businessmen might well learn the art of making a living, but not many of them have learned "how to live."

3. *Where shall we witness?* Acts 8:4, "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." Our Jerusalem is the office, shop, school, neighborhood. Each of us as laymen have our sphere of influence. We are called to be "the fishers of men." The ponds are everywhere.

4. *What shall we witness?* You don't need to be a good speaker but you can give facts and personal testimony. Who were you before you met Christ and accepted him as your personal Savior? You can give facts or testify what happened during the conversion and then what Christ has done for you. Once you were blind, namely spiritual blindness, walking in the darkness and going to hell, but once you accepted Christ Jesus as your personal Savior by faith and grace, your soul awakened, your mind enlightened and your will converted. The result is your conscience is purified and your affections renewed.

5. *How shall we witness?* We work not on our own, but we are workers together with God. God provides the Holy Spirit for witness as the power and the guide to witness. God provides his Word for faith and practice and God promises to bless it. We must faithfully sow the seed, his Word. Our part is to be willing to witness by our life. Our lives should be attractive for the Savior.

Before I close my presentation, let me ask you, "What is your occupation? A doctor? A merchant?" Do not run away from these callings. Who you are and what you are God will use as a tool in his hand to proclaim the Gospel, to bear witness in your position in the community.

A LAYMAN LOOKS AT WORLD EVANGELIZATION

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Since I was touched by the Gospel in the university fifteen years ago, I have been disturbed by several features of the contemporary church that it seems to me do not adjust to the instrument proposed by God to take the light to the world. I wanted from the beginning to be just a plain Christian. Denominational differences have been for me, as they are for many who seek the Gospel, a burden. The lack of unity between brethren belonging to different organizations and their insistence on emphasizing whatever separates them, has always disturbed me very much. You cannot find in the body of Christ the unity required so "that the world may believe" (John 17:21).

One of the most relevant distortions that I find in the contemporary church is institutionalization, understood as the organic conformation of the church to a business enterprise model or to a social club. To this you must add the professionalism of the ministry, once clergy and laymen are distinguished, with the consequent dependence of the members of the congregation with respect to the ministers in order to function as church. The communication of the Gospel has thus become the task of specialists, with the risk that it may no longer be the normal task and the privilege of every believer. On the other hand, isolation of the redeemed in church buildings, does not allow them to effectively be the salt of the earth. The buildings for the assembly of the faithful have become a substitute of the very notion of church.

Within such a frame, the Holy Ghost finds very little freedom to move. The Word of Life does not reach those to whom it is addressed; and the life of fellowship between the brethren is very limited. We do not see nowadays many Christian communities of which they can say they persevere unanimous every day as in the example of Acts 2:43-47, communities where the fellowship in Jesus Christ reflects itself in inter-family relations, in mutual help, in secular work, in service and in all realms that give practical expression of our faith.

I find another hindrance to the extension of the kingdom of God in the marginalization of the church from the contemporary world, caused by institutionalization, by the absurd dichotomy between the material and the spiritual, and by a wrong interpretation of what separation from the world means, which we have adopted as an excuse not to give a permanent witness in our work, in our social and family relations, in our responsibilities as citizens, in the arts, and in sport. This other worldly position, qualified by a conservative ethic that we stress too much in our message, has made us lose our contact with reality. We do not go to the world to seek those for whom Jesus died, expecting that somehow they will become interested in attending our evangelization meetings. Our message sounds very strange to the ears of the man without Christ, or there is no response at all because the message is not relevant to his problems. The proclamation of the Gospel fails in being an existential witness. We do not take advantage of our situation in the world where the

Lord has inserted us to be his witnesses. We are then no longer sensitive to the opportunities of infiltrating in all sectors of contemporary society, as a living testimony, giving freedom to the Holy Spirit so that our mouth brings forth the abundance that should overflow our hearts (Luke 6:45).

I am quite worried about the emphasis given to evangelistic methods by the contemporary church that this Congress reflects. It seems as if we would insist in refining the model given by God for the extension of his kingdom with means that do not produce the same impact nor the same result as the simple existential proclamation through personal and collective witnessing of those that recognize that Jesus is Lord. I believe that technological innovations, efficient organization, the psychology of communication and other contemporary ingredients have a lot to contribute to a wider and more effective spreading of the Gospel. However, I believe that those are accessory means that eventually may reinforce or complement, but that in no case should be a substitute for the methods of the Holy Spirit, spreading his gifts through men and women transformed by his power in the context of daily life, and operating in multiple ways in the church, the life of fellowship being the evidence offered by Jesus when He said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

We need nowadays to depend more on God and on the power of the Holy Spirit. The main motivation for our effort in evangelization must be the compassion for those for whom Christ died, not the satisfaction in statistics or in spectacular and multitudinous meetings. If we are not able to make disciples through our witnessing, to integrate them to fellowship in our communities and to support them so that they will be witnesses there where the Lord wants them, we will not be collecting the harvest but spreading it.

But thank God that in spite of our imperfections, the people of God are growing. While traditional churches burdened by institutionalization are mainly concerned with their doctrinal or methodological distinctions, in building impressive temples, and in preparing literature mostly for internal consumption, the Holy Spirit is moving powerfully among the youth, among the marginal groups of society, within the traditional churches and even in Bible-centered groups of Catholics, renewing the body of Christ and extending the message of God spontaneously to the thousands that were not attracted by our meetings.

The human categories that we have introduced in the church reflect also in missionary effort. We find discrimination between servants of the Lord of different nationalities. The professionalization of the ministry has turned many disciples that should be proclaiming the Word into spectators. The distinction we make between foreign missionary and native witness, as well as the distinction between clergy and laymen, has no biblical foundation. We are all sent by Jesus Christ to the world and we have the responsibility to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judaea, in Samaria, and in the uttermost parts of the earth.

On the other hand, I think that missions before they send a worker abroad where he will probably have to struggle against cultural and linguistic barriers, should make sure that national workers are not available, because often nationals are willing to serve but they lack financial and logistical backing in their country. There are probably

many other unexplored ways that could contribute to improve our missionary strategy. For example, in those countries that are closed to the Gospel because of ideological, nationalistic, or religious reasons, I think there must be tremendous possibilities of sending disciples of missions. We must inform Christians with a missionary vision about the opportunities of study or work in their secular field of activity, and provide the necessary support so they may be inserted in places that cannot be reached by the conventional missionary.

Finally, I would like to make a remark that is pertinent to the countries of the Third World and particularly to Latin America. Our churches are constituted essentially by the proletariat and in a lesser but rapidly increasing degree, by the lower middle class. There is practically no witness among the higher class, the one which has the political and economic power, because the members of our churches rarely have access to college education. They abstain from political participation and their presence in the cultural life of the country is not significant. There is an urgent need for a strong witness among the people of the leading class. Our brethren coming from the lower classes must be encouraged to go to the universities and to become witnesses in influential positions, and those professionals or businessmen that are already there must have our earnest support so they may faithfully declare their faith in Jesus Christ in such a difficult environment.

It is true that Jesus sent us to preach the Gospel to the poor in the first place. For God the professional, the politician, the high official is not more valuable than the illiterate city worker, the peasant or the most primitive Indian. But it is noble that those who are located in the top of the pyramid of society, those who have leadership in the country, and have many eyes upon them should have priority in our evangelistic effort. The impact of the conversion of VIPs from government or private sectors may have repercussion in our countries as important as the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, or Cornelius the centurion. Thus, in the strategy of evangelization of all the sectors of contemporary society in our generation, it is vital to multiply our prayers and our efforts in order to reach those located in key positions.