CULTURE CHRISTIANITY

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Category: Observations

Yesterday, I worked my way through fifteen hundred pages of reports from the 1974 Lausanne Congress on Word Evangelisation. I didn't read every word and I skipped some papers entirely, but I was very struck with how relevant some of the presentations were to our situation today. These words by RenÃ© Padilla are particularly prescient:

> *The act of "accepting Christ" is the means to reach the ideal of "the good life" at no cost. The Cross has lost its offence, since it simply points to the sacrifices of Jesus Christ for us, but it is not a call to discipleship. The God of this type of ChristianityÂ is the God of "cheap grace" the God who constantly gives but never demands, the God fashioned expressly for mass-man, who is controlled by the law of least possible effort and seeks easy solutions, the God who gives his attention to those who will not reject him because they need him as an analgesic.*
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> *In order to gain the greatest possible number of followers, it is not enough for "culture Christianity" to turn the Gospel into a product of religion. For this, the twentieth century has provided it with the perfect tool - technology. The strategy for the evangelization of the world thus becomes a a question of mathematical calculation. The problem is to produce the greatest number of Christians at the least possible cost in the shortest possible time, and for this the strategists can depend on the work of the computer. Thanks to computers, never in the modern era have we been closer to the reestablishment of one culture unified by theÂ Christian faith -Â the Corpus Christianum. The "culture Christianity of our day has at its disposal the most sophisticated technological resources to propagate its message of success throughout the world and to do it efficiently.*
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> *Obviously, what is objectionable in this approach to evangelism is not the use of technology in itself. Viewed alone, technology, like more science or money, is morally neutral. Nor is the concern that there be more Christians in the world to be questioned. God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). The problem with this "culture Christianity" lies in that it reduces the Gospel to a formula for success and equates the triumph of Christ with obtaining the highest number of "conversions." This is man-centred Christianity that clearly shows itself to be conditioned by theÂ "technological mentality" - that mentality that, as Jacques Ellul has pointed out, regards efficiency as the absolute criterion and on this basis seeks, in all areas of human life, the systematization of methods and resources to obtain pre-established results. It is the "religious" product of a civilisation in which nothing, not even man himself, escapes technology - a civilisation obsessed with the search for the "one best way" that inevitably leads to automation. This is another form of worldliness. The manipulation of the Gospel to achieve successful results inevitably leads to slavery to the world and its powers.*

Though they were written over forty years ago, these words are still relevant today. Indeed, I would

argue that they are more needed now than when they were first written. The drive to systematize and commodify Christian mission is stronger today than it ever was. All too often, speed and efficiency are the watchwords while patient witness and self-sacrifice are no longer needed.

I think we have a problem.