

HARRY DENMAN CALLED AN UNUSUAL KIND OF CHRISTIAN

By Louis Cassels "United Press International"

Harry Denman is a disturbing kind of Christian.

He takes seriously an aspect of Christian teaching that most church members prefer not to think about: the responsibility of every layman to be an outspoken "witness" for Jesus Christ.

For more than 30 years, Denman has been talking about religion, quietly and unaffectedly, to taxi drivers, department store clerks, pullman porters and virtually everyone else he meets. Billy Graham calls him "the greatest practitioner of personal evangelism in America."

Denman is not the brash kind of extrovert who finds it easy to strike up conversations with strangers. By nature, he is a sensitive and diffident man. He carries on his private evangelistic crusade because he is convinced that "Jesus was speaking to all Christians—not merely to ministers—when he said, 'Ye shall be witnesses unto me.'"

"Do you really believe that the average housewife or businessman could do the kind of 'witnessing' you do?" I asked Denman in an interview.

"Yes," he replied. "Anyone can do it if he tries. It's like jumping under a cold shower. After you get under, it's all right."

Denman was an office worker for a Birmingham industrial firm when he began his career as a lay evangelist. Although he still is technically a layman—in the sense that he has never been ordained—he now devotes full time to church work. Since 1940 he has served as general secretary of the Methodist Board of Evangelism at Nashville.

In recent years, Denman has been much in demand as a speaker. He stays on the road constantly, visiting local Methodist churches in every part of the country to help organize evangelistic missions. In the course of a year, he probably preaches to more people than any other churchman with the possible exception of Billy Graham.

He has done his best to remain what he feels he was called to be—a "lay witness to Christ" rather than a professional evangelist. He refuses to accept a salary from the Board of Evangelism. ("I am a bachelor and do not need a salary," he explained.) His living expenses, which the board pays, are held to the bare minimum. When I interviewed him, he was staying in a cramped single room in a second-class hotel.

He was extremely reluctant to talk about himself or his work, but he opened up when the conversation switched to a layman's opportunity for evangelism.

"Your basic witness is the kind of life you lead," he said.

"A sincere Christian can have a profound effect on the people around him without saying a word about religion. But the same Christian will accomplish far more for the Kingdom of God if he learns to witness with his lips as well as his life.

"There are many ways of doing it. It is easier, usually, to start with someone you know. If you have new neighbors and notice that they stay at home on Sunday morning, you have an opening to invite them to go to your church with you. They may accept your invitation—or they may tell you that they don't believe in going to church. Either way, you have a chance to talk to them about Christ.

"Maybe you have a friend or a business associate who is in trouble. Help him in any concrete way that you can, and meanwhile watch for the right moment to tell him where you turn for strength and courage when you are in trouble."

Won't people resent such overtures and treat you as

an unwelcome meddler in their personal affairs?

"I've talked to a good many thousands of people, and I've never met one who resented it," said Denman. "You cannot do this kind of thing unless you really care for people—and they can always tell. If you are trying to get an 'A' on your own spiritual report card, instead of trying to help someone else find Christ, you'll fail."

Can one causal conversation actually convert a non-Christian?

"In most cases, no. What you are doing is sowing seed. Many of them are bound to fall on rocky ground. But some will take root and grow. A word or two from you at the right moment, may be just the little push that's needed to change a man's entire life. I would rather say a million words that did no good than leave unsaid the one or two that could have been crucial."

How can you know which are the right "one or two words?" What if you are a tongue-tied fellow with no eloquence at all?

"The words will come. You are never asked to do this work alone. Just remember that God is working on this project too."

NEEDED! A VIGOROUS CHURCH

By J. W. Spurling

Our day is moldable! Our culture will be stamped with some signet. Just who will form it? It will be men and women of vigorous lives who have the courage to speak out loudly for what they believe, and to stand with a minority group for what they feel to be right.

Personal Christianity is founded upon the law that knowing must lead to being and doing. A Christian can never be the same after discovering a new truth. Truth cannot be put in "cold-storage"—preserved for future use. Knowing truth means that we must act on it, live by it, become subject to it.

This vigorous love of truth has been the fire in the bones of every Jeremiah. Possessing it, the church cannot be stopped. It is the dynamite that will blast out the deeply-rooted stumps of sin from their underground fortress. It is the balm that will heal the wounds of injustice and fear.

Flatly opposed to such a virile church is the growing plague of sophistication. The clamor of our day is that we be shocked at nothing and perfectly at ease in any situation. The banner it flies heralds "broadmindedness." Non-partisanship is its religion. Its keynote is moderation. Don't be too strong in what you believe or say. We are warned to look at both sides of every question, with the inference that if we only know all the facts, one side of any question is just about as good as another.

There may be colossal battles raging all about, but such folk prefer to stand aloof and free to criticize both sides. Men, women, and children may be fighting for their very souls, but we are admonished that all God expects of us is that we live permissive and harmless lives. The understanding seems to be that it is uncouth to avow earnestly that what one believes is right. Just live it, if you must—but quietly, of course.

The stinging answer from any heart aflame with God is, "Just how is it possible to live what one believes without saying anything about it?" Something as revolutionary as truth just cannot be lived passively. It rather seems that if anyone would have known how to love truth and yet live such a universally inoffensive life, it would have been Christ. Yet we find Him boldly avowing what He believed and not hesitating to associate Himself with a godly standard. Of course, such an unsocial and unsophisticated practice took Him to a crucifixion; it cost Him His life. If there were a quiet, passive way with

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