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Interview of Gilberto DiLuca, Romano Sardi, and Otello Pandolfine

Gilberto DiLuca

Romano Sardi

Otello Pandolfine

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Gilberto DiLuca from Ferrara, Italy, Romano Sardi from Livorno, Italy, and Otello Pandolfine from Piombino, Italy, were interviewed by Keith Robinson on March 16, 1970.

Robinson: The first question I would like to ask Gilberto DiLuca regards the cause of friction between the foreign missionary who arrives on the field and the national worker.

DiLuca: I think the problem can be resolved or can be summarized in the attitude of the missionary toward the people to whom he is preaching. First of all, when the missionary constitutes a little nucleus of Christians, the problem presents itself of having a native evangelist to preach. If he can get a native preacher to fill this role, that means he can leave this place and go somewhere else and work.

Usually when the missionary finds the person indicated, he asks some American congregation to support this national worker in preaching. This is the place where the problem is borne. Usually the American missionary asks for support and the support is sent to him and not directly to the national preacher. So indirectly the national preacher doesn't depend so much upon the congregation that is supporting him as upon the missionary who has guaranteed for him to his community, to his congregation. These particular things in Italy have created a lot of problems and then not only a lot of problems but consequences from these problems that have created still others. It has caused misunderstanding, contrasts between preachers and even jealousies. The problem then is that this should not be repeated. If the national preacher does not have complete absolute trust on the part of the people who are supporting him, then it is better not to support him at all. If the person who is to be supported has no reason to doubt him, if he can be recommended fully, then he ought to be immediately put in contact with the congregation that is to support him and the missionary ought not enter into it in any way any further.

It has taken us perhaps many years to learn this in Italy, and it is our hope that if some new person might come to Italy that they would keep in mind that this has been the cause of problems and not repeat the same error.

Robinson: I would like to ask Otello Pandolfine what he feels may be one of the biggest or some of the mistakes that we made in beginning the work in Italy.

Pandolfine: First of all, I think it is a good thing just to recognize that we have made mistakes. But still more important, after having recognized them, is to take remedial measure so as not to repeat them. Certainly one of the biggest mistakes I think we have made is the problem of paternalism. It is very easy to become paternalistic. This mistake can be made by the most faithful of God's servants. In fact, I think sometimes that our great zeal and our great love for those whom we are trying to approach for Christ and the gospel causes us to make this error. By paternalism I mean something very precise. I mean we are trusting too little in the power of the word that we are preaching. Perhaps we trust too much in our capacities.

This is an error that carries and brings with it a series of other errors. We could begin for example to be puffed up and prideful. In any case this is an error that carries us further and further away from our position as Christians and servants of God.

This paternalism is everywhere. It has been everywhere. It is in Italy and anywhere the gospel has been preached, this has been one of the problems. We've got to do everything we can to avoid it. Among other things paternalism brings us to this mistake: it keeps a child from growing. I will just give you an example. If I have a child who doesn't know how to swim, but I want him to learn to swim, there are two things I must do. Either I just resign myself to the fact that he will never know how to swim or otherwise I just get him and throw him in the water. A person who really understands his position with regard to those who do not know the gospel must recognize this. Either the seed that he puts in the hearts of people is a seed that grows and grows because God makes it grow or else it just does not. We must make this selection. I believe that the correct choice is, of course, to try not to commit this error of paternalism. I would suggest to every Christian in the world to not commit such an error.

I repeat again paternalism keeps a young Christian from growing. In Italy we made a great number of mistakes in this direction. We are beginning to recognize them. We would like to correct them, and we would like to walk in the right direction. May God help us.

Robinson: With regard to paternalism what different attitudes have to do with our becoming independent financially and otherwise quicker?

Pandolfine: I think the example and explanation is very simple. Up to now it seems like we have been worried about meeting places. Then we went out looking for people to put in the meeting places. Those people who came then, we haven't asked for anything as far as helping us in this. We asked other Christians to provide or perhaps we made the sacrifice ourselves. The difference is this: from now on we recognize this is not the correct method to follow. The day when we convert people, they will understand that they are Christians and that they need a meeting place they will be the ones to provide. They themselves must think toward everything they need with regard to their own work because the work must be theirs. This should help us to avoid these mistakes.

Robinson: Romano, would you give us some indications about your ideas regarding training people on the field, training schools or other methods that you might think of for training people?

Sardi: A great need we have in the mission field is preachers. We need more preachers to do more work. Of course, we can't always have an American or foreign missionaries so we need to train local people to become preachers, to go and spread the gospel everywhere. At the beginning, of course, it is more useful to have training such as Paul training Timothy. I believe the best thing to do is to have in each congregation a preacher training class. From these people we can have out in other places some Bible schools which will train them for good leadership in the church.

I think what we are doing now in Italy is not perfect but it is trying to reach this goal. We have a school which trains people to preach the gospel. Maybe they won't

be full time preachers, but they would be good leaders in the churches where they go. Some of them may also decide to become full time preachers. We need both of this kind of people in the church. One thing I want to say is this: with the maturing of the Italian churches and of the Italian Bible School, Italian preachers and Italian teachers, we must reach the goal to put Bible School in the hands of Italian teachers. Also the Italian churches will feel this responsibility and they will support it financially.

Robinson: How do you see the prospects for future preachers? Do you see greater hope with part time preachers in our congregations and perhaps the preachers who are now our full time preachers going into other areas to open up new churches?

Sardi: I think that in congregations already established we need more part time preachers, but we need more full time preachers where the church is not there, where there are not Christians. In that area a part time preacher cannot do a good work because of a lack of time. That's why in those areas we need full time preachers in order to go from one side to another and to travel in a wide area in order to have many contacts.

Robinson: Would you say then with regard to training schools that one aspect is to be sure that they would get academic or professional training so they can support themselves if need be?

Sardi: Yes.

DeLuca: It is indispensable whatever method we go about of training people that they be trained professionally, and academically if we are ever to arrive at any kind of independence, particularly financial independence in Italy. The conversion process is slow. It takes a long time, and we must have congregations who can provide their own teaching. They can get by with part time preachers who can make their own living by secular activities or if need be they can get by without any teachers at all. Otherwise there seems to be a little possibility of arriving at financial independence.

Robinson: We have already said a word or two about this, but what other suggestions could be made with regard to something we might change or we might emphasize more in arriving at a more complete independence financially and otherwise?

DiLuca: The thing we are trying to do now is to get each person to shoulder his own responsibilities. As was commented before, one of the mistakes we have made in the past and we must quit making is to feel like these people cannot take this responsibility and to make things so easy for them because we are afraid they will leave. If we are to arrive at any kind of independence, then every single solitary person must be made to face up to his own personal responsibilities immediately as soon as he is baptized, as soon as he becomes a Christian and as soon as he becomes a part of the teaching.

Pandolfine: One of the big difficulties is the fact that Christians come from Catholicism and Catholicism does not teach people personal responsibility to the

individual and this carries over, of course, into Christianity. When a Catholic priest is in financial difficulty, the state intervenes and gives him a salary. Our problem is to work in such a way that a person or a Catholic who becomes a Christian becomes more and more Christian and less and less Catholic. A Catholic who becomes more and more Christian, of course, will understand and must understand the joy that comes from giving and the joy and happiness that comes from sacrifice.

I am certainly in agreement with Gilberto and his statement that this goal is a long way in the future. None the less we know the hearts of our co-national brethren and we have faith and confidence that we will be able to obtain this goal. We will do it if we have a lot of confidence in the power of the gospel of Christ and if we have confidence in the capacity of these brethren we are teaching.

Robinson: Please comment briefly on a problem that is pretty well throughout our mission activities carried on by Americans and this has caused the fact that Americans go to preach the gospel and have taken some of their problems with them. What could you comment to me about American attitudes that cause problems on the mission field, attitudes that maybe have little to do with Christianity but cause problems?

DiLuca: I think this depends probably from a mis-evaluation of the teaching of Paul which teaches us that we must become all things to all men in order to save a soul. There are some things which seem to be very insignificant but they are not insignificant when they are compared with the mentality of the people among whom one goes to preach. We've noticed, just to give an example, in Italy some reunions of Americans maybe in keeping some national American holiday where the Italian nationals were excluded from these meetings caused some apprehension and suspicion and jealousy. A lot of things we can feel our conscience perfectly free to do and we can do in the light of day, but when we do them half hidden then it becomes suspicious.

Another problem is the fact of not adequating oneself properly to the social level of the people among whom we are working. We have a certain level of living in Italy and almost immediately when the missionary comes from America we notice a different level, a higher level for the most part, of living on his part. For example, we drive maybe a certain type of car. It doesn't make any difference what type, but we notice the American missionary drives another type that's a bigger car, a more comfortable car. Well, these things are not important in themselves but if we are going to try to win souls to Christ, we need also to be able and be willing to denounce and renounce certain vanities.

What I want to say is this. It is not tied or connected directly with a car or anything of a material nature but I do mean a person who goes into a mission field must use with more wisdom and prudence, whatever the means the Lord has given in his hands, he needs to use them wisely and intelligently. Not only for other reasons already named but also this would avoid the fact that some people might be attracted to us not for reasons of loving the gospel but because they see a certain level of living, a high standard of living, and they are attracted by material things and with the hope of getting some material benefit. If an evangelist is not willing to adapt himself to the living and the level of living of the people among whom he is living, it is better that he stay in America where he can do just as good a work and go about serving the Lord in this field.

Robinson: Let's conclude now. Each of you, if you would like to say a few words, what do you see for the future of the church in Italy?

Pandolfine: I would like to go back to what we were saying before. If we are willing to admit the mistakes that we have made in the past and we are willing to try to correct these mistakes and go ahead with the work of the Lord, I see a great future for God's people in Italy. The soil, the field in which we are working, perhaps is one of the most biblical in the world. In comparison to the power of God's word, no field can really be considered difficult.

Sardi: It is difficult to really make any sort of prediction. The future is in the hands of God but because of our faith in God and His word and the power of His word, I think the future will be good as we are willing to work for Christ and are willing to let people know about Jesus and we want to spread the word of salvation in all of our country.

DiLuka: The scriptures teach us that Christ said the powers of Hades will not prevail against the church. Any view of the church in the future should be an optimistic view and certainly the fact that we are recognizing and talking about some errors that we have made in the past is not indicative of something negative but is indicative of something positive. We see in the New Testament itself the men of God made mistakes and it is very difficult to find any character mentioned when some of his mistakes are not mentioned also. The problem is not so much in making mistakes as in refusing to recognize them and refusing to try to correct them. If we do this and put our trust in God, then the power of Satan and Hades cannot prevail against the progress of the church in Italy.

Robinson: I appreciate very much the presence of each of you and the time you have taken to interview. It is my prayer that many people will listen to these in the future and gain wisdom and knowledge in taking the gospel to all the world.