

The following is a brief translated transcription from the program [Uomini e Profeti](#) (“Men and Prophets”), a program on the Italian radio RAI3 (the transcribed Italian follows.) It is the second in a series of six interviews by Gabriella Caramore (whose comments are marked “GC” in parentheses below) with [Paolo Ricca](#), a Waldensian pastor and theologian, on the theme of the judgment discourses of Jesus; this clip starts about 18:40 into the [second program](#).

To me it seems apropos regarding contemporary trends in church marketing. For the last few years I have felt a growing concern of exactly what he describes, that the more that churches seek to market themselves the more they lose sight of Jesus. It is my conviction that were we to focus on living the Gospel instead of marketing it, people would be drawn to the churches without being enticed, and those that were changed would stay of their own commitment, without the need to constantly and increasingly entice, satisfy, entertain, stimulate, titillate, lest they become bored and leave. We have substituted building the church as a successful organization for building the church as an expression of the kingdom of God, and our marketing and branding programs (which are big business) exhibit that deception.

Paolo Ricca: “Then there is the other extraordinary theme, which is that of “visibility”, we might say. In our media society we know well that you exist only if you appear, only if you are seen. And churches are easily and fatally induced into seeking visibility. (GC: The most important seats of authority, the places of honor, greetings in public places....) These are all things that are called “the religiosity of public relations” as we might call it, the spectacularization of religion which by now occupies an important place in the collective imagination, and which precisely for this provokes an ever increasing perplexity. We know the invitation of Jesus; in the Sermon on the Mount he goes exactly in the opposite direction. Do not make a show of yourself as a Christian. Do not make an exhibition of your piety. Do not let yourself be seen when you pray. (GC: Pray in your bedroom if you must pray....) What does this signify? It signifies that the search for visibility has nothing to do with the search for God. S/he who seeks visibility is not seeking God. S/he should at least be aware of that... and it has nothing to do with truth.”

“Poi c’è l’altro tema straordinario, che è quello della visibilità, potremmo dire. Nella nostra società mediatica sappiamo bene che tu esisti solo se appari, solo se sei visto. E le chiese sono facilmente e fatalmente indotte a cercare visibilità. (GC: I primi seggi, i posti d’onore, i saluti nelle piazze...) Sono tutte cose che appunto sono state chiamate “la religiosità delle pubbliche relazioni”, così la potremmo chiamare, la spettacolarizzazione della religione che tra l’altro occupa un posto importante nell’immaginario collettivo ormai, e proprio per questo suscita una perplessità sempre più grande. L’invito di Gesù lo sappiamo; nel Sermone sul Monte va proprio nella direzione opposta. Non metterti in mostra come cristiano. Non esibire la tua pietà. Non fare vedere che preghi. (GC: Prega nella tua cameretta se devi pregare.) ... Che cosa significa questo? Significa che la ricerca della visibilità non ha nulla a che fare con la ricerca di Dio. Chi cerca visibilità non sta cercando Dio. Lo deve sapere per lo meno ... e non ha a che fare con la verità.”

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