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ONE YEAR IN LONDON— AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

There I was, in the year 1960 and thirty-one years old. I spoke, read, and wrote in three languages: Spanish, French, and Arabic, but my knowledge of the English language was very elementary. Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver's Travels*, English pastor, writer, and politician, said in the seventeenth century that a writer who can't read or speak in English is a rather illiterate writer. And he was right.

About two billion people today communicate in English in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and islands of the Caribbean like the Cayman Islands, among others. English is also spoken in countries of the Middle East, in African nations like South Africa and Nigeria, in India, and some other regions in Asia. English is a universal language. Furthermore, the best books on religion and atheism are written in English and have never been translated into Spanish or French.

I received a scholarship in 1960 and went to London. I was there for a full year, from January to December of 1961. I had to put off my radio and press activities. A young Spanish man, Miguel Quesada, took my place as a preacher in the church in Tangier.

I devoted many hours to learning the English language. I also enrolled in an advanced course in journalism.

As soon as I arrived in London, I came in contact with the literary circles there.

In 1958, I had published a strong book against the Spanish government titled *En defensa de los protestantes españoles* (*In Defense of the Spanish Protestants*). I made it clear in the prologue that I wasn't defending any specific doctrine of Protestantism. I defended the people who were discriminated against by the Spanish government for not professing the Catholic religion. Very high fines were applied when there were more than twenty people meeting in a house. Christians were put in jail for testifying about their faith. Soldiers were put in jail for not attending Catholic Mass in the army. People were fired from their jobs for not being Catholic. Civil matrimony was prohibited. The dead were buried in areas of the cemetery destined for trash. The young were not admitted to college. Government administrative positions could not be filled by Protestants. Publication of Christian literature, including fliers, was not permitted. In Franco's Spain, Christians could not announce their activities through the press, radio, or any other means.

My book was published in Tangier, with the authorization of the Moroccan government. The first edition was soon sold out. A printing press in Barcelona, Spain, published a secret second edition that circulated all over the country. I sent the book to politicians of the Spanish government and also to all foreign embassies.

The consul of Spain in Tangier called me to his office one day. He asked me to give him ten books. He said that Secretary of State Fernando María Castiella wanted to read the book. Two weeks later, he called me again; he was furious. He showed me a letter written by the secretary of state of the Spanish government, but he didn't give it to me. Mr. Castiella said that, if what I said in the book was true, he would work to fix that situation. If it wasn't true, I was going to have a hard time and would have to face the consequences, even if I was outside of Spain.

Castiella, who was a sincere Catholic, ordered an investigation and was able to prove that everything I had written was true. I didn't have any problems continuing to travel to and work in Spain. On the contrary, I think he even gave orders that I be left alone.

When I arrived in London, my book was already known. A publishing company on the famous Fleet Street called The Protestant Trust Society proposed that my book be translated into English. And it was.

I devoted some time to oversee the translation. The director of the publishing company, K. W. Stone, who also wrote the prologue, assigned me some other jobs. At the same time, he put me in contact with religious newspapers in England that asked me to submit articles on specific topics. I earned money with the translation of my book and with the articles I wrote. I lived comfortably in London with my scholarship and the money I made.

In July of that same year, I received a call from an English lawyer, Peter Benenson. He said the director of the publishing company had given him my phone number. He had read the drafts and was amazed at the attitude of the Spanish government toward Protestants. He added, "Now I understand why President Truman didn't want to include Spain in the Marshall Plan that contributed to rebuild Europe after the devastation of World War II. It was because of the religious intolerance in that country."

He said he was going to introduce an organization in Paris that would fight against all kinds of discrimination, and he wanted me to go and speak at the inauguration ceremony. He would pay for my plane ticket and hotel stay.

So I went to Paris.

The founding meeting of Amnesty International took place in July at the Hotel Lutetia in the French capital. There were four speakers: Benenson himself, who introduced the ceremony; a Catholic priest from Barcelona who held communist ideas; a woman from the Belgian resistance during World War II; and myself. The woman and I spoke in French. Benenson and the Catholic priest spoke in English, and their speeches were translated into French.

That was the beginning of Amnesty International, which then was called Amnesty 61. I was one of the founders, of which I am very proud.

In October of 1962 in London, Benenson introduced the regulations of the organization, which by then was already registered as Amnesty International.

Through the years, this organization has played a very important role in the world. It's dedicated to the defense of those imprisoned because of racial, political, or religious reasons who have never taken part in violent acts. It also denounces the violation of human rights anywhere in the world. It denounces acts of torture and it opposes capital punishment. It doesn't pronounce itself either in favor or against political parties; it's impartial and objective.

I believe a Christian can freely be a part of an organization like this one, ruled by the same principles we find in the Bible.

In 1977, the Stockholm Academy awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to Amnesty International. Part of that award belongs to me.

I returned to Tangier after my experience in England. I had achieved my purpose with hard work and a strong will. I could read, write, and speak in English. That Shakespearean English that I was taught in England was ruined in Texas. I now speak English like a cowboy from Abilene. But I'm happy with that.