

Jesus practised secrecy (Jn.7:8-10), spoke in parables to keep secrets of the kingdom from the uninitiated (Jn.8:10), and repeatedly enjoined others to secrecy, for a variety of reasons (Mk. 1:44; 5:37; 7:36; 8:30). Those who disobeyed Jesus' command for secrecy surely limited Jesus' freedom to minister in the urban centres (Mk.10:17-20).

Wisdom in tentmakers, and in their supporters too, demands that we restrict the flow of information about our ministries. In some case this means writing encrypted prayer letters, omitting last names, location names, or in some cases even using pseudonyms. In the case of converts it is necessary to protect them from families or governments that will persecute them. In the case of tentmakers themselves, it is sometimes a question of protecting them from well-meaning but insensitive supporters (pseudonyms are used with supporters, not with the local government!).

Even e-mail users must learn new guidelines for communicating securely, probably without using encryption which itself raises red flags to official "snoopers."¹ In summary, God cannot lie (Titus 1:2) but he certainly keeps secrets. So should we.

4. Bribery

A Pakistani brother once asked me whether paying after a service was rendered (a tip) made it more moral than paying before the fact (a bribe). Why do we find the one so easily acceptable and the other not? If we take the original meaning of tip as "to insure promptness," there is little to distinguish between the two in many cases. Many seasoned veterans of cross-cultural living distinguish between extortion (demanding bribes) and bribery (paying them). The Bible appears to make the same distinction,

uniformly condemning the practice of demanding bribes but virtually silent about paying them, except in the desire to get what one does not deserve.

That is a helpful distinction—the ethical distinction between paying the "extra" demanded for a legal and moral right as opposed to paying to get something that is not rightly ours. The former is paid to ensure promptness, the latter to secure illegal and immoral gain. Local believers will help us navigate the minefields caused by a confusion of our cultural and Biblical values.

To put things in perspective before we leave the topic of tentmaker integrity, perhaps it should be pointed out that traditional modes of ministry have an equal number of ethical questions, perhaps less examined because we have lived with them for so long. Should foreign workers, especially the myriad short-term work teams, be taking jobs from nationals? Should guests set their own agendas rather than working where they are wanted and needed as defined by the host country which grants them permission to come? Should we be establishing agencies and institutions whose ethos demands the individualism and "drivenness" that characterize so much of our ministry?

Are there some activities of both tentmakers and traditional missionaries which need to be re-examined? One example is the ethical question of exporting carpets made by children, or conversely depriving families of their livelihood by insisting that all children go to regular schools. Another dilemma relates to refusing to pay bribes to underpaid government employees whose families depend on the income. There are no easy answers to these and many other related questions.

The onus is on us—expatriate and national alike—to be shrewd but innocent and to bring ourselves under the authority of God's word as we together seek his wisdom in being salt and light in the world he has commanded us to evangelize.

End Note

1. Editor's Note: Some feel that since businesses often use encryption for the security of their companies' information it may or may not raise red flags depending on who is using it and who they are in communication with.

Bob Morris until recently was Area Director South for Interserve. Currently he is on sabbatical leave in Toronto, Canada. Bob is a graduate of the University of Western

Ontario and Tyndale College and Seminary. You can contact Bob and respond to his article at <103635.1250@compuserve.com>

Interserve Canada

*Professionals
In
Mission*

10 Huntingdale Blvd.
Scarborough, ON
MIW 2S5
Tel. 516-499-7511
Fax. 416-499-4472
E-mail:
74140.3626@Compuserve.c

of faith is integrated with our profession we will not lack integrity.

Other Ethical Issues

We return now to the other implications of integrity which come under the category of "honesty" and "holiness." Here as much as anywhere we see a contrast between accepted evangelical orthodoxy and Biblical values, which have a more Middle-Eastern or Asian flavour.

1. Double Agendas

Double agendas are a Biblical principle blessed by God and absolutely essential to the fruitfulness of tentmakers. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord and he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." How does he do it? Do the kings act like puppets on a string while God in his sovereignty makes them act against their will? Or is he like some master programmer writing into their decisions exactly what he wants them to do? Neither! Joseph understood how double agendas work, both to preserve man's autonomy and God's purposes. He said to his brothers on the occasion of revealing himself to them in Egypt, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:21; Isa.10:5-7, 12). God had one agenda and Joseph's brothers had quite a different agenda. Both accomplished their agendas through the same actions. Joseph's brothers had not felt manipulated in selling Joseph into Egypt; they were doing exactly what they freely chose to do, but in so doing they got Joseph to Egypt. That's where God wanted him in order to prepare him for the great job he eventually had under Pharaoh. Examples

abound in the modern world where rulers have made decisions which have furthered the kingdom of Christ.

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what we say we are, whether nurse or management consultant or engineer, and still be an ambassador for Jesus Christ.

The supreme example of double agendas is the cross. The cross was the epitome of the worst that man and the Devil can do to man or God. Yet God used it for his purposes: the demonstration of agape love and the provision of redemption for all his creation. Man's worst and God's best meet in the cross!

2. Hidden Agendas

Hidden agendas are a variation of double agendas, this time practiced by one person. They too can be blessed by God. There is no necessary contradiction between our going to Mongolia as a city planner (and presenting ourselves as doing exactly that for the government of Mongolia) yet at the same time looking for opportunities to share our faith in a

way that does not decrease our effectiveness as a city planner. God himself advised double agendas on occasion, where both agendas were legitimate. He told Samuel to present a sacrifice as a means of simultaneously anointing David without antagonizing Saul (I Sam.16:1-3).

Problems arise when one of our agendas is false or deceptive. For example, someone on a student visa who attends one university class per week and spends the rest of the time evangelizing in the villages is acting fraudulently. Someone on a student visa should be a student, and if evangelism is his calling, let him witness to the academic world that he has been given permission to enter. Then neither his hidden or overt agenda lacks integrity.

3. Truth Telling, Secrecy and Pseudonyms

The hardest lesson for Christians from the West to learn is that truth telling in most other cultures and in the Bible does not mean telling the whole truth. Because we swear in court to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, we forget that "telling the whole truth" is not necessarily Biblical, while the other two oaths are. The cardinal rule for wise tentmakers is, "Respond to what has been asked, no more."

North Americans live in a culture which has an insatiable appetite to know. In fact we have laws protecting the public's right to know. We value the free flow of information to the point of information overload, and then spend our free time surfing the net, not to gain any benefit from it but just to revel in the unlimited access to a virtually infinite amount of information. Not so in the East; not so in the Bible. either!

3. Wholeness and Integration

This is an issue far broader than tentmaking but is absolutely critical for tentmakers. In the West we live what someone referred to as “TIME-magazine lives,” with different compartments for each. Life is departmentalized into work, leisure, family, religion, etc. Even more, we have unbiblical separations between sacred and secular, soul and body, eternity and time, clergy and laity, and so on. In particular, Christians seem to separate work and ministry. When someone says, “After I come home from work I am just too tired to have any ministry,” that may be because they see work as going from 9 to 5 and ministry taking place from 5 to 9. We need to see work and ministry integrated on three levels if we are to have integrity in our lives.

a. Values and Work

God’s people must think through carefully how their faith impacts the way they do their job. In Wes Pippert’s memorable turn of phrase: “Let faith write your job description.” Christians should even question the cultural values associated with their job which may be quite contrary to Christian values. Nathan Hatch, for example, suggested in *The Perils of Professionalism* that “professionalism” measures everything in terms of success, without reference to servanthood or the way success is achieved. Self-confidence and competence are valued above humility. We are taught to believe that we deserve what we achieve, without reference to grace or other Christian understandings of how God works in the world. A good exercise for any believer, but particularly for those preparing to be tentmakers, is to write a one-page “Christian Philosophy of [whatever my work is],” whether it is a Christian philosophy of education or health care or

auto-mechanics. The idea is that by thinking through ahead of time how our faith should impact our particular vocation we can perform distinctively as God’s people in the market place.

b. Lifestyle and Work

In the West the central issue may be the challenge of living within our income from work or adopting a simple lifestyle. Overseas the challenge is to maximize our effectiveness by choosing a lifestyle appropriate to the vocation as it is understood in the local culture. Teachers in most foreign countries are highly respected as models of behavior and there are certain expectations that must be met. On the other hand, students live the epitome of a simple life-style, and foreigners on student visas should live as frugally as local students do, even though they may have access to greater resources because they come from wealthier economies. Tentmakers in business will be expected to entertain clients lavishly, and holding back in this area because we value simplicity will be badly misunderstood. But whatever our vocation, in whatever context, Christians must avoid conspicuous consumption and materialism, which invariably are wrong. Even our social lives should reflect the tension between local social norms and Christian values.

c. Witness and Work

No “secular” employer is going to be happy with a tentmaker who spends his time on the job talking endlessly about his faith, or passing out tracts, or holding Bible Studies at coffee breaks (lunch hours may be legitimate in some contexts). Christian witness on the job is usually more a matter of transformation than “addition.” That is, our witness on the job must be integrated with our job,

without compromising our work. Marketplace witness consists of living so distinctively as a Christian that people come to us to find out what makes us different. This is at least part of Jesus’ meaning when he said we are the salt of the earth. Salt makes people thirsty, and we must live so “saltily” that people thirst for the water of life, which they see at work in us.

We live out our faith in at least five non-verbal areas in our work—in *attitudes* (for example, we have the heart of a servant, we treat others with the dignity all God’s creation deserves); in *how we do our job* (the best we can); in our *behavior* (we apologize for our mistakes, forgive others’ mistakes, we do not tolerate racism or sexism or foul language); in our *values* (simple living, co-operation, encouragement); in our *choices* (not to participate in abortions, not to maximize working hours at the cost of family or church, and so on). Our Christian distinctiveness on the job then becomes the springboard for fuller articulation of our faith at other times.

By integrating our work and our witness we avoid the exhaustion of others who see ministry as something totally separate from our secular vocation and therefore done after a long hard day at the place of employment. Jesus was a model of integrating the spiritual and the physical. Matt.9:35 says Jesus went “Teaching... preaching... and healing...” Even the Greek words used to describe Jesus’ activities reflect a wholistic view of life all too often lacking in our perceptions. “*Sozein*” (to save) is used of sins but also refers 18 times in the New Testament to healing, indicating there is no necessary tension between the ideas of saving from sin or from physical ailments. “*Aphesis*” (forgiveness) similarly refers at various times to sins, debts, slavery, or eschatological liberation. In summary, if our profession

Shrewd Yet Innocent: Thoughts on Tentmaker Integrity

Integrity in the context of all of life is core to who we are in work and ministry. Specific issues such as bribery, public identity, truth telling, hidden agendas, and professionalism are discussed in a biblical context. May we have a biblical rather than a “Western evangelical” understanding of the ethical issues of tentmaking integrity!

by Robert D. Morris

Anyone who has lived in the developing world for any length of time knows the difference between the ways rats and snakes operate. Rats are noisy, obvious, and slow moving. Snakes, on the other hand, are quiet, quickly in and out, and are almost impossible to find after the first sighting. It is this very quality which Dennis Clark, one of the pioneering tentmakers in Asia, suggested constituted the “wisdom” or shrewdness of snakes in Jesus’ enigmatic command to be “shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves.” (Rats would seem to epitomize the opposite—shrewd as doves and innocent as snakes). If he is right then tentmakers, of all Christian workers, should live up to Christ’s standard.

We should be as crafty as snakes in our entry strategies, skillful in avoiding danger, knowing when to act, when to speak, and when to refrain from both. On the other hand, we must never use our shrewdness in a hypocritical or deceptive way, nor be naive or stupid. Paul echoed the same principles when he told the Corinthians, “I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil” (Rom. 16:19).

So let us take this as our standard as we work our way through the

issues: shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.

The Meaning of Integrity

Said to a tentmaker: “Isn’t it being dishonest when you call yourself an engineer in the Middle East when you are really a missionary?”

Said by a tentmaker: “When I get home from a 60-hour work week I am just too tired for ministry.”

As different as these statements appear on the surface, they both reflect on integrity, a quality which all disciples of Jesus Christ are expected to exhibit in their daily lives. Tentmakers, no less than anyone else, should be seen as people of integrity. Yet there is no mode of witness other than Bible smuggling that seems to raise more questions about it. When we talk of integrity there are at least three different meanings that we must consider:

1. Holiness in the Broadest Sense

All of God’s people are to be spiritually pure, uncompromising in Biblical standards. However we must be shrewd in distinguishing between our own cultural values and those supra-cultural standards God demands of

us. This is a sufficiently complex topic that we will treat it separately later.

2. Honesty in Tentmaking

One of the most frequent questions heard is, “Isn’t tentmaking deceptive? Isn’t it dishonest to say you are an engineer in the Middle East when really you go with a missionary agenda?” My response has been to say, “Isn’t it dishonest to work as a manager for Consumer’s Gas when really you are a Christian?” The point is that there is no necessary contradiction between the two, unless you think it is wrong to have an agenda that you do not broadcast to everyone. Or unless you are saying one thing in the Middle East and another at home. More on that later. Honesty demands that when we are asked directly about something we answer honestly even if not completely. David, a surgeon in Bahrain, was once asked by a Muslim colleague just as he began an incision, “David, are you a missionary?” In the interest of both honesty and the patient’s well-being, David said simply, “Yes,” and the matter was dropped for the time being. Later David explained more fully why he came to Bahrain.