

Hirelings, Hucksters & Harlots

“Take this to your room and listen to it while you are here,” said my friend, as he handed me a cassette tape by a nationally known Baptist evangelist. “If you do not have time to listen to it before you have to leave, I will make a copy and send it to you,” he continued. I pointed to a warning sentence printed at the bottom of the cassette label, “Duplication Prohibited by Law”. “Oh,” he said, “I did not see that. Guess I will have to order another copy.”

Reflection on the above incident (which is altogether common today) provoked some disturbing thoughts. The sermon recorded on the tape was excellent. It was a moving and challenging gospel message, one that deserves vigorous distribution to as many listeners as possible. Yet here is the preacher or his sponsoring organization forbidding its propagation.

From the early Apostles, preachers of the gospel have defied all attempts to silence them. They have risked and incurred imprisonment and death to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to every creature willing to hear. What a strange turn of events it is, then, when preachers of the gospel forbid their message to be spread, put their sermons under lock and key, and threaten, on pain of legal punishment, anyone who dares slip them out to others.

But the preacher isn't altogether hiding his light under a bushel. He will gladly bring it out for all who will pay for a peek. The sermon is readily available at the office of the Evangelistic Association for \$5.00 per copy (\$4.00 if you buy a dozen or more at a time, and free if you send a donation of \$25.00 or more for “our ministry”). The fact that the man who would like to pass the truth of God's word on to someone else may not have the \$5.00, but could duplicated the sermon on a used tape and send it on, is not considered. If he can't pay, he can't have the gospel. Nor is it considered that the preacher was paid well for his time and labor in preaching the message. It is not a matter of compensating a workman for his services. He already has that. It is a matter of getting all you can. It is a matter of *greed*; dirty, grubby, piggish GREED! The law allows it, we have it, they want it, so we are going to get the money.

A large Bible Conference I used to attend was serviced by a Christian brother who carried sound and recording equipment to various camps and conferences, and provided tapes of messages preached on the respective programs at a modest price for all who wished to have them. This reasonable and satisfactory arrangement continued for a number of years, until a well-known, big-shot Englishman demanded that he be paid a royalty on any and all tapes containing his sermons. Because the brother had neither the bookkeeping arrangement nor the extra cost in his modest price structure, he packed up and left. No one got tapes of anything, simply because the preacher wanted *more*. He was well compensated for his travel and his preaching. But he was unsatisfied with what was right. Such greed knows no satisfaction. He was not primarily interested in spreading the gospel by every legitimate means. He was interested in *more money*.

Another preacher and evangelist friend of mine was quite contented traveling and preaching, living off the “love offerings” that were given him, until he learned of the big bucks some of the more dynamic men were making by selling their most popular sermons on cassette tapes. At this time he, too, was beginning to receive several requests for his sermons on tape. So he began his own tape ministry, offering them for sale at his meetings. But he could not stand the sight of someone out in the audience taping his sermon and robbing him of a potential sale. So what did he do? He did the same thing multitudes of men and organizations have done. He forbade anyone to bring a recorder into the meeting where he was preaching. If you want the tape, said he, you can buy it from me.

Let us bear in mind that this man, who is sworn to proclaim the word of God to all who will hear, and who is now severely restricting who might hear, is receiving wages of the church which he is now serving. It is not a matter of his receiving his rightful wages. Again, it is a matter of ugly, unvarnished greed!

Patent and copyright laws were instituted to insure a craftsman or artisan fair compensation and recover of his expenses and labor in producing something new and beneficial. This is nothing but right. Considerable labor, research and expense goes into new inventions. In the matter of publishing music and books, not only are the artisan's talents employed, but someone must take the risk of the expense of initial publication. In this the copyright of books has more of legitimate argument.

But when it comes to recording preached sermons, copyrighting them and selling on a protected market, that is quite another kettle of fish. And a smelly one, at that. It takes no more breath or energy for a preacher to preach to a million through tape duplication than the dozen or so who hear him live. And if he is compensated for his work, why should he reap a bonanza? A sermon is not a creative work of art. If it is worth a dime, it is God's inspired gift. And the preacher may preach hundreds of them in a year. What kind of conscienceless thief is it who wants to merchandise the gift of God? Again, we are pushed back to the unpretty spectacle of hellish, hoggish greed!

One particular huckster, who operates on the West Coast and has the same initials as the celebrated author of The Screwtape Letters, typifies another popular and lucrative religious con-game. He is a mediocre writer and operates by direct mail. Keeping his “ear to the ground,” he stays alert to the popular fads among religious people. When he finds interest rising in a particular area, he sits down and writes a book or pamphlet on the subject, advocating the very thing his audience wants to believe, with just enough sensational quirk and catchy title to attract attention. Mailing to the “sucker lists” he has purchased from organizations similar to his, he quickly unloads his new production of religious pornography at exorbitant prices. There has not been an issue of any kind in the last twenty-five years that he has not proven himself to be an authority on. He has the latest sensational speculation on prophecy and

end-time events. He can tell you everything you ever wanted to know about spiritual gifts. If you just buy his how-to books on soul-winning, you will become a great evangelist. Is your husband a mean-brow-beating non-Christian? His book will tell you how to lead him to Jesus before he knows what has happened to him. Do you have wayward, rebellious teenagers? For an arm and a leg he will sell you a book that will guarantee their submission and conversion. Are you troubled with sickness? Jesus wants you well. Send X amount of dollars and find out how, by proper diet, vitamins, exercise and faith, the Bible prescribes perfect health for everyone. Are you in financial straits? He will get you out . . . for a price.

You have, no doubt, been hearing a lot about demons. Just order Dr. L___'s book and learn all about the occult and how to rid yourself of demonic oppression. Perhaps you are just too fat and unattractive. Jesus wants you trim and slim. For a fee, he will tell you how the Bible tells you how to do this. The hundreds of thousands of naïve and gullible members of the Christian community are the lawful prey of these miserable pickpockets who insinuate themselves as ministers of the gospel. They are hucksters who bear a closer resemblance to the fake medicine man who hawked his cure-all elixir from his covered wagon.

Even the older reliable Christian book publishers are cursed from top to bottom with the worldly conformed philosophy of "get the religious dollar". The first thing a publisher must ask himself when he is considering a publication is not "Is this truth?", or "Will this benefit people?", but, "can I sell it?" If he cannot sell it, all the other questions mean nothing. He cannot afford to print what he cannot sell. "Will it bring in a profit?" has to be the criteria of everything that goes to his presses. The other questions are secondary and not of prime importance at all. With the religious palate of most of the reading public running anywhere from pabulum to garbage, it is little wonder that most of what fills the shelves in bookstores is better suited to fueling fires in furnaces than in hearts of the godly.

But if this fare is cheap in quality, it is not in cost. Under the pretense of rising costs of materials, publishers have doubled and tripled the price of religious books in recent years. This has far outstripped inflation in products using similar materials.

Producers of religious records also demonstrate unbridled avarice by taking fifty cents worth of vinyl, two bits worth of junk music and shallow lyrics and demanding five or ten dollars for it. This profitable pandering to the puerile palates of religious children is called a "ministry". These had best hope that church and state stay separated, or they will find themselves in trouble with the vice squad.

The name of the game is Get The Money. Whether it is by truth or lies, by Christianity or Humanism, by sincerity or by hypocrisy: Get the money. Get more of it. Get all you can. If more is available, get it, too.

When I first entered an itinerant ministry, generally called Evangelism, I was given some eyebrow-raising advice by the veterans. Like to hear some of it? Hold on to your seat:

Get love offering envelopes printed with your picture on it and a convenient bank draft on the flap. Research has proven that pink envelopes get more money than any other color. Try to collect the used envelopes before you leave. That way you can add the big givers to your mailing list, cultivate them and milk them for more money from time to time. Get your travel expense in advance or as soon as you arrive. That way, they will not include it in your offering, and your offering will not look so big. If you have records or books for sale, never take money for them at the meetings. Just get the orders and send them later. You can say this is to keep from "changing money in the house of the Lord", but the real reason is this: Any one person will have only so much money available during the meeting. Try to get all of that in the love offering, and then you can get the merchandise money later. Otherwise, your love-offering would be reduced by the money they spent on your merchandise. You need to have your cake, even though you have already eaten it.

One seasoned old veteran gave me this well-meaning advice: Brother Murrell," he said, "it seems the Lord has gifted you with the ability to get at truth and spell it out in such a way that the saints can understand and receive it. But don't ever put any of your good sermons in books. If you do, people will buy the book, read it, and then you will be washed up. All your stuff will be gone and you won't have anything to offer." Isn't that astounding? I am to carefully hoard my treasure of gospel so that I won't run out of anything to sell my audiences!

Is this the deep spiritual wisdom an aspiring young preacher of the gospel should expect to hear from the hoary-headed elder? If we are no more than a generation of gouging hirelings, hucksters and religious whores, selling our services to the highest bidder, it is all we will have to offer to those who fill our own places.

And don't think that evangelists, when they have attained the position where they can choose their engagements, do not select them with any eye to the take. Amazingly, pastors know this, and still invite the greedy giants. One pastor told me of a particular noted evangelist who frankly told him, "I don't have to take just any meeting any more. I go only to the places where I know I will be taken care of properly." Another pastor has been trying to get this preacher for three years. Each time, he turns him down when he learns the size of the church. He still wants him because he thinks he can deliver the goods. He is willing to pay wheat it will cost to get this modern Balaam to come and mesmerize his people. Personally, I had rather hear Balaam's ass. She, at least, told the truth.

The truth of the matter is, pastors are just as covetous and greedy as evangelists. One young man who showed better than ordinary gifts and abilities for the ministry, and evidenced clear thinking in theological areas, graduated with his doctorate some time ago. I asked him if he had been approached by the seminary to continue on in its faculty. "Yes," he replied, "as a matter of fact, I have considered that carefully. But the seminaries don't pay enough money. A man with my abilities and education can easily demand thirty to forty thousand a year in the right pastorate, and I think I deserve it." There it was in stark naked reality. He could not have stated his case any clearer had he said, "I am an hireling, for sale to the highest bidder."

Before those of us who are not so gifted and not so well educated begin to nod our self-righteous heads in outraged agreement, let us ask ourselves, have we not been led to favorably consider a different, larger, more prestigious station that offered us a bit more than ten shekels and a shirt (see Judges 17-18)? Why is it that so many "shepherds" are busily hopping from one pastorate to

another every two or three years, nearly always to a bigger one? Is it that they are hirelings who flee when they see the wolf coming, or just religious harlots prostituting their gift for the best price they can get?

It should not be necessary to call attention to the big TV huckster-showmen whose so-called ministries are unabashed Hollywood type *productions*, not worship services or evangelistic meetings. More and more of this million-dollar TV time has to be used to get more money to buy more million dollar time. They are spectacularly successful. So successful, in fact, that the preacher has to keep coming up with more projects, lavish building and offices, Bible schools, seminaries, colleges that aren't needed, hospitals that aren't needed, monuments and pray towers, ad nauseum! You will never hear one get on the air and tell the folks to stop sending money because he has enough to pay all his bills. He is driven by the same ambitious greed as the rest of the world's widow-robbers. He never gets enough. And he has to spend as much as he gets every year or the IRS will be breathing down his neck. That is why he has to keep coming up with new projects.

And speaking of the IRS, the big howl and cry from big time religion on the church and state separation issue is when money is involved. Religion is afraid it will lose its tax exempt status. Is afraid it will lose its mailing subsidies. Is fearful it will have its billions in property taxed. The Internal Revenue Service poses a government threat to religion *only* so long as religion is money-centered. Remove that, and reduce it to Christ-centered Christianity, and then let the IRS do what it pleases. In this the big denominations are in the same bed with the para-church and electronic church empire builders. They make the same money-grabbing mercenary noises.

You may now think that I am coming on too strong about this matter of greed and covetousness. Do I well to sound such an alarm? I think so. The Scriptures abound with warnings: Covetousness is idolatry (Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5). It captures and engrosses the heart (2 Peter 2:14) and is never satisfied (Ecclesiastes 5:10, Habakkuk 2:5). The saints are enjoined to utterly rid themselves of its corruptions (Ephesians 5:3, Hebrews 13:5), and ministers *must not* be greedy for filthy lucre (1 Timothy 3:3). Avarice foments injustice and oppression (Micah 2:2), flings multitudes down into foolish and hurtful lusts (1 Timothy 6:9), and for the love of money some depart from the faith 1 Timothy 6:10). For the gold and silver of this world, men lie, kill, steal. It wrecks homes and brings to poverty and misery. The covetous shares his character with the wicked (Romans 1:29) and the lazy (Proverbs 21:26). He is utterly abhorred by God (Psalm 10:3)

Idolatry is worship, trust, devotion to any other object than Almighty God. Spiritual adultery is somewhat the same: It is taking pleasure, delight, in the abominations of the world, the flesh and the devil. But spiritual harlotry is something more narrowly defined than either of these. Its essence is found in Hosea 2:5: "For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink." There it is. The harlot sells her services. She will go after them that "give me". Adultery is unfaithfulness for the pleasure of it. But whoredom is a business deal. This generation of religious apostates has produced not just hirelings and hucksters, but outright hookers. If there are any marks of the last of the last days, certainly this is one of them. For these are the days when men are lovers of themselves, covetous . . . (2 Timothy 3:2), scoffers walking after their own lusts (2 Peter 3:3)

But I must not leave my readers with the impression that I am down on preachers, pastors, evangelists and churches. Before we get an Elijah complex and hunt out a juniper tree, let us remember that the Lord God has never been, nor will ever be, without His faithful remnant. This is true, both of His prophets and His churches. It has been my burden to help the true preachers of God's grace and to strengthen the people of the Lord as long as I can remember myself to have been a Christian. There are multitudes of hard-working, praying, sacrificial living, holy men of God whose lives are laid down for the sheep of God's fold. There are widely scattered churches all across the country made up of saints intent on loving and serving the Saviour with all their hearts, mind and strength. If we are to see any degree of true Spiritual Awakening in our days, it will be accompanied and ministered by a people who have divested their hearts of worldly idols, covetous ambitions, and have laid their lives down for the sake of the gospel freely received and freely given (Matthew 10:8)

- C. M.