



Must gifted teachers stay home Or can the abuses be corrected?

A friend of mine, an extraordinary teacher who travels extensively as well as having local responsibilities, declared last week that he was now refusing all invitations to speak away from home.

He said he was tired of people calling and saying, "Will you come speak to our group? We sure can use you."

Unfortunately, those calls come much too often.

The speaker leaves his family and local responsibilities to travel great distances. He arrives to find he is not only scheduled for the three evening services as agreed, but he is also supposed to:

- Speak to the local Rotary Club ("Please don't mention Jesus because it will offend the Jews, and don't talk about the gifts of the Spirit because the Baptist pastor will be there.").
- Talk to a third-grade class in the local Christian school.
- Pray over the loudspeaker at the Friday afternoon junior high track meet.
- Speak to "the ladies" for three mornings at the church.
- Travel to a neighboring town to have tea with the grandmother of the former pastor who always has tea with the visiting minister.

All in all, he speaks nine times; counsels 14 women who have already been counseled by their husbands, the pastor, and the last five visiting speakers; and spends three nights in the bedroom of the pastor's five-year-old child so the church won't have to foot the motel bill.

If the speaker has *chutzpah*, he reminds someone he had to purchase his own airplane ticket. If he is shy, he may wind up paying for it from his own pocket.

During the services he suffers through the "love offerings," gritting his teeth as the people are told the money will go to the visiting minister. He knows from experience that he will receive only a small amount. The rest will be spent by the local group on "expenses" or will go in the bank in case there's not enough to give to the next visiting speaker.

It's no wonder my friend says he's not going out again. He's tired of being "used."

Because of such insensitive abuses on the part of churches and other Christian organizations, an alarming number of America's finest teachers are doing what

my friend has done. They are saying no to nearly all requests.

Others, especially those who travel full-time, have often been forced to commercialize their ministries. This is even more tragic.

Now we are faced with the specter of the contemporary prophet and his booking agency which handles his schedule and demands a financial guarantee before the speaker will agree to come.

One wonders if Amos would have been effective as he prophesied against those who "lie upon beds of ivory" if he had first signed a contract with Amaziah for 3,000 shekels before coming to speak.

When a minister—even if he is under

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great pressure by the abuses—puts his schedule in the hands of a booking agent, he can no longer be classified as a prophet or teacher. Now he is simply a commodity or, at best, a celebrity.

In order to obtain the services of these celebrities, the purchasers are forced to sign his contract which spells out every detail of things to be done for his comfort and convenience. This often includes first-class air travel, fresh fruit in the motel room, a king-sized bed, and a rental car at his disposal (Buick or better).

The Happy Booker sends his "client" where the calendar demands—with little thought to intense prayer, submission of the schedule to the concerned brothers, or even consideration of God's will. The "client" is booked where he will draw the largest offerings and can sell his books, records, and tapes (and add names to his mailing list for future solicitations). Or, he is booked simply because he has a vacant Thursday night. (After all, it doesn't

make sense to have a potential money-maker sitting idle in a motel room between engagements.)

Instead of being used, the celebrity is using the sponsoring group. One well-known celebrity demands \$6,000 per sermon—and gets it. A famous singing group upped its demands last year to \$10,000 a performance. Other musical groups make even more ridiculous demands, including chauffeur-driven limousines and fresh flowers for the ladies.

It's sad.

How do we achieve balance?

First, we recognize there is a place for the traveling speaker and minstrel. While 2 John warns against hospitality to those who speak simply for monetary gain, 3 John encourages churches and sponsoring groups to be hospitable to those who go from place to place ministering in the name of the Lord.

Second, the sponsoring group should trust God for a "double portion" to honor the visiting minister. If that does not come through the love offering, it should come out of the pockets of the sponsors. Such are the risks of daring to say, "God told me to invite you."

If a love offering is received for the visiting minister, every dime should go to the minister. If the sponsoring group intends to use only a portion of the offering as an honorarium, the visiting minister should be told in advance, and the audience should be told the same thing before they give. The truth sets us free.

Third, the visiting minister should be willing to trust God to supply his need. Thus, if the Lord told him to accept a certain invitation, he should then be willing to cover his own expenses if necessary.

Personally, I feel churches and sponsoring groups should refuse invitations to speakers and musicians who demand a guarantee. It's frightening to think you might pay for—and get—some Samson dressed in an exciting wig, but shorn of the Spirit.

Let's go only where God says go, regardless of tantalizing rewards from other sectors. Let's invite only those God says invite, even if they have never been on national TV. The crowds may be small, but the Holy Spirit has a way of showing up at meetings like that.

What else matters? ⇨