

Publishing Editor's column

I would like this month to offer some thoughts on the extent to which our employment affects our attitude to the things of the Truth. Here are two examples which illustrate one aspect of the matter. Firstly, some years ago the question arose of ecclesias (and Christadelphian organisations) claiming tax back on contributions made to them. Accountants in the Brotherhood, whose job it is to advise people on legal means of tax avoidance, advanced arguments for doing this. Arguments against it were also advanced, notably from an employee of the Inland Revenue, whose job it was to collect as much tax as possible. Secondly, the question of whether or not Christadelphians may join trade unions is one that has exercised the Brotherhood over the years, with arguments being advanced that such should always be avoided and also that there is no harm in it provided one is not an activist. But my recollection is that those arguing against have been in occupations where the issue is not relevant anyway, and those arguing that it is permissible have been in jobs where it is required (a situation now not permitted by law in the UK) and it was a question of either being in a union or being unemployed. I make no comment on the issues involved, except to say that in neither case can both views be right, but suggest that it illustrates how one's attitude to matters concerning which there is no direct Scripture teaching may well be conditioned by one's environment.

Brethren and sisters do, of course, develop skills and knowledge in their jobs, which can be, and often are, used in the service of the Truth. There is a danger here that those with skills which are especially useful find that these skills are called upon to such an extent that they have little time for reading and studying the Scripture for themselves. (It is up to individuals to ensure that they have a proper balance in their lives, of course.) And questions come to mind here also. Is expertise in marketing and sales valuable in devising and producing means of spreading the Truth to others? We certainly need materials that are presentable and attractive, but are techniques designed to get people to buy what they do not really need appropriate in trying to get people to believe teaching that is vital to their future?

Another question is the extent to which knowledge and expertise gained from employment are beneficial in platform speaking. I can recall listening to a speaker seeking to show how the teaching techniques of Jesus were like those he himself had recently learned at teachers' training college, and another basing his exhortation on what he had recently learned at a management course. In neither case did I find the result either very edifying or very interesting, and I felt that the speaker would have done better to have kept to Scripture. On the other hand, a brother in an occupation which existed in Bible times, such as a shepherd or a potter, may well be able to use knowledge and experience from his daily work to illustrate Scripture to the profit of his hearers.

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