

# The Tentmaker's Vision:

*Through all of Church history we have suffered from using methods that functioned well in one era and in one culture but not in another. In adopting methods from another age and culture we show that we need to be more creative, that we lack God given imagination.*

by Berit Helgoy Kloster

Looking towards the future, Christians tend to take the long view and see the great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne, and in front of the Lamb (Rev 7.9).

This was the vision given to God's people in one of history's toughest times of persecution. The light was too dim at that time to see a close up picture clearly, but every generation is obliged to analyze its own time and to evaluate how best to spread the Kingdom of God. The Great Commission demands this. How can we go to all the peoples of the world unless we study the road that will take us there?

Through all of Church history we have suffered from using methods that functioned well in one era and in one culture but not in another. In adopting methods from another age and culture we show that we have little imagination. The Roman Church adopted Caesar's political structure. The Western missionary strategy, as it was hammered out in the early 1800s, was in essence a copy of the British colonial structure. In hindsight we must ask if the mission strategists of the times thought about the effect the close connection with the colonial powers would have when the Gospel was communicated into new cultures.

Today we must admit that many mistakes were made, but that the Lord used the weak vessels in spite of our mistakes. Today with materialism running rampant, and efficiency values governing our lives, we are facing greater challenges than perhaps at any other

time in history. In political terms we have all the visa restrictions and all the ethnic hostilities. History has produced so many scars, that we from the West cannot build friendships with people from other parts of the world unless we first ask for their forgiveness.

Western Christians no longer have the patience required to do missionary work. If quick results cannot be produced, in terms of converted souls, then modern-day missionaries lose the support of their donors. This hurts pioneer work as well as mission training. In addition, the modern-day missionary requires an ever greater support apparatus at home. Today, the "older" missionary churches, must go to the "younger ones" and see how they solve the problems they face in carrying the Gospel to the ends of the earth in a mechanical worldview.

As Christians we must throw out the simple conversion stories. Few if any experience a radical "one night" conversion. Even the apostle Paul had many years of intense study of the Old Testament behind him, and also the meeting with leading Christian personalities, such as Stephen, on his mind when he met the Lord on the Damascus road. Every person is himself or herself involved in the conversion process where God is the instigator. We have to rediscover the old truth that if we are Christians, then Christ lives in us (John 14:23). Yes, if he lives in us, then he does something to the person we invite in, then he speaks when we honestly admit our mistakes. He also speaks when we, in our work, show a high moral standard.

If we believe that Jesus lives in us, then Jesus is today probably on board every airplane, on every train, and in every major city. He is in the tourist crowd, and at the universities and schools. Do we permit him to be seen? An outstanding expert on Islam says that there are three methods for winning the Muslims: friendship, friendship and friendship. Friendship in the name of Jesus is paramount.

To be a tentmaker is to build friendships. The one you meet at the work place is the person you have something in common with. Yet, only the Holy Spirit can convert a working relationship into a constructive Christian teaching situation. Most of Jesus' teaching took place while he and the disciples walked around and met people in different situations. We are so set in our ways, we think Christian leadership training requires a quiet place, paper and pencil and a computer. I believe the Lord is inviting us to a course of study He personally has created.

The Bible talks about being a faithful servant who prepares the food at the right time (Matt. 24:45), but it is Jesus Christ and only Him who can provide nourishment. Here we have to pray for renewed vision and renewed boldness. It probably took three years from the time Nicodemus talked to Jesus during the night until he could be found by Jesus' cross.

We have to build alliances, and dare to ask where the most strategic meeting points are. Which peoples groups communicate best with each other? Who meets people in the various strata of society? Who can get into any coun-

try? Business people and aid personnel can get in almost anywhere. Let us pray specifically for those groups!

If the enlargement of the Kingdom of God is left to tentmaker strategy, some could conclude that it does not work, since tentmakers are exposed to political and economical ups and downs. But what did the Lord mean when he said that he was going to be with us till the end of the age? The tentmaker vision is to encourage every believer to show that Christ lives in him or her. The tentmaker vision is to carry those in prayer, who are at the front lines where Christians meet unevangelized cultures. It is to pray so that we may be able to see our every day lives with God's eyes.

The tentmaker vision in the name of Jesus, and with his love, is to encourage each other, so that we may "know the hope to which he has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe." (Eph 1:18-20).

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