

THE STEWARDSHIP PAPERS

A Lifetime Job

Living in this world is a lot like working at a particular job...or, perhaps, for a particular company. There are groups within the company that work closely with one another much like countries in the world, each with its own set of “buzz” words, which comprise a way of communicating that sounds like a foreign language to the uninitiated. The hierarchies of command exist everywhere, and these, along with power plays, intrigue and suspense rival some of the best spy novels produced.

When a person leaves a company, especially if that person has worked there for most of his or her adult life, it is very much like dying. Those that are left behind insist that they will keep in touch, but usually that doesn't happen. Intentions are well meant, but often, memory of the departed one eventually fades, while those people who are left behind, on the job, continue to struggle with the normal day-to-day crises. It's interesting to note that the one who has “gone on” discovers that life no longer revolves around getting up in the morning, going to work, and coming home...that time takes on a different meaning, and that a person's sphere of existence can become much broader with the right outlook. In short, there is Life after work...

Unfortunately, there are people within the companies of this world whose work ethics are not always above board...or that use what a well-meaning scientist

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has discovered to, perhaps, hurt others in order to make a profit...but, again, that's not so different from the things that people do in the world-at-large.

This whole topic came up because a good friend and colleague has been questioning a particular aspect of the ethics of her job. In particular, if she produces a product, believing that it will be used for the protection of life, and then, someone else comes along and distorts its use...perhaps not to cause death, but at least to accomplish something which offends her sense of moral rightness...what should be her reaction? Basically, my friend was asking two general questions:

- (1) Is the person who produces a product responsible for the use to which this product may eventually be put?...and
- (2) should the producer quit his or her job if the use of a product is immorally distorted?

My friend's questions reminded me that Jesus took on a job when he came into this world. Now, the world probably wasn't the most ethical place at the time...but he grew up and learned about this "company" of people. He eventually became a carpenter, by the way (something which often is forgotten), and perhaps made a chair or two in order to ease the tired bodies of the hard working people of that time. It's even possible that one of those chairs was used by the recipient, in

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frustration, to hit a neighbor on the head. Should Jesus be blamed for the use to which this chair may have been put? (In other words, perhaps, at some point, we need to stop passing the blame on to others for the bad things which are done and start taking responsibility for our own actions.) On the other hand, the very fact that my friend was concerned about the unintentional complicity in the misuse of a product mean that she was ready to accept responsibility for the “sins” of others...a very Jesus-like thing to do.

Perhaps the easiest thing to do in a situation like this is to quit one’s job and find some really nice company with exceedingly moral people to work with. On the other hand, Jesus went among those people whose moral ethics were judged by their contemporaries to be pretty bad. However, whether we are among those who believe as we do or are among those who have a morality which is strange to us, we are called upon to “witness” in our jobs, just as Jesus witnessed to the world. That is, we are called upon to be the best person that we can be, doing our jobs as best we can, caring about people, and trusting in God.

But isn’t it nice to know that if we’ve had a particularly difficult lifetime job, that retirement is going to be heavenly?

(May 9, 1994)