

Warning! Beware of 'Christian' Con-Artists

A big percentage of ministry funds from the U.S. go down the drain because of corruption. Please use discernment when you give.

They called K.A. Paul “the Billy Graham of India.” During his heyday in the 1990s, some Christian leaders in the United States gave big donations to the evangelist, assuming he was using the money to feed thousands of orphans and widows.

As it turned out, most of the funds Paul raised were used to buy a huge 747 outfitted with a second-floor cabin that contained his own bed, complete with red and gold lamé bedspread. Paul flew the oversized aircraft to Third World nations where he grabbed as much publicity as possible by staging photo ops with politicians. He tried to convince them that his Houston-based organization, Gospel to the Unreached Millions, was alleviating world poverty.

In actuality, Paul was stealing from Christians to feed his monstrous ego.

When I visited India last week, I learned that Paul was arrested in May and is currently in jail in Andhra Pradesh. Authorities have charged that he hired a man to kill his own brother because the two were having a dispute over ministry properties. Now, this man who claimed to be a counselor to presidents and prime ministers has been placed in a mental hospital while he awaits trial.

How do people who claim to be doing God’s work turn out to be selfish charlatans?

It shouldn’t surprise us. Jesus warned of wolves in sheep’s clothing, and one of His own disciples pilfered the money box

and betrayed Him. Judas' kiss-and-then-stab-in-the-back betrayal was rooted in his love for money and his corrupt character (see John 12:6, Matt. 26:14-16).

The Judas spirit is still working today. Missiologists say an embarrassing percentage of Christian donations from the United States go down the drain because of religious corruption overseas. That's not to say we don't have charlatans in this country, but American shysters are a bit more obvious because of the glare of media scrutiny.

Because I fund foreign mission projects, I've developed some simple guidelines about money and missions work. If you are considering supporting or partnering with a ministry overseas, don't be duped. Ask these questions:

1. Do you really know the person you are working with? God's kingdom is built on relationships of love and trust, and these bonds take time to develop. Don't partner with people hastily. One email from an evangelist in Pakistan is not enough to build a partnership. Wisdom is not naive. Take time and be prayerful.

2. Do your overseas contacts have local accountability? Never work with lone rangers. If you are carrying out a project with a church leader overseas, insist that he or she have a board of advisers who can monitor all accounting. Ask for regular reports and assign local team members to verify accuracy.

3. Do your ministry partners have integrity? Does the person you are working with fear God? Does he or she have a healthy marriage and family life? Do they walk in sexual purity? Do they tell the truth? Ask for references and do your homework before you enter into any official ministry partnership. Sometimes money sent to build a church or orphanage or to run a feeding program can end up lining someone's pockets. Track all funds carefully.

4. Does the person you are working with have a humble

attitude? Wherever pride is on display, you can be sure corruption lurks under the surface. Don't work with people who demand royal treatment or who treat their workers like slaves. Insecure leaders with untamed egos will eventually fall, and they will drag your investment and their ministry down with them.

5. Do you discern any dishonesty? I remember when a representative from K.A. Paul's ministry tried to convince *Charisma* to do a story on the evangelist a few years ago. I didn't know all the facts, but I had a really bad feeling in my gut. We didn't do the story. Learn to develop discernment. One warning from the Holy Spirit can avert a financial disaster.

Missions work can be a deeply fulfilling experience when you work with the right people. My life is richer because of the wonderful men and women I am blessed to know in countries such as Uganda, Guatemala, India, Peru, Bolivia and Nigeria. Many of them are role models in my life now because of their impeccable character. Ask the Lord to connect you with leaders overseas who have humility, compassion and integrity, and trust Him to help you avoid religious traitors.

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