

Holy Ghost Writer

I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. – Romans 16.22

G. P. Sawant spent twenty years reading other people's mail. He couldn't help it: he wrote the letters. Mr. Sawant runs a stall across from the post office in Mumbai, India. For a fee, he takes dictation from the illiterate so they can correspond with family in their villages. Most missives contain rupees earned in the big city and remitted to care for the folks back home. Cell phones and rising education rates have about closed him down, but not before the business sent all four of his children (a banker, an engineer, a computer programmer and a business consultant) through private school.

Mr. Sawant took liberties with his craft: he cropped rambling speeches into pithy paragraphs. Mr. Sawant observed the code of his profession: he refused to write love-letters or help to con anyone, and would not reveal a letter's contents to any outside party. Mr. Sawant honored the ministry of his calling: he did not charge prostitutes, battered village girls who wrote lies to their parents about how they earned the generous dollops of cash they sent home. Part artist, part entrepreneur, part pastor, the amanuensis plied his humble trade for two decades under a tree, an awning shielding him from flocks of incontinent pigeons.

We know that Paul dictated his epistles because once the scribe, perhaps on the sly, slipped his own name into the sentences of sacred scripture. "I, Tertius" – perhaps he feared the apostle would forget him; in the long roster of greetings he'd shown no sign of remembering his secretary. The name never appears elsewhere. Luke seems not to have known – or at least noticed – him. No official greetings rank him with Silvanus and Timothy as apostolic assistants; just the guy who did the writing; just the Dictaphone of divine revelation.

Yet Tertius may be the ideal model for ministry – a mouthpiece who passes along the life-giving word of God. It is an art – to seek the loveliest way to tell the honest truth. It is a profession – to abide by the calling to speak God's truths whether we like them or not. It is a ministry – to remember that these words work from Person to person and never forget that people, not paper, matter most.

Thankfully, Paul pre-dated text-messaging. "God czs all things 2 work 2gether 4 good 2 those who luv God" somehow just doesn't have the right ring and besides, Tertius would have missed his ministry opportunity. And we would miss the lesson of faithful transcription and incarnation of God's love letter to humanity.

Take A Letter,
Doug