

## Development of a Christian Life Style

Since the beginning of the energy crisis, Canadian citizens have been warned to waste less and adopt a more austere lifestyle. Government leaders are exhorting their people about their wasteful practices. They are told that their homes are kept warmer than needed, and are criticized for the excessive use of luxury goods at the expense of the dwindling and costly natural resources.

A growing number of people are taking a closer look at our world's needs and are finding appalling the increasing disparity between the rich and the poor nations, the overwhelming suffering of multitudes of fellow human beings. They are asking themselves: What is the government doing to help underdeveloped nations? Is foreign aid really effective? Do Christians have a personal responsibility beyond supporting relief agencies like the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee?

Do we need to develop a Christian lifestyle? What is such a lifestyle? Our move to the Philippines has forced us to reflect on these questions. They are no longer academic. Our style of living has drastically changed. We are trying to cope with daily brownouts. Most evenings we work with oil lamps and two twelve volt fluorescent lights hooked up to a car battery. We have run out of water numerous times, and we can add a list of other inconveniences. Our neighbours around our house are desperately poor. Their living conditions are shocking to our Western sensitivities. In the Philippines many children are malnourished. Some suffer brain damage or become blind because of inadequate protein in their first five years of life. While malnutrition haunts its many victims, another segment of mankind lives in incredible affluence.

What responsibility do we have over against the poor? Are we sensitive enough to the plight of the millions who have neither the strength nor the knowhow to even plead for their cause? A new evangelical phenomenon in the U.S.A. is the "Christian supper club." "Heralds" in Minneapolis was purchased for over \$300,000. This club has a huge stage, including a \$20,000 lighting system. The cover charge is \$3.00 with meals running \$4.00 to \$10.00. There seems to be an "eat, drink and evangelize" explosion. Is this a Christian lifestyle?

Do we still hear the cry of anguish?

Are our eyes open for the plight of our contemporaries? There are no easy and simple solutions to today's problems. Yet we must look for some means to show that we care as Christians. Where do we begin? I am convinced that we should try to develop again a distinct Christian lifestyle. In the 16th century there was a lifestyle carried on by Reformed Christians. It was markedly different from the Renaissance style of life.

As a whole our world no longer listens to the Gospel. The countries which are supposed to possess a Christian civilization are rapidly becoming secularized. And in Asia the gospel has not made much of an impact as yet. You may say: Isn't preaching enough? Yes, we must be totally committed to proclaiming the fullness and the richness of the

Word of God. But we are also to act as a leaven and a light in this world and not capitulate by it. "To speak quite frankly," writes Jacques Ellul, "without beating about the bush, a doctrine only has power (apart from that which God gives it) to the extent in which it creates a style of life, to the extent in which it is adopted, believed, and accepted by men who have a style of life which is in harmony with it. "And the participants in the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization made this solemn pledge: "Those of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simple lifestyle."

What should a Christian lifestyle include? Let me venture a few suggestions for discussion. It should include an intimate personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, being faithful to wife and children, and having a position on social and economic conditions.

We should return to the faith and practice of our spiritual forbearers of Reformation times. Christianity and simplicity belong together. We are stewards of God's world as well as pilgrims on the way to the New Jerusalem. How we live as pilgrims has meaning for eternity. Jesus said: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes where thieves do not break and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 7:19-21).

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