

Ten Days for World Development Starts with Thinking of Self Development

In the last couple of years a growing simple living movement has emerged in North America. We read in the newspapers of social gatherings where the refreshment consists of soup! Smart households are learning to do without meat to get in on the latest fad: vegetarianism. Young families prefer to buy a renovated home in the city core. Buses are more popular than driving. There are scores of executives and academics who have moved out of the city altogether, living now on farms at the fringe of the urban areas and commuting each day. Yes, the simple life, back to nature and the good earth, has recaptured the imagination of Canadians, or of some of us at least. Of course one might question whether this discovery of a new aesthetic of simplicity is an advance towards a more egalitarian world or merely another cop-out on the part of the (relatively) wealthy. One might question

indeed!

There is another side to the coin. Some of us are not so fortunate that we can make choices about where we will live or work, or what we would like to eat. The economic crunch is on and it's deadly serious. We simply have had to cut back on recreation, food, clothes. So, we make the best of a bad situation and discover alternatives. Cutting back on meat, eating more beans, turns out to be an improvement. Less potato chips and coke, we find, leaves us healthier! Walking, bicycling, may be necessary, but are also enjoyable.

Just the same, making the best of a bad situation doesn't really come to terms with global trends or even take the question of life-style very seriously. Even that finely motivated admonition to eat less so those who are starving may live, deserves a critique. After

all, I can remember being told as a child when I wouldn't finish my dinner, "Remember the poor people in Africa." In fact that never did work very well; we used to reply, "Well, send it to them then." Even as kids we found the connection naive. How could my leftovers that night really help or hurt the starving masses?

What contribution then can a simplified lifestyle make to a renewed and reinvigorated life for myself, my sisters and my brothers throughout the world?

The response to such a question depends very directly on how seriously one takes life, *all life*: my own, that of others, even that environment for life in which we have been enfolded by the gift of creation.

A few years ago a book sponsored by the Club of Rome was published: *Limits to Growth*. It caused quite a stir. After an examination of five problem issues (food, nonrenewable resources, pollution, population and industrial production), they concluded that by the year 2000 we would be deep into a monumental world crisis which would cause serious world famine or widespread disease and death. According to their projections even the most ideal cooperative action would only buffer, not eliminate, the crisis. Despite all the arguing over their predictions, we who constitute the first-class passengers on spaceship earth are consuming and destroying far beyond what the human family or even the physical planet can sustain. The best things in life are *not* free; for every irresponsible attack on our environment there is a price to pay. Given the disparities which exist today, and the cycles of life, it will likely be our fellow citizens in other lands, and our children, who will pay the price. It will be tragically true that the sins of the parents are visited upon their children.

Little need be said at this point about the disparities between the rich and the poor, about the exploitation of the Third World countries by our multinational corporations, backed up by self-protecting governmental policies. The call for fairer trade policies and for a more reasonable program of aid has gone out more than a decade ago and is still largely unheeded. The price we all pay, even now, is horrendous. One thinks of the two million dead because of a U.S. policy to retain a foothold in mineral-rich South-East Asia, not to mention another 3½ million maimed or wounded. We still face the enormous spectre of yearly starvation tolls in Bangladesh, India and the Sahel region of Africa. The toll taken also reaches deep into our own nation. Disparities between the rich and the poor here daily grow larger; whole regions (the Atlantic provinces) and peoples (the Native Peoples) have been reduced to circumstances clearly paralleling the Third World.

We struggle with these hard questions, ponder the sad state of the universe, and wonder what we, or even God, could do to right things. Certainly the nations of the Third World need to rebuild their ruined economies (and shattered cultures) with tools appropriate to their aspirations, their resources and their traditions. In Canada too there is much to be done to regulate our relationship with these lands, and to rediscover for ourselves a sane society. We need fair trade, generous aid, restraints on corporate power, an end to manipulation through advertising, and a responsible public life where family is strong and children, the elderly, the handicapped, the immigrant, have some place of honour.



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