

## Commitment to a Wartime Lifestyle

—by Ralph Winter

**T**he Queen Mary, lying in repose in the harbor at Long Beach, California, is a fascinating museum of the past. Used both as a luxury liner in peacetime and a troop transport during the Second World War, its present status as a museum the length of three football fields affords a stunning contrast between the lifestyles appropriate in peace and war. On one side of a partition you see the dining room reconstructed to depict the peacetime table setting that was appropriate to the wealthy patrons of high culture for whom a dazzling array of knives and forks and spoons held no mysteries. On the other side of the partition the evidences of wartime austerities are in sharp contrast. One metal tray with indentations replaces fifteen plates and saucers. Bunks, not just double but eight tiers high, explain why the peacetime complement of 3000 gave way to 15,000 people on board in wartime. How repugnant to the peacetime masters this transformation must have been! To do it took a national emergency, of course. The survival of a nation depended upon it. The essence of the Great Commission today is that the survival of many millions of people depends on its fulfillment.

But obedience to the Great Commission has more consistently been poi-

soned by affluence than by anything else. The antidote for affluence is reconsecration. Consecration is by definition the "setting apart of things for a holy use." Affluence did not keep Borden of Yale from giving his life in Egypt. Affluence didn't stop Francis of Assisi from moving against the tide of his time.

Curiously enough, while the Protestant tradition has no significant counterpart to the Catholic orders within its U.S. base (unless we think of the more

recent campus evangelistic organizations such as Inter-Varsity, Campus Crusade, and Navigators) nevertheless the entire Protestant missionary tradition has always stressed a practical measure of austerity and simplicity as well as a

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parity of level of consumption within its missionary ranks. Widespread reconsecration leading to a reformed lifestyle with wartime priorities is not likely to be successful (even in an age of increasing awareness of the lifestyle issue itself) unless Protestantism can develop patterns of consecration among the people back home that are comparable to what has characterized the Protestant missionary movement for nearly two hundred years.

There will only be a way if there is a will. But we will find there is no will

- so long as the Great Commission is

thought impossible to fulfill;

- so long as it is thought that the problems of the world are hopeless or that, conversely, they can be solved merely by politics or technology;
- so long as our home problems loom larger to us than anyone else's;
- so long as people enamored of Eastern culture do not understand that Chinese and Muslims can and must as easily become evangelical Christians without abandoning their cultural systems as did the Greeks in Paul's day;
- so long as modern believers, like the ancient Hebrews, get to thinking that God's sole concern is the blessing of our nation;
- so long as well paid evangelicals, both pastors and lay people, consider their money a gift from God to spend on themselves rather than a responsibility from God to fight economic injustice and help others in spiritual and economic need;
- so long as we do not understand that he who would seek to save his life shall lose it.

America today is a save-yourself society if there ever was one. But does it really work? The underdeveloped societies suffer from one set of diseases: tuberculosis,

malnutrition, pneumonia, parasites, typhoid, cholera, typhus, etc. Affluent America has virtually invented a whole new set of diseases: obesity, arteriosclerosis, heart disease, strokes, lung cancer, venereal disease, cirrhosis of the liver, drug addiction, alcoholism, divorce, battered children, suicide, murder. Take your choice. Labor saving machines have turned out to be body

killing devices. Our affluence has allowed both mobility and isolation of the nuclear family and as a result our divorce courts, our prisons and our mental institutions are flooded. In saving ourselves we have nearly lost ourselves.

*How hard have we tried to save others?*

Consider the fact that the U.S. evangelical slogan "Pray, give or go" allows people merely to pray, if that is their choice! By contrast the Friends Missionary Prayer Band of South India numbers 8000 people in their prayer bands and supports 80 full-time missionaries in North India. If my denomination (with its unbelievably greater wealth per person) were to do that well, we would not be sending 500 missionaries, but 26,000. In spite of their true poverty, those poor people in South India are sending 50 times as many cross-cultural missionaries as we are! This fact reminds me of the title of a book, *The Poor Pay More*.

They may very well pay more for the things they buy, but they are apparently willing to pay more for the things they believe. No wonder the lukewarm non-sacrificing believer is a stench in the nostrils of God. Luis Palau (1977) speaks of "unyielding mediocrity" in America today. When will we recognize the fact

that the wrath of God spoken of in the Bible is far less directed at those who sit in darkness than against those who refuse to share what they have?

*How hard have we tried to save others?*

The nearly two billion dollars American evangelicals give per year to mission agencies is one fourth of what they spend on weight-loss programs. A person must overeat by at least two dollars

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worth of food per month to maintain one excess pound of flesh. Yet two dollars per month is more than what 90% of all Christians in America give to missions. If the average mission supporter is only five pounds overweight, it means he spends (to his own hurt) at least five times as much as he gives for missions. If he were to choose simple food (as well as not overeat)

he could give ten times as much as he does to mission and not modify his standard of living in any other way!

Where does this line of reasoning lead? It means that the overall lifestyle to which Americans have acquiesced has led us to a place where we are hardening our hearts and our arteries simultaneously. Is our nation not described by Isaiah?

My people are like the dead branches of a tree... a foolish nation, a witless, stupid people... The only language they can understand is punishment. So God will send against them foreigners who speak strange gibberish! Only then will they listen to Him! They could have rest in their own land if they would obey Him, if they were kind and good (Isa. 27:11; 28:11, 12).

Or, hear Ezekiel:

They come as though they are sincere and sit before you listening. But they have no intention of doing what I tell them to; they talk very sweetly about loving the Lord, but with their hearts they are loving their money... My sheep wandered through the mountains and hills and over the face of the earth, and there was no one to search for them or care about them... As I live, says the Lord God... you

were no real shepherds at all, for you didn't search for them (my flock). You fed yourselves and let them starve... Therefore, the Lord God says: I will surely judge between these fat shepherds and their scrawny sheep... and I will notice which is plump and which is thin, and why! (Eze. 33:31; 34:6; 34:8,20, 22b).

We must learn that Jesus meant it when He said, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." I believe that God cannot expect less from us as our Christian duty to save other nations than our own nation in wartime conventionally requires of us in order to save our own nation. This means

that we must be willing to adopt a wartime lifestyle if we are to play fair with the clear intent of scripture that the poor of this earth, the people who sit in darkness, shall see a great light. Otherwise, again Isaiah, "I faint when I hear what God is planning" (Isa. 21:3).

The essential tactic to adopting a wartime lifestyle is to build on pioneer mission perspective and to do so by a very simple and dramatic method. Those who are awakened from the grogginess and stupor of our times can, of course, go as missionaries. But they can also *stay home and deliberately and decisively adopt a missionary support level as their standard of living and their basis of lifestyle, regardless of their income.* This will free up an unbelievable amount of money—so much in fact that if a million average Presbyterian households were to live within the average Presbyterian minister's salary, it would release at least two billion dollars a year. That happens to be only one-seventh of the amount Ameri-

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cans spend on tobacco. But what a mighty gift to the nations if carefully spent on pioneer missions!

In order to help families shift to a wartime lifestyle, two organizations are proposing a six-step plan that will lead gradually (with both education and coaching) to the adoption by lay people the salary scale of an existing mission agency. The remainder of their income, at their own discretion at every point, being dedicated to what they believe to be the highest mission priority. The United Presbyterian Order for World Evangelization is a denominational sister of the general Order for World Evangelization. The twofold purpose of each of these organizations is 1) to imbue individuals and families with a concern for reaching the Unreached Peoples and 2) to assist them in practical ways to live successfully within the maximum limits of expenditure as defined by an agreed upon existing mission structure.

Even missionary families need help in staying within their income limitations, but ironically, no more so than people with twice their income. These organizations believe that families can be healthier and happier by identifying

themselves with the same discipline with which missionary families are coping. For two hundred years it has been the undeviating pattern of all Protestant missionary agencies to establish a single standard for all their overseas personnel, adjusted of course to known costs of living and for various kinds of special circumstances. Some boards extend this system to their home office staff. No agency (until now) has gone the one logical step further—namely, to offer to the donors themselves this unique and long tested system. In view of the widespread concern of our time for a simple lifestyle, it would seem that this is an idea whose time has come.

We have Weight Watcher Clinics all over the country. We have Total Woman Clinics. Why not mission-focused Family Lifestyle Clinics? How much more significant these clinics will be with ends as noble as the Great Commission!

To reconsecrate ourselves to a wartime lifestyle will involve a mammoth upheaval for a significant minority. It will not go uncontested—any more than did the stern warnings of Isaiah and Ezekiel. But we do not need to defend our campaign. It is not ours.

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