

Reconsecration

To a Wartime, Not a Peacetime, Lifestyle

Ralph D. Winter

Not since World War II has America seen all out mobilization of the general population to support the cause of attaining victory over what was almost universally acknowledged to be a great evil. Ralph Winter recalls his experience as one who lived through World War II. He envisions what it might be like if Christians took the Great Commission just as seriously—as a prolonged spiritual war—as many people did during that great war.

The 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 peace-time 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 poisoned 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 parity of level of consumption



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Pasadena, CA. After serving ten years as a missionary among Mayan Indians in the highlands of Guatemala, he was called to be a Professor of Missions at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. Ten years later, he and his late wife, Roberta, founded the mission society called the Frontier Mission Fellowship. This in turn birthed the U.S. Center for World Mission and the William Carey International University, both of which serve those working at the frontiers of mission.

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 anyone thinks 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 people, consider their money a gift from God to spend however they wish on themselves rather than a responsibility from God to 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 8,000 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) coined the phrase "studied mediocrity" in reference to 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 it is 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 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 TLB).

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!" (Ezek 34:8,20,22 TLB).

We must learn that Jesus meant it when He said, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 12:48). I believe that *God cannot expect less from us as our Christian duty to save other nations than our own nation has required of us in times of war 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 (Isa 9:2).

The essential tactic to adopt a wartime lifestyle is to build on pioneer mission perspective and to do so by a very simple and dramatic method. Some who are awakened from the grogginess and stupor of our times can, of course, go as missionaries. But others can *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 create at least two billion dollars a year. But what a mighty gift to the nations if carefully spent on developmental missions!

The Presbyterian Order for World Evangelization and its denominational sister the Order for World Evangelization have a twofold purpose: 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.

In order to help families shift to a wartime lifestyle, the two organizations once proposed a six-step plan. Through education and coaching they led many to live according to the salary provisions of an existing mission agency. The remainder of their income, at their own discretion at every point, was dedicated to what they believed to be the highest mission priority.

Even missionary families need help in staying within their income limitations, but ironically, so do people with twice their income. These two organizations believe that families can be healthier and more fulfilled by identifying themselves with the same discipline with which missionary families are coping. For 200 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 encourage their donors to adopt 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.

To reconsecrate ourselves to a wartime lifestyle 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. 🌱