

Dear All,

Living more simply

I focussed last month on the environment and on some simple ideas – recycling, sustainable energy sources – to help us leave the planet as a viable organism for future generations.

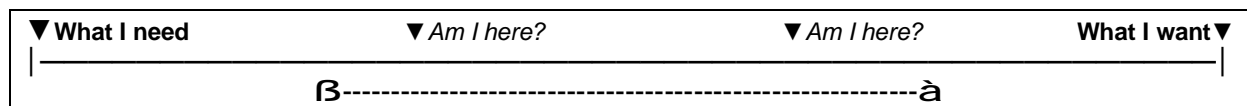
This time I'm talking about how as Christians we might work towards and argue for a simpler lifestyle. Of course, this kind of thinking is rather 'closer to home', and we may find it challenging, threatening even.

I remember being moved, in the 80s, by Ronald Sider's books, particularly Living More Simply and Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger. (They're still available, I see.) And then there was always (remember it?) Small is Beautiful. But it's one thing to read such books, and another to take action.

Clearly the international community needs to address issues of growing consumption by developing countries as they (understandably) try to climb on a bandwagon which we in the West have been advocating for decades. But what can *we* do, as *individuals*, here and now?

Radical change on our part towards consuming less would not only help the planet, but would be a major statement of intention on the part of the Christian community. And it need not be a matter of grim-faced sacrifice which limits our options and takes the joy out of life.

Let's draw a distinction. As a human being, what do I *need*? And what do I *want*? We could see this as a spectrum, with *need* and *want* as the two poles of it, thus:



I admit I'm never going to find it easy to make do with only what I absolutely *need* as an organism to survive. And, anyway, I don't think we're talking about that, though it would be an amazing show of solidarity with those who have no choice but to subsist. We're talking, really, about moving left along the scale: about keeping an eye on our patterns of consumption, and thinking carefully about the effects of our living on the planet, and, therefore, on the lives of others in our global village. Where could I cut back, and not really notice the difference? What over-consumption on my part happens simply out of thoughtlessness or lack of care?

It's OK to value the simplicity of Shaker chairs in a catalogue, but we tend to ignore the drive to simple living out of which those pieces of furniture, works of art even, arise. In Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, an iconic book if there ever was one, Robert Persig advocates a kind of care and attention which places us in greater contact with whatever we are doing, so that even a simple act (say, changing a bike tyre) becomes a moment of attentiveness and connection with the world. Perhaps that's what we need more of: an attentiveness to our circumstances and to the burdens we place on Earth, our home.

On the church notice-board over at the Wells, there's a 'rap' version of the 10 Commandments, done by the young people. How's this for number 10?

*"Be satisfied; do not envy:
Do not wish or want a lot –
be content with what you've got!"*

We might not be alone in wanting to rein in our consumption a bit. As a community of concerned, joyful people, we could support each other in happily using and wanting less. Any feedback, anyone? Why not let's start a discussion here?

Best wishes,

Andrew