

## \* \* THOUGHTS ON "PLAIN LIVING"

What are the reasons for "zurueck-hayvas"? Is there not more sentimentality involved than scriptural reasons? I have been asked to put down some points concerning simple living. Let it be clearly understood that living simply will not save our souls, nor make us more righteous. It is merely a small sacrifice which, when done for Christ, draws us closer to Him, further from the world, and helps us realize we are but pilgrims and strangers here on earth, seeking a better home.

- We are not to be conformed to this world. Romans 2:2 "Stellet euch nicht dieser Welt gleich." This world is a mindset just as much or more than material possessions. "Worldly" is anything carnal, whether the carnality is clothed with tattoos and earrings, or with a plain suit and a black hat.

- Our everyday actions and way of living are not separate from our spiritual life. We cannot put our spiritual life and convictions in one drawer, and our way of living in another drawer, and say they are two separate drawers. Our way of life is: a) a testimony to what is living in our heart, and b) a hell or hindrance to the growth and maturity of our spirituality.

- If we live so that it makes sense to the world, we are with the world. I Cor. 1:27 "Sondern was töricht ist vor der Welt, das hat Gott erwählt, daß er die Weisen zu Schanden mache; und was schwach ist vor der Welt, das hat Gott erwählt, daß er zu Schanden mache, was stark ist.

- The Christian's life is one of self-sacrifice. This has to be taught; it will not come naturally. A child who learns that he may not have everything (even if the peers of his church have it) will have a much easier time of it later, than one who grows up knowing his parents have pretty much everything the church allows. Children know this, however much adults want to think they don't. When parents confront their teenagers with pleas to "tone down", or "surely that isn't necessary", which teenager is more likely to respond positively: the one who knows his parents are "caught up with the Joneses", or the one who knows since childhood his parents do not have all the material possessions the church would tolerate?

- The more our life is one of ease and comfort, the more apt we are to become lukewarm. God surely does not want us to purposely inflict bodily pain, torture, or discomfort on ourselves just so that we don't forget Him. No; however, He created man to worship Him. This is mankind's ultimate purpose - to bring honour and glory to our Creator.

How pleasing it must be to Him, then, if He sees His children voluntarily refraining from earthly pleasures simply to be able to better serve Him. If I could have electricity, hot water plumbing, thermostat-controlled environment, plush carpeting, soft background music, but I voluntarily do not have these things simply because of the long-term effects of luxuriating in such an environment, am I not trying to keep self down and "taking up my cross" for His sake? Or for who else am I doing it? Obviously not for my own sake, hardly for the sake of my neighbours, but for His sake. I realize one can refrain from these things in a Pharisaic way, so that it is for one's own self-gratification, but should this stop me from being non-conformed - simply because I may become self-righteous?

- There is something about a slow-paced life that promotes spiritual growth. The faster-paced our life, the harder it is to have a meaningful, devotional, prayer. A farmer sitting behind a plodding team of horses, row after row, letting the horses rest every once in a while, is much more apt to be in a meditative frame of mind than the one who is bouncing, on the seat of a 90 h.p. roaring tractor. The farmer with the horses takes a break over lunch so the horses can rest and eat, and stops at night when the sun sets. He stables the horses for the night, pats them, and retires with a satisfied feeling of working in harmony with God and nature. He knows the field isn't done, but he'll do what he can tomorrow. The farmer on the tractor barely has time to stop for lunch, besides he isn't really that hungry, and the noise and fumes are giving him a slight headache. As the sun sets, he turns on the lights and the engine keeps throbbing on into the night. Finally, late at night, the field is done, and he retires, exultant with the completion of his work. Which of the two farmers' minds is more receptive to the Spirit's still small voice and meditates thereon?

- Years ago, walking to church on Sunday was preferred as opposed to hitching up the horse, but of course this has changed over the years. It was considered sacrilegious to trot past a church house on Sunday; one would slow the horse to a walk. A funeral procession used to travel at the speed of a horse's walk, rather than at a trot. As of today, these things have changed, possibly for mostly practical reasons. My question: do speed and sobriety go hand in hand well? Do we want our youth drag-racing on the way to church? If no, why not? Do we want our tractors, roaring at top speed along the road or along the bush lane? If no, why not? It seems to me, that a humble, contrite spirit is not completely compatible with the thrill one feels when pushing down the accelerator and feeling the many horsepower respond. The one is a feeling of power and control in one's own hands, the other is a feeling of contented submission to higher power and control. When Jacob returned with his flocks and family, he told Esau, "I will lead on softly" "Ich will gemächlich hintennach treiben." Gen. 33:14

- It is very difficult to feel true thankfulness for something if we've never had to do without it. I don't think God wants us to nearly starve ourselves so that we are more thankful for food, or clothes and bed ourselves scantily so that we can be more thankful for warm clothes and bedding. However, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, what sin had the rich man committed so that he ended up in hell?? We read he "fared sumptuously every day". Luke 16:19 A child who can pick out the foods he likes and turn up his nose at "common" food, who is surrounded with expensive toys, who can travel many miles in a rainstorm in a cozy car and thus never even feel a raindrop, and always wears fashionable clothing, is severely handicapped in feeling genuine thankfulness. A child who eats a balanced diet and occasionally gets a special "treat", who has simple, everyday toys, who may get wet and uncomfortable splashing his way through a rainstorm crouched below a dripping umbrella, and wears plain but practical clothing, is much more apt to mature into a thankful adult. He feels genuine joy and gratitude when given something "special". He is much more receptive to suggestions of refraining from a new fad. In short, he is more contented than the one who has many material possessions. Just so with adults.

- It is a common argument that works will not save us - it is faith. Therefore, it is possible to allow more materialism, but stress the "faith" Part - teaching our children Bible verses, colouring our language with scriptural jargon, in short, "baptising" every event with scripture. We want to tell everybody the "good news" and evangelize quite vocally. What a glorious, free life the Christian has! "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." Matt. 7:20. What is the fruit? The fruit of a plant holds the seeds which have power to reproduce. The plant passes on its characteristics to the next plant through its fruit. Jesus did not say, "By their

leaves ye shall know them." Leaves are needed to produce fruit; they gather the essentials needed to produce fruit, but they do not pass on the germ of life. Compare this with passing on the faith to the next generations. Where is the germ of life? In the commotion of spiritual activities and talk, or in the quiet, but deeply-grounded convictions of a simple lifestyle? - We may not all agree exactly what is "zurueck-havich" and what isn't. However, one can soon feel if a person's desire and way of thinking is geared toward progressivism, or if he understands and respects another's interpretations of a certain refrainment simply because he understands the principle of refraining. Is the Lord's visible church on earth not a body of humans, prone to error, but being a help one to another, one being strong where the other is weak, and having a common vision? Is our common vision refraining for Christ's sake, or is it a hypocritical vision of being plain because we are several steps behind society, yet at the same time accepting readily any new progressive idea because it makes economic sense? Should the dollar be the church's deciding factor whether some new materialism is acceptable?

- The more mechanized we become, the less actual physical labour we do. Hard, physical labour is healthy for the normal teenager. If a teenager works hard physically six days a week, he is rarely tempted to party several nights a week, or go skating, etc. It is easier to keep the Sabbath a day of rest if one has worked hard physically during the week.

- Song #115 in Lieder Sammlung is a masterpiece of expressing desire to live more "gebeugt". Somehow, "Ach, herunter, o mein Herze! In dem Staub und Asche hin; Ach, was ist doch aller Schmerze, Wenn ich recht gebeuget bin! Alles Leiden bringet Freuden, Wenn ich nur die Sünd kann meiden;" has more meaning (Kraft) when sung by the light of a flickering lamp and a teakettle singing on a woodstove in the background, then sung in an upholstered easy-chair by the light of electric lights and electrical appliances humming in the background.

- Our Anabaptist forefathers left us a rich heritage of simplicity, frugality, and brotherhood. A simple, trusting faith is acceptable to God. It is ironic, but it seems the more modern and easier our life becomes, the more complex it becomes. The more "unsimple" our daily life becomes, the more difficult it is to keep a simple faith. Living frugally is not easily done in an environment of high living. Not everyone agrees exactly on what high living consists of. However, the more conveniences, appliances, and gadgets we are surrounded with, the more of a struggle we will have to refrain from high living, much less pass on the principle of frugality to the next generation. A slow-paced life, working with horses, etc., encourages community brotherhood. People need and depend on their neighbours to get their harvest in and likewise help their neighbours get their work done. It is barely possible to put into words the intangible ties that are bonded in a community when every age group is included and feels needed in the circle of workers. Bonds between father and son have a better chance to grow as they pitch sheaves side by side, clean out the barn forkful by forkful, than when father and son each have a tractor and rarely have time to speak as they pass each other. Neighbourhood men are more apt to visit as they wait on the next horse-drawn wagon while threshing, than each man in his own field on his own tractor. Grandparents can feel included and needed longer, and the next generations can benefit from their advice and experience. The Anabaptists learned the virtues of simplicity, frugality, and brotherhood during severe persecution. Modernism is one of the greatest threats to these central themes of Christ's church on earth.

-Written by one who is also caught in the materialistic web, but yearns to live more simply for His sake.-