# LIFE STYLES IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Throughout the history of Christianity there has been an interesting relationship between belief and faith, on the one hand, and life style, on the other. Ways of life have provided grist for the theological mill at the same time that theology has sought to clarify, evaluate and give direction to life styles. We now find ourselves in an era of considerable theological rethinking at the same time that we witness widespread experimentation in life styles both within and outside the church. This may be a good time in which to give serious thought to what theological learnings might issue from this experimentation in life styles at the same time that we ask how theology can illuminate the contemporary search for more humanly fulfilling ways of life.

Paul Hessert has written, "In periods of theological uncertainty, a description of the Christian life may be the only way to restore order and perspective. Prior to the creation of theological systems, Christianity can only be described as a life. And when the intellectual framework of an age is called into question, that may be the form theology must take again."[1] What follows is essentially an attempt to explore some possible meanings for theology to be found in today's quest for new life styles, and some possible illumination on life-ways flowing from emerging theological thought.

## I

In *Future Shock* Alvin Toffler writes,

> A life style is a vehicle through which we express ourselves. It is a way of telling the world which particular subcult or subcults we belong to . . . The real reason why life styles are so significant — and increasingly so as society diversifies — is that, above all else, the choice of a life style model to emulate is a crucial strategy in our private war against the crowding pressures of overchoice . . . . . .
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> How we choose a life style, and what it means to us, therefore, looms as one of the central issues of the psychology of tomorrow. For the selection of a life style, whether consciously done or not, powerfully shapes the individual's future. It does this by imposing order, a set of principles or criteria on the choices he makes in daily life.[2]

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[1]Paul Hessert, *New Directions In Theology Today: Volume V Christian Life,* Westminster Press, 1967, p. 11.

[2]Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock,* Bantam Books, 1971, pp. 314, 306.

Life styles are more than interesting fads. How and what a person eats, his sleeping habits, how and what he wears, the language he uses, the songs he sings and the music he listens to, the art forms he finds meaningful, the ways he perceives the relations of past, present and future, the arrangements he makes for human relating, his methods in decision- making, his perceptions of and responses to the pivotal experiences of life (including work, play, love, suffering, aging, death) are all saying important things. They are saying something about how he is getting on as a person, about his values, his fears, his hopes, his grip or lack of grip on life, the state of his coping. Life styles say something about our self-image, our faith or unfaith, our models. Who we think we are and what life means or hopefully might mean to us comes to expression in life style.

It is obvious that not all life styles are theologically informed. There are various humanistic philosophies committed to the maximizing of human possibilities without reference to God. There are philosophies which define the highest good in terms of power, possession, position or pleasure – without reference to religious sanctions. There are life styles which reflect an image of life as rat race, or treadmill, or giant salesroom. And as Isaac Watts pointed out many years ago, there are those whose life style reflects no nobler visision of life's meaning than devouring cattle, flock and fish, and then leaving behind an empty dish. Life styles have their implicit visions and values.

The deeper meanings of life styles can be discerned only in relation to the contexts in which they come to expression. Just as a word may convey quite different meanings in different settings, so life styles say different things under different circumstances. He who would seek to interpret the contemporary experimentation in life styles needs to do it with an awareness of changes taking place in world, society and culture.

The failure to read life styles contextually can lead to unfortunate and sometimes amusing results. It is evident that some persons are far more threatened by a "different" life style than by a new idea. The threat can only be understood in relation to what has come to be familiar and satisfying. To understand what a life style is denying and affirming it must be perceived in relation to the thoughts, feelings, aspiration and commitments of a person or persons under specific circumstances.

## II

From the beginnings of Christian history we find the insistence that belief, faith and life style go hand in hand.

Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits... Not every one who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:16, 21)

Paul wrote, "..let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.... For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake." (Philippians 1:27,29)

Hebrews speaks of "the new and living way which he (Jesus) opened for us..." (Hebrews 10:10) At an early date Christianity came to be designated as "the Way." In the Book of Acts there are at least six references to "the Way." Christians were followers of the Way. The New Testament takes it for granted that the Christian life is to be distinguished from the life of the human community in general.

Through the centuries of Christian history major interpreters of the gospel have linked belief, faith and life style. Jesus called his followers not only to believe but to live a life manifesting love of God and neighbor. Paul wrote of a "more excellent way" marked by faith, hope and love. He affirmed the fruit of the Spirit to be "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Galatians 5.22) The author of I John affirms "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." (4:16) Augustine's *Enchiridion* is an exposition of faith, hope and love. The Reformers had much to say about the relation of belief, faith and way of life. John Wesley affirmed that man is justified in faith and perfected in love — a love manifest in attitude, aspiration, action, manner of life. Some of the most articulate of contemporary theologians have presented ethical interpretations of the life of belief and faith. Thus, there is the recurring theme that belief and life-ways are closely related, that faith in and commitment to the God of Christian faith frees man for a new existence in faith, hope and love.

However, Christians have not always found it easy to ascertain precisely what manner of life is most worthy of the gospel of Christ. What is the trusting, hoping, loving thing in a particular set of circumstances? At varied times it has been said that the authentic Christian is one who withdraws from the evil world, who denies the flesh, whose orientation is other-worldly. Again, it has been said that the true Christian is in the world but not of the world. Again, he is an instrument of world transformation. At varied times the Christian par excellence has been perceived to be the martyr, the see-er of visions, the speaker in tongues, the affirmer of the orthodox belief, the sturdy character who stands fixed and unmoved in the midst of change, the

doer of compassionate deeds, the mystic, the courageous sufferer, the maker of pilgrimages, the loyal churchman, the one who has had a particular kind of religious experience, the social activist. Such different persons as Augustine, St. Francis, and Martin Luther King, Jr. have been held up as exemplars of the Christian way. Thus, while there appears to be widespread agreement on the marks of a Christian life style stated in broad, general terms, there is considerable confusion when it comes to commending specific actions as the Christian thing to do under specific circumstances. It is easier to believe in general than to prescribe in particular. Experience suggests that the art of Christian living involves a sense of what is appropriate in a given time and place.

Nevertheless, it is no small thing to affirm that commitment to the God of Christian faith involves the summons into a life of maturing faith, hope and love. Negatively, it is to deny that life styles of distrust, despair, exploitation, and greed basically characterize the Christian. More positively, it is to affirm a direction of aspiration. It is to affirm the possibility of an existence involving "freedom from the past and openness to the future." It is to affirm good news for the human creature who so frequently experiences life as bad news. It is to affirm the conviction that in the divine order there is the possibility of a quality of life for mankind which justifies the human enterprise – a life worth living.

It is precisely the fact that some pioneers of the spirit have demonstrated and demonstrate such a quality of life that the Christian message carries the mark of credibility. The profoundest religious insights, including those of Christianity, have not dropped ready-made out of the heavens. There have been "flashes of insight." There have also been gracious, hoping, loving persons whose lives bear witness to what is central and enduring in the nature of things. Revelation is grounded in experienece. Whatever authority scripture and tradition may have refers back to what man has come to know of God experientially. If the theological task of reflecting on faith proves fruitful for illuminating life styles, it is also true that out of experience issuing in life styles have come data for theological reflection. The affirmation that God is creative, gracious, redemptive reality finds its verification and/or falsification in experience. That is why the theological work of our time needs to take into account how persons are experiencing the world of today, and what they are saying in their varied life styles. Theology can inform life styles. Conversely, life styles have something to say to the theologian who would speak of the human situation and God's relation to that situation.

## III

The world of the twentieth century is vastly different from the world of the first and second centuries in which some of the classic statements of Christian faith, belief, and life came to expression. Modern man understands and experiences the world in new ways. If the twentieth century Christian is to be guided by Biblical understandings of the Christian life, how is he to understand faith, hope, and love of God and neighbor under the conditions of today's world? In what sense, if any, are the virtues and ethical precepts of first-century Christianity relevant in the twentieth century? Are the models of Christian living to which the earliest Christians turned for insight and inspiration viable models for the Christian in today's world? If it be true that man's self-images and world-images and languages undergo important changes, and if it be true that life styles are culturally conditioned and are to be understood contextually, questions of this sort are very much to the point.

One of the important differences between the worlds of the first and twentieth centuries has to do with the respective roles assigned to the natural and the supernatural. In his book *Experience with the Supernatural in Early Christian Times,* Shirley Jackson Case wrote:

> The pious Jew of the time of Jesus had never been called upon to face the task of adjusting himself to a solar universe. For him both heaven and hell were as definitely local as the earth, and neither the question of distances nor the problem of time offered any difficulties for his way of thinking.
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> In this three-story world of popular Jewish imagery naturalism found no room to breathe. The most spacious quarters in this cosmic mansion were on the third floor where God and the angels resided. The natural world, in any modern sense of that term, was a conception quite unknown to popular Jewish thinking at the beginning of the Christian era. By common consent all of life's most treasured experiences, and the solution of its gravest problems, were assigned to the sphere of the supernatural.[8]

It is true that in the last half of the twentieth century there are still persons who have not moved beyond the kind of thinking Case describes. Astrology, magic, witchcraft, and the crassest forms of supernaturalism are still among us. But in the modern era amazing advances have been made in medicine, agriculture, and the understandings of human behaviour and human becoming. Scientific methodologies turn to the natural order for answers to the questions being raised. Twentieth century man is far more naturalistically oriented than was first century man. Even devotees of supernaturalistically oriented religious and philosophical movements frequently do not hesitate to draw on resources made available by modern science.

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[8]S. J. Case, *Experience With The Supernatural In Early Christian Times,* Century Company, 1929, pp. 415.

With the coming of modern technology (one phase of the naturalistic orientation) man is now able to cope with many problems once believed to be beyond his control. It is now possible to deal with problems of poverty, over-population, physical and mental illness on a scale once thought impossible. Technology is here to stay and modern Christians must learn to live with it and use it in ways which were not possible for Christians of earlier centuries.

Attendant upon these developments is modern man's emerging awareness of himself as *decision-maker*. The human creature is now called upon to make decisions involving life and death control which only a few years ago were assumed to be God's decisions alone. Man's state is increasingly under his own control. Under these circumstances the virtues of resignation and submission need rethinking. The earliest Christians were small in number. They exercised little power in the power structures of their time. This has changed. There are many Christians and they are charged with the responsibility of exercising an "ethic of responsible power" in their decision-making.

In new ways the human creature is discovering himself to be an *explorer*. He is probing microscopic secrets. He has explored planet Earth, learning that we have just one human species. He has moved into outer space and travelled to the moon. He has studied the universe and learned that he must rethink his place in the cosmic spectacular. The earth is not the center of the universe; there are billions of stars and the conditions for life may well exist on many heavenly bodies.

In his exploring, the human creature is coming to a new awareness of the inter-relatedness of all things, organic and inorganic. Human life is linked with all creation – a vast ecological system of systems. Who is my neighbor? The natural world; all living things; human creatures of all races and nations and cultures; the future which even now impinges on the present. To be sure we continue to have our local loyalties, but we are being given a vision of the more inclusive communities and wholes of which we are parts. No longer can we appropriately think of the meaning of human existence, of human fulfillment, or salvation in purely private or individualistic terms. The human creature is part of a whole from which he cannot resign. His destiny, his fate, the meaning of his very being has to do with his relation to the larger realities of which he is a part.

Under these conditions there is widespread experimentation in life styles. Some are styles which say "withdrawal" or "despair" or "apathy" or "get you kicks while you can." But there are others which

speak of a hunger for a more humanly fulfilling mode of existence, a life which reflects a deepening understanding of man's role in a universe which is dynamic, inter-related, and ever in process of becoming.

And there are pioneers of the spirit who are calling us to new visions of greatness – into new dimensions of awareness, of sensitivity, of caring and creativity.

What are the roles of religion in the new world of now? What light, if any, can theology throw on the human situation in the twentieth century? What guidance can it give to the human creature in his quest for fulfilling life styles? How one ultimately answers those questions will be influenced by the willingness of religious leaders (including theologians) to hear what is being said in the contemporary experimentation in life styles. Some of that experimentation says that the human creature is a searcher after meaning; that there is widespread dissatisfaction with prevailing views of value and success; that there is a search for more creative relationships and a discovery of the sacred in the natural; that a profound morality must seek love and trust and mutual respect in relationships and modes of relating are to be tested in the light of those qualities. That there is a religious dimension to much of the contemporary search for new life styles seems evident. Unfortunately the church too often fails to comprehend the character of the hunger or offers no counsel better than a return to the past, a blessing of the status quo, a gospel of privatism, or a summons to institutional loyalty. Can the church do its religious thing in ways which are relevant to the new situation? Can the church communicate visions of greatness? In its myths and rites and life styles can it communicate faith and hope and love? Can it mediate the grace of courage and caring as human creatures go about making the decisions they must make? Can it show how human life can be meaningful for increasing numbers of human beings living under greatly varying cultures, in different parts of the world?

The church needs to be attending to the fact of diversity in contemporary life styles. It needs to be attending to those styles which express a hunger for instant intimacy, instant answers to complex questions, instant salvation. It needs to be attending to those life styles which express a hunger for a simpler mode of existence and those life styles which express a hunger for a community of those who would live "closer to nature." It needs to be attending to those life styles which express a hunger for the ecstatic experience. It needs to be attending to those life styles which affirm that something can be done about the major personal and social problems of mankind and that there can be a better life for more of the world's population. And then

it needs to be attending to those life styles of humanistic orientation which say "The man who has come of age no longer needs to take seriously the idea of God as a working hypothesis. Man is his own best hope." These life styles are saying something about the thoughts, feelings, needs, aspirations and commitments of multitudes of persons. Many of these life styles are being enacted with little or no reference to the institutional church.

If the church has something to say of importance under these circumstances it needs to be trying to understand the full import of what is being said. It must read aright the world-wide hungers and aspirations for more humanly fulfilling ways of life. It also needs to be probing the theological foundations which are basic to its message and mission. It is not enough to return to the concepts and symbols of the past. New knowledge, new power, new threats to mankind's survival on planet Earth, new visions of what the world might be like must all be taken into account in theologies which serve the present age. Margaret Mead has written:

> The task of the Christian community today is to learn to combine the command to love our neighbors as ourselves with the task of finding out who our neighbors are, knowing all that is known about them and knowing all that can be known about carrying out the Christian command.... If theology can be illuminated by a greater knowledge of the world in which we live, theology will be given a new life in our time. We will not be losing a large proportion of our young people because they feel lonely in an atmosphere that does not take into account what they know...
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> It is absolutely urgent that Christians should take as a first responsibility to know what is known... We must take upon ourselves the task of providing a twentieth century faith that we can put together with empirical knowledge. Theologians must work with scientists to build this new faith, because without faith and love we may destroy the world. With faith and love and no knowledge the world may also be destroyed.[4]

On Christmas Day 1968 a remarkable article appeared in the New York Times. In those hours one of our Apollo missions was in progress. Our astronauts were speeding around the moon, seeing planet Earth in a perspective from which it had never been seen before. Under those circumstances Archibald MacLeish wrote of various chapters in human history when mankind moved into new worlds of understanding and experience – calling for human beings of greater vision and larger commitments. Once more, he said, we have come to a turning point in human history. This is part of what he said:

> For the first time in all of time men have *seen* the earth: seen it not as continents or oceans from the little distance of a hundred miles or two or

[4]Margaret Mead, *Twentieth Century Faith,* Harper and Row, 1972, pp. 51, 52, 53.

three, but seen it from the depths of space; seen it whole and round and beautiful and small even as Dante — that "first imagination of Christendom" — had never dreamed of seeing it; as the Twentieth Century philosophers of absurdity and despair were incapable of guessing that it might be seen. . . .

To see the earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold — brothers who know that they are truly brothers.[5]

The Christian church had its beginnings in a world in which men thought in the terms described by Shirley Jackson Case. It is now called to minister in a time when men have gone to the moon and in a world where the vision described by MacLeish is emerging. To what life styles shall the church call mankind in this new day? In what life styles shall the church proclaim its good news? And in what theological languages and images shall it speak of its vision of reality and its hopes for mankind?

## IV

Can the church in this era of history communicate a vision of reality which is faithful both to what is central in its heritage and to what is now known by modern man? Can the church hold forth images of God and man and hope which are rooted in Judaic-Christian thought and which also reflect sensitivity to modern knowledge and experience? Can the church then show that its vision of reality, and the attendant images of God, man and hope, have important implications for life styles or ways of life? Do those life styles have something important to say and contribute to the contemporary world? And can the church be a fellowship which undergirds persons in those life styles — life styles which speak good news?

I believe that all of these questions can be answered in the affirmative. In the remainder of this presentation I shall make some introductory suggestions concerning one possible approach to the relation of theology and life style in our time as a part of an affirmative answer to these questions. In a later presentation I shall carry further this line of thought as it bears on the church's own style of being church.

Insofar as we may speak meaningfully of Christian life styles we are speaking of life styles which are responses to Christian understandings and experiences of God and man and hope. When Paul, for example, called the Corinthians to "a more excellent way" marked by faith, hope and love, he did it in the light of his understanding of what God is, what man might become, and the hope to which Christians are called in Christ. These understandings were experientially based and

[5]New York Times, December 25, 1968.

confirmed. When through the centuries to the present day major interpreters of Christianity have spoken of Christian ethics and Christian ways of life they have appealed to Christian understandings of God and man and hope. To be sure, other theological considerations have been reckoned with, but these three have had perennial importance.

What, then, can we say of contemporary Christian understandings of God and man and hope? And what are the implications of those understandings for life style?

Obviously Christianity encompasses vast differences of thought and style. There is no *one* Christian theology and there is no *one* Christian life style, what I have to say reflects the approach of one Christian who is committed to a style of theologizing which seeks to draw on the resources of scripture, tradition, experience and reason while denying that any one alone is the final arbiter in matters of truth. It is a style of theologizing which assumes that it is better to know than not to know; that truth is wholistic; that learning comes from many sources; that no one person or group has a monopoly on truth or goodwill. It is a style of theologizing which endeavors to bring together insights from Christianity with learnings from other faiths and philosophies, with knowledge coming from modern science and varied forms of contemporary experience. It is a style of theologizing which takes seriously a statement made by Einstein when he was asked how he came to the theory of relativity. He said, "I challenged an axiom." It is a style of theologizing which assumes that theologians need to be ready to challenge axioms – or they will learn nothing. It is a style of theologizing which is functional and empirical in its approach: the basic functions of religion are understood as having to do with man's search for morale and meaning and motivation; theology is the intellectual work of religion as man seeks a comprehensive belief system – a frame of orientation; empirical methodologies, rather than authoritarian or deductive methodologies, offer the greatest hope for creative theological work in our time.

If new ground is to be broken in theology there must be a deepened awareness of how theological language functions and a deepened awareness of the relation of language to context.

For nineteen centuries the Christian church has affirmed that man's ultimate trust and devotion belong to God; that God orders, creates, judges, accepts, forgives and saves through the love supremely revealed and mediated in Jesus Christ; that God inspires and sanctifies through his spirit, calling men into a new life and a new community of witness, service and mission. The church has affirmed that man is both sinner and bearer of the image of God, that he is unique in the order

of creation, born to be reborn, to participate in a "new creation," called to membership in "the body of Christ" and in the Kingdom of God. The church has affirmed that God's final word to man is not a word of condemnation and despair but a word of grace and hope – a hope which shines through the devastations of sin and death. The church has used the language of crucifixion and resurrection. Translated into experiential terms the teaching is that the Christian way involves dying into newness of life. The church has affirmed that the new life in Christ is a life of disciplined freedom – by the grace of God man is made free to mature in faith and in hope and in love of God and neighbor. These are the major affirmations which underlie the power of historic Christian faith. Can twentieth century man hear them, or something like them, as believeable good news for him? Can they be expressed in contemporary life styles?

Paul Tillich has reminded us that "the concepts of theology and the symbols of religion are empty for those who do not experience them as answers to their questions." So it is with the varied languages of theology. Unless they exercise clarifying, kindling, expressing, commending, evoking power in such ways that attitudes and life styles are influenced in fundamental ways, they are of little relevance. If modern man is to hear theological language old and/or new as meaningful *for him,* he must be able to hear it and use it in the context of the world as he actually perceives and experiences it. That is why the tasks of symbolization and resymbolization, of interpretation and reinterpretation are so essential in our time. It cannot be assumed that images and symbols and languages which took their rise under one set of circumstances can be superimposed on other sets of circumstances and function as they first did. He who would interpret Christian faith in our time must show how its languages have referential significance and meaning in a world as presently understood and experienced.

## V

Historically attempts to "do theology" without recourse to the resources of philosophy have not come off very well. In this century, for example, neo-orthodoxy involved the attempt to affirm the autonomy of theology. But it soon became evident that neo-orthodox theologians could not escape philosophical presuppositions whether or not they were prepared to acknowledge and deal with them. It also became quickly apparent that in the modern age any discipline which hopes to be in serious communication with other disciplines must be prepared to reckon with what are essentially philosophical issues. One of the encouraging dimensions of current theological discussion is the growing recognition of this point.

Among the philosophical perspectives which are available as possible resources for the contemporary theologian, those which combine existential and cosmological interests, which affirm the dynamic, relational and processive character of knowable reality, which attend carefully to the problems of language, and which employ holistic and organismic models seem to me to be the most promising in the possibilities they hold forth.

Many of the traditional images of God and man and hope have reflected static categories of thought with little attention paid to the relational-processive-holistic character of reality. The implications for the religious life, including life styles, have been far-reaching. The death of God movement was inspired in part by the growing awareness that static, non-relational, non-processive views of God and man and hope have little meaning for the person who is sensitive to the realities of the world in which he lives. Bishop J.A.T. Robinson caught the spirit of the new situation in theology when he wrote, "We need not fear flux: God is in the rapids as much as in the rocks, and as Christians we are free to swim and not merely to cling."[6]

We are now invited to contemplate images of God which perceive the divine reality as fundamentally implicated in the structures and processes which are basic to being and becoming, as the binding integrity giving character to the whole, as the reality making for wholeness. To speak of God is not only to speak of the divine source of life, it is to speak of the integrity which relates life and death, which underlies the life-death cycle. To speak of God as creator is to affirm God's involvement in the whole of reality, a creativity which relates matter, life and spirit; a creativity which affirms the dignity of creatureliness; a creativity which is on-going on all levels of being. To speak of God as redeemer is to affirm the potentiality for meaning in creaturely existence – a redemptive reality which brings order out of chaos, wholeness out of brokenness and fragmentation, meaning out of what has been counted all loss and tragedy. Love is the will to relate creatively. Where persons relate creatively, where events come so to be related that possibilities for good are realized, there God is present.

We are now invited to engage in Christological thinking within the framework of the newer conceptualizations of the world and man. The Christ reality is the personal incarnation in a human life of divine integrity and love, mediating the grace of acceptance, healing and reconciliation, facilitating and enabling relationships which make for wholeness. There were those who nineteen centuries ago experienced

[6]J.A.T. Robinson, *Christian Morals Today*, Westminster Press, 1964, p. 20.

the historical Jesus and events associated with his life and death and continuing presence with them in ways which made him the Christ for them. In him was light and grace. Through him came new understanding of what God is and what man might become. Ever since, the image of Jesus as the Christ has informed Christian thought and taken a central place in Christian myth and rite. The originating Christian experience and dynamic was the experience of him who was the Christ, bringing newness of life.

When Christian theologians worked within dualistic and prescientific conceptualizations of the world they spoke of the work of Christ in terms of paying a debt or rendering a satisfaction to meet legalistic conditions established by a distant God. We can do better now – discerning the work of Christ *relationally,* incarnating, disclosing, mediating the love which makes for wholeness. With this understanding we better understand that the Christ reality is not confined to one point or person in history. The creating-redeeming word becomes flesh and dwells among us again and again. To know the living Christ is to participate in a tradition but it is not to return to a distant past – it is to be open to the grace which is everywhere and most significantly in persons who show us the meaning of love of God and neighbor. He who would contemplate the implications of this line of thought for life styles might well begin by contemplating the teaching of Martin Luther that the Christian is called to be a Christ to his neighbor.

We are now invited to understand the church as both fellowship and organization. As fellowship it is the *group* agent of mediation, incarnating the Christ reality in its relational life, mediating the grace which makes for wholeness. As organization it involves structures and processes designed to undergird and implement the ministry of mediation. The organization is finally measured not in statistical terms but in terms of the relationships it facilitates, the visions and values and aspirations it undergirds.

We are now invited to think of man in more holistic ways – a creature linked with the whole of reality, achieving his highest good in a coordination of body, mind and spirit, endowed with the capacity to give a measure of direction to human evolution. The human creature is neighbor to all that partakes in being. He is called to be a steward, not exploiter, of the natural environment. He does not simply live *in* a body, he is called to *live his body,* even as he is called to affirm and exemplify spirit in a synthesis of body, mind, spirit. He is a creature born for becoming more fully human through the chapters and seasons and crises and varied experiences of life – so that his life

is not just an accumulation of years and achievements, but an intricately connected net – wondrously participating in human and non-human communities. It is given man to find meaning through intrinsically meaningful experiences, through life-long processes of self-realization, and through participation in self-transcending goals and causes appropriate to the history in which he participates. Man is the creature who knows that he must die; thus he is the creature who can ask the meaning of his life, and he is the creature who can seek to orient his existence in relation to God. But his highest concept of God is not that of a distant being who arbitrarily imposes himself and his will on the world from afar; rather, it is the concept of the God whose power is more persuasive than coercive, who invites man to participate in the divine work of creation and recreation, of healing and of wholeness. "The glory of God," said Irenaeus, "is man fully alive."

We are now invited to contemplate the meaning of hope in the context of today's world. The human creature is confronted with new dimensions of both threat and possibility.

Man's continuing survival on planet Earth is threatened. His survival as a truly *human* creature is threatened by forces at work in the machine-like dimensions of a technological culture. He is threatened by the dehumanizing influences of institutions and moral codes and value systems which do not adequately reflect the changes taking place in the world.

At the same time there are new dimensions of possibility in the human situation. We have greater resources than ever before with which to deal with personal and social problems. The emerging awareness that there is one human species, that we must move toward a world civilization, that the human creature himself has untapped potentialities, that persons of goodwill in all parts of the world are communicating more and more about the quality of life we seek, provides a basis for hope (even though a chastened hope) in the present situation.

The church is called to make a distinctive contribution in speaking for hope. The human creature does not live by knowledge and skills alone. He lives by visions and values and goals to which he is committed. Alfred North Whitehead wrote, "... that religion will conquer which can render clear to popular understanding some eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact."[7] The church is called to bear witness to its vision of the eternal greatness incarnate in our history. In so doing, it will serve not only individuals, but

[7]A.N. Whitehead, *Adventures Of Ideas*, Macmillan Co., 1933, p. 41.

the peoples of the earth as they seek binding elements in their life together on planet Earth. Whether the church is really heard will depend in no small measure on the visions and values implicit in the life styles it commends and exemplifies.

## VI

Life styles which reflect the images of God, man and hope suggested in the preceding section are *aspiring* styles. The Christian is marked by the direction of his aspiring and striving. Such life styles reveal a deep concern not only with getting but with being and becoming – becoming more God-like, becoming more fully human, becoming more mature in faith, hope and love.

There is room for great variation in Christian life styles. Variations in temperament, in limitation and capabilities, in cultural conditioning, in education, in past experience inevitably lead to differences in life styles even though they are all informed by Christian visions and values and nurturing.

Contemporary Christian life styles reflect a sensitivity to the transcendent dimensions of world and experience – but now transcendence is redefined. Trancendence refers, not as in the past, to a supernatural realm apart from and discontinuous from the natural realm – but to such dimensions of reality as are suggested by such terms as source, depth, wholeness, grace, possibility. The transcendent "goes beyond" or surpasses, the immediate, the measurable, the manipulable. Symbols and myths of transcendence point toward meaning and value not found in the immediate situation. Transcendence suggests a perspective we may gain through seeing ourselves through another person or culture or movement. He who lives with sensitivity to the transcendent dimensions of reality does not merely exist "on the surface." He lives with an expanded awareness of the larger and fuller and qualitatively richer reality than is discerned simply through preoccupation with immediacies. A sense of wonder attends Christian life styles.

Christian life styles are disciplined life styles. The disciplines are implicit in the goals which define Christian aspiring – becoming more God-like, more fully human, more mature in faith, hope and love.

Christian life styles – in the orientation here being considered – are inspired and motivated by *a vision of wholeness* which has not been possible until the modern period. This vision of wholeness moves in three important directions:

First, it deepens the awareness that *human beings as seekers of meaning, may aspire after meaning in all experience.* Meaning is to be

found in creaturely existence. The doctrines of creation and redemption must be brought together. Meaning is not imposed from without – it emerges through the inter-play of selves with the givenness of experience. Thus the crisis points of life, the unfolding seasons and chapters of life, the routines and surprises of a single day are all potential for meaning. The cross is a reminder of a way of life which wills to create, even through suffering. Christian life styles bring the concern of the artist to bear on experienece – to participate in bringing forth something of integrity and beauty and meaning from the raw materials with which we deal. Meaning is not a word defining a special realm – it is a quality potential in all realms of experience. Philip Phenix calls us to a higher, creaturely worship in these words:

> To know the world profoundly, in its origins, actualities, possibilities, and promises, is to know God, and to live in the world with unconditional concern for the realization of its manifold and multiform excellences is to worship him in spirit and in truth.[8]

Second, the vision of wholeness calls for *an integration of deepened subjectivity, on the one hand, with a more creative participatory style of life, on the other.* Christian life styles reflect aspiration after this integration of the inner life with creative participation in the world. Perhaps the time has come for a re-introduction and redefinition of the term "soul." Too long it was used to refer to a "disembodied spirit." Now that we are seeing the human creature in more holistic terms, finding meaning and spirit in his creaturely existence, we may be ready to use a term which combines deep subjectivity with creative participatory syles of life. Gibson Winter has suggested that the term "soul" may be what we need. He writes:

> The term "soul" has many meanings and little meaning for many people. We are not thinking of an eternal substance which distinguishes man as a creature of God. The idea of substance and the corresponding notion of soul are practically unintelligible to modern thought. We think now in terms of dynamics and process. Hence, we take "soul" in a more existential sense — the way in which man is related to his world. "Soul" refers, then, to the wholeness or integrity of man, his embodied feelings and sensibility, his struggle for an authentic existence and in general to the quality of his subjectivity. When we speak of a "struggle for soul" or a "crisis of soul" we are speaking of a man's struggle for a style of life appropriate to him as man.[9]

An appropriate style for a creature of body, mind, spirit – linked with all creation in bonds of support – is one which combines meditation, reflection, communion, openness to the grace of beauty, love and

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[8]Philip Phenix, *Education And The Worship Of God,* Westminster Press, 1966, pp. 28, 29.
[9]Gibson Winter, *Being Free,* Macmillan Co., 1970, p. 84.

renewal which surrounds us, prayer and worship, with a participatory way of life wherein one seeks to place his personal stamp of faith and hope and love on a world which is ever coming into being.

Third, the vision of wholeness in our time calls for an *expanded understanding of love of God and neighbor.* If God be the God of all creation and of all peoples, the implications are clear. Love of God takes us beyond our local loyalties and our self-centered desires. It points toward a sense of stewardship in relation to our environment and human resources. It points toward a quality of caring which not only ministers to needs but seeks to correct conditions which issue in dehumanization and suffering. It points to a quality of caring which reaches to all human creatures making up the family of man. It points to a quality of caring which seeks communication across lines which traditionally have separated the human family.

In calling for enlarged visions of love of God and neighbor and an understanding of Christianity as "a culture that transcends local cultures" Margaret Mead writes:

> . . it is on these questions — the stewardship of the earth, the cultivation of the earth as a garden, and the command to feed and heal all men — that the issue is joined. In earlier times the Christian, intent on his own soul and the life of the world to come, might devote himself to giving alms, rescuing orphans, and comforting the dying. These relationships provided a satisfactory dynamic tension within which the donor and recipient benefited spiritually. But in the present era the conception of giving must be revised. Is it Christian to insist that it is nobler to minister to the individual sufferer than to use technology to wipe out the disease from which the individual is suffering? . . . . the new technology demands a new ethical application.[10]

A Christian life style, exemplifying love of God and neighbor now involves a sense of cosmic and global citizenship. It involves the will to place one's personal stamp of caring on the world through participation in those movements whose purposes include the humanization of institutions and relationships.

Last, but not least, contemporary Christian life styles are communicating styles, as attempts are made to nurture creative interchange among all persons of goodwill regardless of race, religious tradition or culture. Hope for a more humane world involves the hope that such creative inter-change is possible. There is one species of man; we are called to the realization that we are brothers on Spaceship Earth.

A Christian life style has long been held to be a dying-to-a larger life style. Among the things to which we must die is the provincial

[10]Margaret Mead, *Twentieth Century Faith,* Harper and Row, 1972, pp. 7, 8.

notion that all truth and wisdom has been vested in one tradition. We have much to learn from each other. There is much work to be done which we must do together.

Arnold Townbee has written:

> The matter in which there might be spiritual progress in time on a time-span extending over many successive generations of life on Earth is . . . the opportunity open to souls, by way of the learning that comes through suffering, for getting into closer communion with God, and becoming less unlike Him, during their passage through this world.[11]

Perhaps in seeing the godlike in those different from us, and in seeking to know them better, we shall become more godlike ourselves, moving toward forms of work and worship which affirm that God is truly the God of all creation and all mankind. Life styles which make that affirmation will not only contribute to better theology – they will contribute to a better world.

[11]Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization On Trial*, Oxford University Press, 1948, pp. 248, 249.