

CHARISMA CLASSIC: Someone Else's Servant (September 1985)

When missionaries visit the States and see our opulence, they draw a natural contrast it to the poverty they've just left.

But poverty and riches are relative. I have two cars. I live in a two-story brick house. Within reason, I can buy anything I want. I've never known hunger. What should I do if confronted by the Third-World poverty?

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Here's what I have done. I loan my cars to missionaries home on furlough—and I buy the gas and pay the repair bills. I fill my house with people in need of ministry. I give a large portion of my income to support those in ministry and to feed the poor. Ten years ago, my wife, Jackie, and I moved out of a small subdivision to our present house on 20 acres in a semi-rural setting. By today's standards we got it at a steal. But for five years we both lived with deep-seated guilt because we had such a nice place. That has passed. We now see our purchase as a wise move. I no longer believe God condemns prosperity. Indeed, I think He desires it for us—as long as we use what we have for His glory.

On the other hand, I too am appalled by what is happening in some sectors of Western Christendom. Extravagance grieves me. Yet extravagance is relative to culture. Not long ago, I helped deliver an evaporative cooler to a Christian Native American living in a dirt-floored hut in the Mexican desert, which provided him—and the 10 people in his tiny house—a degree of comfort. But in the eyes of his neighbors, it was sheer extravagance.

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I admire the way Sen. John D. “Jay” Rockefeller IV approached his job as a volunteer in the antipoverty program in Emmons, West Virginia (population 200), as a Peace Corps worker. “I come from a world that may be different, but you’ll find me serious and caring and wanting to help,” he told them. Those grateful people later elected him governor—then U.S. senator. It seems that put riches in the right perspective.

What has God told me to do? He’s said to withhold judgment from His servants—to be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving—even if I do not understand.

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