



Live simply

Let others live

Edward P Echlin

Published May 2007 by Progressio
Unit 3, Canonbury Yard
190a New North Road
London N1 7BJ, UK
www.progressio.org.uk

Progressio is the working name of the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR). CIIR is registered in the UK as a charity (number 294329) and a company (number 2002500).

© Edward P Echlin 2007

ISBN 1 85287 324 8

Edward Echlin asserts his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

Cover photo: Boats in La Gonâve, Haiti
Photo: Mark Howard

Design: Twenty-Five Educational

Printed on REVIVE chlorine-free 100% recycled paper.
Printed by APG which holds ISO 14001 accreditation for meeting international environmental standards in all aspects of the print production process.

About the author

Edward Echlin is an ecological theologian. He is Honorary Fellow at Trinity & All Saints University College, Leeds, and Visiting Scholar at Sarum College, Salisbury. His writings include *The Cosmic Circle: Jesus and Ecology* (Columba Press, 2004) and *Earth Spirituality: Jesus at the Centre* (John Hunt, 2002). Dr Echlin gardens organically in East Sussex, and is chair of Catholic Concern for Animals.



Live simply

Let others live

Edward P Echlin

Sufficient for each, sustainable for all

The *livesimply* awakening – the call to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor – echoes the slogan of the late Dean Horace Dammers. His ‘Live simply that all may simply live’ blossomed into the Lifestyle Movement, a small ecumenical and inter-religious group of people who continue not only to promote environmental justice, but live their talk.

Dammers’ enduring slogan reflects the worldwide ripples of the *livesimply* campaign. All things are connected. The earth community is like a teeming ocean where the smallest actions of any one creature affect every other creature. If one consumes too much all suffer, including in the end the mega-consumer. But where does this leave us in our quest for ‘development’? The familiar ‘sustainable development’ shibboleth entered our culture especially in the late eighties with the ‘Brundtland Report’,¹ and, in 1992, at the Rio Earth Summit. In fact, however, sustainable development was then, and is, what the political scientist Dick Richardson called a calculated ‘political fudge’.²

Livesimply means sustainable *sufficiency*, recalling Gandhi’s famous phrase that ‘the earth has enough for everyone’s needs, but not for everyone’s greed’. In other words, we need and use what is sufficient for ourselves and our dependants, as opposed to ‘growth’ or ‘progress’ driven superfluity, which depletes the earth, steals from the future, and impoverishes poor people in the South today.

The joker in the ‘sustainable development’ pack is the word ‘development’ which means different things, some good, as it once did to Barbara Ward,³ and some terrible. Edward Goldsmith warns: ‘The real cause of the pervasive environmental destruction of today is economic development, and unfettered trade which serves to maximise development and to which all considerations today, however important, are ruthlessly subordinated.’⁴ Unfortunately we are stuck with the phrase ‘sustainable development’, and its studied ambiguity. When we use it, we mean – in the *livesimply* sense – sufficiency: human development that is environmentally sustainable. We mean the ‘human development’ that is the subject of *Populorum Progressio*, the 1967 Encyclical Letter of Pope Paul VI which, 40 years on, has inspired the *livesimply* project.⁵ We mean development that cannot be limited to economic progress, but involves development of the whole human person, and seeks to be genuinely sustainable in its use of the earth so that it benefits poor

people and all earth creatures and not just rich people. The *livesimply* project is a message to those of us in the North. It asks us to look at our lifestyles and consider how we can live in a sustainable way, in solidarity with, and with a concern for, the poor in our world.

Hurting the earth

2006 was a pivotal year in human history. To explain with an anecdote: a friend walked to Assisi and back in golden autumn. He was gone for only six weeks. He left a country wrapped in ignorance and denial. When he returned he was astonished to find a different awareness than he had left only the previous month. Suddenly, in a Damascus flash, people in the UK *knew* that humans are altering the climate, destroying the global biosphere, and depriving children of a future. They suddenly knew, despite lingering denial, that humans are now ‘a geophysical force’, destroying forests, soil, seas, and atmosphere. They knew we are ‘the great meteorite of our time’, extinguishing species, garden grabbing and tiling, road and runway building into a hermit-like future wherein people will be virtually alone in a denuded earth. What happened in those six short weeks?

Put briefly, it was a combination of happenings, a coincidence of epochal events exploding like cluster crackers all at once. Especially there was Al Gore and his brilliant, undeniable, multi-media *An Inconvenient Truth*. There was the much discussed TV special by David Attenborough, in which he asked, ‘How could I look my grandchildren in the face and say I knew what was happening but did nothing?’ There was the ‘Stern Report’,⁶ by a former World Bank ‘one of us’, that even earth illiterate economists and NIMTO (not in my term of office) politicians understood. There was the ‘Stop Climate Chaos’ march in London, the largest climate demonstration in history, with stirring speeches by two bishops as well as environmentalists, Greens, and ecologically concerned politicians. Not least, there was the weather – droughts and floods, confused wildlife, difficult food growing – and accompanying the weather, an anxious foreboding especially by people with young children. Michael McCarthy, environment editor of *The Independent* newspaper, wrote: ‘It feels as if the foundations of the known world, so long relied on by us and by our culture, are all at once being shaken, shaken by profound, scarcely imaginable forces we have ourselves

unleashed, which may take us who knows where.⁷ No wonder our returning Assisi pilgrim left a country in mass denial and returned, like Rip van Winkle, to an almost instantly concerned awareness, if not among political leaders in the UK still in denial, then certainly among many people, especially those with children. Many of us now feel, with Robert Frost, that 'The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep...'⁸

We can be tempted when we contemplate those sleepless miles to say the challenge is too big for us (or for our Church), and instead of living simply to rail against mega-consuming America and our own earth indifferent politicians, and to insist it's 'over to them', that 'they' must fix it. Alternatively, we can excuse our consumption with the much deployed 'this little bit won't matter' – this bit of packaging, this air trip or air-miled import, this slabbing of the small garden entrusted to me, these short car trips, can't matter. In fact, what we do does matter – a lot. It matters most of all to people in the global South. People who are poor will suffer the most from climate change. As Sir John Houghton wrote in the *Progressio* leaflet *Weather warning*: 'Rich countries are largely responsible for the pollution and environmental damage that is leading to climate change. Poor people and poor countries are least able to cope with the consequences... [And] people in developing countries are more likely to suffer deaths, misery and economic damage as a result.'⁹

We are at a critical time in human and planetary history. What is new is that we now have the numbers, technology and mobility, complemented by progress and growth myths, to destroy the earth. Yet, if we can unite and muster the will, we can heal the earth and salvage the future. The Australian zoologist Tim Flannery observes: 'We are the generation fated to live in the most interesting of times, for we are now the weather makers, and the future of biodiversity and civilisation hangs on our actions.'¹⁰

The Christian contribution

Friends of the Earth's Tony Juniper comments: 'When shown grave threat, people tend to look for security rather than solutions. To move from the defensive to engagement people need a sense of hope and a belief that things can be changed with practical and workable solutions.'¹¹ The need for such an 'engagement' is precisely what underpins *Populorum Progressio* and the *livesimply* project.

After the only partially successful Rio Earth Summit of 1992, Maurice Strong and Mikhail Gorbachev and others drafted an 'Earth Charter' which Gorbachev, now chair of the International Green Cross, has championed. Gorbachev argues that peace, justice and care for the earth are necessary if there is to be a future. He says 'hope and belief' are necessary, and notes the connection between love of the human neighbour, as taught by Judaism and Jesus Christ, and care for the neighbour's environment. Gorbachev says: 'The basic idea of the Earth Charter can be summarised in a single sentence: "to save humanity and all future generations we must also save the earth".'¹²

Living simply is ecumenical. Sustainable sufficiency unites people of different 'hopes and beliefs', and demonstrates the great potential of faith to make a difference to our world. The eminent entomologist E O Wilson, like Gorbachev, recognises the need for ultimate concern if we are to heal and conserve the earth. Wilson, a former southern Baptist, now a secular humanist, says religion and science are 'the two most powerful forces in the world today'. He asks that religious people and scientists cooperate 'on the near side of metaphysics in order to deal with the real world we share'.¹³ I would add that old fashioned greed, traditionally called original sin, is still at least as powerful as science and religion, and needs to be controlled if science and religion are successfully to serve the poor and the earth.

We now confront – and are entering – an even more sombre time than the awakened acquaintances of our Assisi pilgrim realised. We live on the edge, or, better, precipice, of what I call 'climate change plus', the post peak oil era. Colin Campbell of the Association for the Study of Peak Oil thinks it will happen about 2010. In any scenario, except that of the US government and the oil and air giants, it will happen soon, probably in this decade. Campbell says peak oil 'is a turning point in history of unparalleled magnitude, for never before has a resource as critical as oil become headed into decline from natural depletions without sight of a better substitute.'¹⁴ That means that we are facing an imminent lifestyle crunch. As a fossil fuel addicted culture, there will be much human suffering as oil, and therefore food, become scarce in the post peak oil 'descent' into an alternative future. Energy descent means we will have to localise food, including the growing of food in our cities and hinterlands, planting nut and fruit trees throughout our communities now, and

living simply as suggested in these pages. Following Jesus Christ in his own lifestyle and teaching is the major contribution we can make in the post peak oil energy descent era.

Jesus lived simply both at Nazareth and in his public ministry. When a young man asked him how to be saved, Jesus referred to the Jewish creation stories and to the Shema read in synagogues: God alone is good, the Creator of everything good. To be perfect the young man should give to the poor and follow Jesus in his living simply (Mark 10.17). Some glimpses into Jesus' teaching are significant. We can discover our own place in the earth community, and in the cosmic liturgy, directly from him. In the first creation story people are described as God's 'image': in brief, we are like ancient client shepherd, gardener, priestly kings, under God, with responsibilities for garden earth and its sheep. To be God's 'image' includes care for climate and soil fertility (Ps. 72.6, 16). We are *adam* (soil beings) from *adamah* (soil). We are the man (and woman) with the hoe (Gen. 2.15). We are here to help all creation praise our Maker, to let things be, to garden well and sustainably in God's garden. Our hoe is the most venerable and best 'herbicide'. Unlike the chemical sprayers of agribusiness, our hoe sustains, nurtures, and does not poison *adamah*. Servant gardener shepherds, like the people of iron age Nazareth, live a sustainably sufficient lifestyle.

Born into a craftsman's family, Jesus from childhood was immersed in Jewish culture and tradition. He knew the sombre side of the second – and oldest – creation story prefacing the scriptures. He knew, in brief, about what we call 'the fall', our innate human proneness to earth abuse. I just noted that E O Wilson should include human greed among the 'great powers' today. Jesus certainly did. He associated with and forgave sinners, because he knew that the man with the hoe had stumbled, as daily do we, Adam's descendants. Jesus' brief life on earth was, with some visits to Judea and gentile territory, a 'live simply' Galilean life. The second century Jewish Mishna divided Jesus' Galilee into three principal regions: 'From Kfar Hananiah and northward, all places where the sycamore does not grow are regarded as upper Galilee. And from Kfar Hananiah and southwards, all places where the sycamores do grow are regarded as lower Galilee. And the region of Tiberias is regarded as the Valley.'¹⁵

This bioregional division, according to varied climate and harvest,

shows how ecological, and sustainable, was the tradition that moulded Jesus. He moved through all three regions, especially within Galilee 'where the sycamores grow' and through the fields and villages of the Tiberias valley. He also visited and taught in gentile districts, including lush Tyre and Sidon and the 'district of Caesarea Philippi' near Mount Hermon whose snow and dew 'waters the mountain of Zion'. Especially, however, Jesus was 'a Nazarene' – as Matthew called him, hinting at the peaceable kingdom – from Nazareth in the green Galilee hill country. As a craftsman's son, Jesus helped his family supplement their simple income with partially self-sufficient food growing on the semi-permeable chalk and marl of the Nazareth ridge. They would have grown local staples endemic in their soil: cereals, brassicas, onions, salads, olives, vines, pomegranates, figs, with perhaps some hens and stock. From the natural world, its habitats, plants, and animals, Jesus learned ecological wisdom: 'Ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you' (Job 12.7); 'Fear the Lord our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest' (Jeremiah 5.24).

Jesus lived and taught inclusively – open to other faiths and the earth – in the tradition of his ancestor Abraham, the father of many nations. Jesus' lifestyle was within the Sabbath and Jubilee ethos, living simply, itinerant, not tied to any one home, job, or nuclear family. He had freely received, and freely gave everything he had, his love, his learning and wisdom, and ultimately his life. His trust was not in a pension dependant on continuing economic growth and development but on God and God's gift of the earth.

Shared meals were an important, often overlooked part of Jesus' ministry. From the outdoor meals on the hills and shore, to the final suppers in Bethany and Jerusalem, Jesus' meals resembled Jewish and Hellenic symposia. Participants contributed, there were two courses, with wine, followed by a talk and discussion. The meals symbolised the universal kingdom already beginning in Jesus, including all races, faiths, and creation. Sharing meals, regularly, in our homes and gardens, is a distinctive way to live simply, to share, at least indirectly, with poor people in the South, to give inclusive and sustainable example, and, in brief, to bring closer the kingdom which Jesus preached.

Jesus revisited Nazareth from his final base at Capernaum in the Valley. At a synagogue service Jesus read a text of Isaiah about jubilee, implying that God's holistic kingdom had begun. His words annoyed his former neighbours, and incited them to expel him (Luke 4.16-30). Anyone who has dared to encourage fossil fuel addicted fellow citizens to live simply and sustainably knows the truth of Jesus' famous comment that a prophet is not appreciated in his homeland!

Trusting in God his Father, Jesus lived simply to the end. After the two final meals with disciples he was arrested in the olive garden which he visited frequently when in Jerusalem. He died a pauper's death raised against the heavens on a cross firmly planted in Golgotha stone. Blood and water flowed from his open side, the new Adam reconciling the soil community to God. The earth quaked, and the sky darkened in cosmic sympathy as he died (Matthew 27.45, 51). At Poitiers Venantius Fortunatus (d. 600) testified to the cosmic reconciliation of all things in Jesus crucified: 'The graceful body is wounded, drops of blood stream forth. Earth, seas, stars, the entire world is cleansed. Faithful cross, among all, tree of unique nobility. No forest has produced such leaves, flowers, and fruits ... Bend your branches, grand tree, release the body, do not tear the limbs of the King most high.'

Jesus was interred in a stranger's grave, in simplicity even in burial. He was soon experienced alive by many – Paul says as many as 500, many of whom had known him. Luke describes an appearance to two disciples, Cleopas and apparently his wife, near Emmaus, but 'their eyes were kept from recognising him'. Only at a meal, when he broke bread, did they recognise him, 'their eyes were opened' (Luke 24.31). In Jesus risen is new Adam, new Eden, and a reconciled Adam and Eve. Cleopas and his wife represent us all, still crippled by Adam and Eve's primordial stumble, but reconciled, with opening eyes, in Jesus, of whom the poet Joseph Plunkett wrote: 'His cross is every tree.'¹⁶

Living simply in practice

The *livesimply* project is a breakthrough. Previously much social teaching and activism for 'development' almost contented itself with protests about 'injustice', slogans like 'make poverty history', and donations for 'overseas development'. The Make Poverty History

campaign did indeed raise awareness of poverty in the developing world. But lifestyles remained consumerist. We gave money and raised issues of concern for poor people, but we continued to damage their climate – and our own – by our fossil fuel addicted lifestyles. We continued to sidestep and overlook the links between our lifestyles, our prosperity, and their poverty.

Make Poverty History showed that many people are concerned about poverty and want to see change in the way the world operates. *Livesimply* challenges people in the global North to take the next step: to be the change they want to see, to make the changes in their own lives that, like ripples in the teeming ocean of the earth community, will reach out and help bring change to the lives of others. Only if we live sustainably, if we walk our talk, can we really help the poor.

Livesimply recognises that each of us *can do* and *not do* a lot. What we do *does* matter. One energy efficient light bulb fixed in our kitchen reduces CO₂ which affects all people's climate. One fruit tree planted here provides a little local fruit in an island of uprooted orchards that imports perhaps 90 per cent of its fruit. A fruit tree provides shelter and food for wildlife and absorbs some CO₂. All things are connected, like ripples and krill in an ocean. Holiday sustainably. Our dependence on cars and our obsession with air travel underpins the whole climate and earth damaging lifestyle of consumerist travel. Living – and travelling – simply respects the heart-rending plea to reduce our emissions by Adolfo Pena of Peruvians Without Water: 'The poor will suffer. Our children will suffer. Lima is built on a desert and in 20 years there will be no water.' Closer to home, Eire, once a virtual water wonderland, instead of providing leadership in water care now fouls its waters with suburban septic tanks, second homes, roads, runways, agrochemicals, and landfill.

The proximity principle is the key to living simply. Live, grow, enjoy parks and open spaces, relate, holiday, trade, love, marry, die and get buried as close to home as reasonably possible. The proximity principle is countercultural, it's the last principle 'profit and power people' want popularised. Shop at local shops, farmers' markets, charity shops, jumble sales, and church fairs. Buy used and hand made gifts. Buy local products. Support local farmers' box schemes. If we eat meat, eat local, organic, free range and grass fed if

possible, and humanely reared and killed and processed. If possible know the farmers, fields, and fishermen from whom they come. If you do eat meat, eat less, and less frequently. Restraint in meat consumption helps other peoples' climate and soil: meat is a resource and energy intensive food product. Encourage other countries to follow the proximity principle, preserving their fields, soil, water, and minerals for regional needs, not destroying rainforests for soya to feed our meat, or for palm oil for our chocolate, detergents and lipsticks. Especially important now, prevent, if possible, and never collude in, the destruction of the South's forests and depletion of its soil for growing crops for biofuels for our cars.¹⁷ Help them preserve precious water by not importing 'virtual water' in, for example, wheat, rice, avocados, cotton, fruit and flowers. One ton of wheat requires 1,000 tons of water to grow. When necessary to trade, follow the proximity principle: citrus from southern Europe and North Africa, not from California or the Cape, wine from the EU, not from Chile and Australia. The proximity principle reduces food and air miles climate abuse. It assists local farmers, soil, rainforests, biodiversity, and local jobs and businesses everywhere, and helps developing peoples to secure their soil, enjoy food security, and feed themselves. John Madeley writes: 'The challenge is for the food to be produced by the people who need it most, for the people who need it most. The challenge is to produce food on small-scale farms and to create the conditions that enable people who suffer from chronic hunger to have the food they need for a healthy life.'¹⁸

Living simply will help us create a 'culture of permanence' that 'lets be' the earth for needy people today – and for the future. Alan Durning writes: 'Religious practice, conversation, family and community gatherings, theatre, music, dance, literature, sports, poetry, artistic and creative pursuits, education, and appreciation of nature all fit readily into a culture of permanence – a way of life that can endure through countless generations.'¹⁹ Another useful ecological guide is Ignatius Loyola's *tantum quantum*, or 'in so far as' principle. We take a fruit from that tree we planted, using it 'in so far as' it helps us serve God and conserve the earth, letting be the rest. The tree also needs us, we let ourselves be used, as it were, to harvest, water, feed, and prune our tree, in what the Archbishop of Canterbury calls 'living with a sense of wholeness, at peace with our earth.'

Cut the carbon

Car, food and air miles are a colossal climate destroyer, pouring gases into and above the atmosphere, diminishing life on earth, destroying vast tracts of land and tranquillity near roads and airports. In the unusual pre-Christmas fog on 23 December 2006 there were, in Great Britain, an estimated two million air travellers, 18 million car journeys, and ferry and rail services at capacity. That same month, shortly after the Stern Report, the transport secretary announced massive airport expansion. Meanwhile a resurgence of indulgence trading emerges as 'carbon offsets' which include tree planting, wood stoves, energy efficient light bulbs, wind turbines and the like, which reputedly 'offset' one's emissions. Another indulgence, promoted by industry, economists, and some politicians, is 'carbon trading', or 'European emissions trading'. The basic idea of carbon offsets and emissions trading is that little of substance needs changing: travel, trade, and pollute bravely, business as usual. What is really needed is not offsets, carbon trading, and depleting the earth to produce biofuels, but restraint in travel, and alternative energies that don't damage the climate.

Sir Nicholas Stern argued that to stabilise emissions at 450 ppm (parts per million) is impractical because it would cost three per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Yet he admitted we cannot continue 'business as usual' because the inevitable environmental collapse would cost even more. Stern described climate change, in language the business mind could understand, as 'the greatest market failure ever seen'. He recommends that we stabilise emissions at 500 ppm which would cost only one per cent of GDP, which is politically feasible. More convincingly, Operation Noah, a Christian campaign on climate change, insists we 'Don't fly', 'Cut the carbon', switch to alternative energy suppliers and demand that governments do much more. Operation Noah argues that Stern grossly understates the carbon cuts necessary. Even 450 ppm would mean flooding of the Netherlands, Bangladesh, and coastal China, droughts especially in Africa and Asia, and hundreds of millions of environmental refugees. The Tyndale Centre argues that a 90 per cent cut in emissions by 2050 is necessary rather than the 60 per cent advocated by Stern and the UK government. In all scenarios we need to 'cut the carbon' immediately if people and the future are not to suffer grievously. The melting of Greenland, the Arctic and Antarctic, and glaciers

everywhere, will bring unprecedented suffering to millions and unsustainable migrations everywhere on earth. Not surprisingly agreement was not reached at the failed 2006 UN-sponsored Nairobi conference on a post-Kyoto, 2012 emissions reduction target. And the Arctic and Antarctic white canaries continue to shrink, melt, splinter, and raise sea levels. In December 2006 the then British Prime Minister took his large family on a widely publicised air holiday to Miami Beach, having flown to Barbados the previous year, refusing to give an example of environmental sustainability. Environment minister David Miliband, a carbon trading enthusiast, said for a prime minister to holiday sustainably 'would be an empty political gesture'. Patrick Holden, chair of the Soil Association, writes: 'Despite the publication of the Stern Report, which supports a reduction of 60 per cent of carbon emissions by 2050, Government responses to date have been totally inadequate. There could be no better illustration than Tony Blair's recent remarks about it being "impractical" not to take advantage of cheap air travel.'²⁰

Eire almost overnight has leapt from being a green country with a simple quality of life to being a rampaging 'Celtic tiger' using twice its Kyoto-allotted carbon emissions plus massive emissions of intensively reared animal methane, and cocktails of airplane generated greenhouse gases. Eire's per capita CO₂ emissions are the worst in the EU. A European Environment Agency report, describing Eire's pock-marked fields now blighted with bungalows and forecourts, some of them second homes, said: 'Ireland is suffering from measles.' The suburbanised Irish countryside, once beautiful open land, generates car emissions and dependence, school runs, and import dependence exacerbated by the destruction of fertile fields cultivated by centuries of peasant growers. Septic tanks taint aquifers. In what would have been unimaginable to my grandparents, Ireland suffers a fresh water crisis!

Nevertheless, individuals here and in Ireland and throughout the privileged world *can* mitigate climate danger and secure a future for poorer children, at home and in less privileged countries impacted by our emissions. Use cars as little as possible. Walk to local schools and shops; use public transport for longer journeys. Enjoy British, Irish and European holidays without using a car or plane. Use only energy efficient 'A rated' appliances. Use few, and don't leave them on standby. In warm weather use shades and open windows for

'cooling'. Avoid air conditioning. We installed solar thermal panels on our south facing roof 11 years ago. From April to October we rarely use the boiler; excess hot water heats a radiator towel rail in our coolest room. In winter 2007 we had the rest of our roof covered with solar PV panels. We are now a fledgling micro-generator, contributing what we don't use to the national grid. Our supplier, recommended by Operation Noah, reimburses us nominally (4.5 pence per unit) for every unit we generate, including what we ourselves use. When the sky is dark and clouded we purchase power from the grid. People with solar PV panels can use appliances, such as an iron, when the sun is shining and electricity, like passive solar heat, is pure gift. Install panels as soon as possible, even before their price tumbles as it will when even ministers – no pun here – see the light. Insist that subsidies for insulation and solar power be increased, that Gordon Brown's ill-advised VAT be eliminated, and that all new buildings be insulated and use alternative energy.

Even with your own panels, live simply: don't waste electricity. Even city people with gardens, or accessible flat roofs, can dry clothes outside. Don't overfill electric kettles. When we have meetings in the lounge at evening we conserve electricity by using a fireplace which burns driftwood and donated logs. Cutting carbon by living simply includes wearing warmer, locally produced clothes, especially woollen from our own sheep farmers. Others can and should use wind turbines and combined heat and power boilers. Not least, ask your MP to support the Big Ask demanding that the eco-reluctant government and opposition introduce a mandatory three per cent per annum emissions reduction. Demand from a reluctant government and opposition more research into geo-thermal energy, and ground heat pumps, which provide warmth even on cloudy days.

The food bottom line

When we think food we usually think shopping. That's because we've become a globalised suburban culture, dependant on imports from foreign fields, industrial farming, and climate damaging air and lorry food miles. When Europeans buy western hemisphere citrus or wine, we're part of the unsustainable climate abuse we say we oppose. Living simply means we don't contribute to air miles and airport expansion, road building and genetic modification, bypassing our own European farmers, fruiterers, viticulturists, and farm

labourers. When we do buy produce from overseas – such as tea or coffee which cannot be produced locally – we make sure to buy fairtrade, which ensures a fair deal for the small-scale producers in the country of origin.

Remember that much of the American CO₂, against which we rail is generated producing exports for the globalised food industry. These same exports deprive poor people from growing local food for their own economies. Shopping locally, organically and fairly sometimes (but not always) costs a little more than cheap supermarket food. No-one claims that living simply, in sustainable sufficiency, means cheaply. If it costs a few pence more to support a family farmer let's do it, even if many of our suburban neighbours prefer to cruise the supermarkets. Their 'choice' of cheap foods means that bottom prices are paid to farmers and growers, and that some of the best 'developing' world soil is chemically eroded for monocrop export. Imported food and drink is transported by lorry to polluting airports or ports, food-miled to our airports or ports, lorried to central depots, unnecessarily packaged, then lorried to supermarkets, where it is purchased, driven by round trip car journey to someone's kitchen, and finally eaten, chemically and travel saturated and tasteless.

When we must shop in supermarkets, try to walk, use the bus, or car share. Sometimes buy in bulk with a neighbourhood 'cooperative' group. Purchase what is local, organic, and/or fairly traded, preferably with little packaging. Refuse plastic shopping bags, always bringing our own. Thank and encourage any shop manager who reduces unnecessary packaging. Ask for returnable bottles. Never buy milk in cartons. And recycle any necessary waste. Follow the five Rs: refuse, reduce, repair, reuse, and when necessary, recycle. Buy regional, organic meat and free range chickens, fowl and eggs. Grass-fed meat and local dairy products are better for ourselves and for the developing world's climate than are chemically saturated animals. Hundreds of acres of our orchards have been ripped out – for monocrop, 'alternative use', or 'development' – during the 'great car society' era. Not only have we become import dependant for over 90 per cent of our fruit, a disaster waiting to happen soon, we've also destroyed some of the best, most biodiverse, wildlife friendly orchards on earth. Let's replant and restore them immediately. Also support and help expand local vintners and cider producers and local hops. Encourage growers in the South to grow and enjoy their own bioregional fruit and drink.

Thankfully there are throughout the earth some wonderful organisations which promote development which is sustainable – not just for the environment, but also for people’s own livelihoods. Progressio is working with partner organisations on many such projects, from promoting organic farming in Honduras, to developing marketing strategies for small-scale organic coffee producers in Ecuador. Other examples include, in the UK, the newly founded Land in Trust, incorporating the Soil Association, Land Heritage, the Paget Trust, and Oakfield Project, which helps small farmers, assists former farmers and growers to re-enter food growing, and encourages young aspirants to sustainable farming. In India, Rural Links helps small holders, even of less than an acre, to farm sustainably and with livestock. In Honduras, Comal helps local shops distribute products of local Central American producers and consumers. In Palestine another charity raises money in Europe to assist indigenous people to replant olive orchards uprooted by illegal Israeli settlers.

Tony Hodgson, in his book *Good food stories: Our choices make the world of difference*,²¹ writes of the need to support systems and structures that encourage local food producers. Here at home, eco-clubs and Duchy Original Garden Organic for Schools encourage allotments and beds on school grounds.²² Relating children to the soil community of which they are members is one of our most serious ecological challenges, difficult because not always recognised by earth illiterate parents and educators. Having lost our connection with the land we could draw inspiration from the global South, such as the example of Pijal school near Otavalo in Ecuador. The teacher, Fernando Guzman, helps school children rediscover indigenous farming knowledge in the school garden. He told Progressio, which is supporting the project through its partner organisation CEPUC: ‘The project is not just here in the school but in the children’s homes, because the children are teaching the parents what they are learning.’ As CEPUC president Roberto Conejo said: ‘If we work with children we are able to make more permanent change in people’s lives.’

Live simply by growing your own

Inherent to living simply is growing some food. Nothing is more local, just, climate and soil restorative, educational, spiritual, and partially self sufficient than growing some vegetables and fruit. It’s

also the way the rest of the world lives – and the basis for a sustainable approach to food production. In contrast, our insistence on buying our food, washed and wrapped in cellophane, from the chill cabinets of supermarkets undermines the efforts of people in the South to develop sustainable and local forms of agriculture. Cuba, and the UK's own 'dig for victory' experience, have previewed what cities can do when the 'oil peak' strikes. In an ordinary garden in a 3 x 20 foot bed we can grow intensively and rotate. Children can assist. Once dug a bed requires no further digging. If we lack a garden, we can rent an allotment plot – ask local authorities to provide more for those who can work them, and for post peak oil when they'll be vitally necessary. Enjoy the allotment culture and soil wisdom. Don't forget roof gardens. And some urban housing estates have common vegetable gardens. The soil, the soil's permeability, the clouds and rain and dew, the aquifers beneath a garden, the teeming soil community, belong not just to a home 'owner', but to all of us who, under God, are responsible for our local soil community, and therefore, for soil and water and people everywhere on earth. Many of us can garden only a window box. Even here we do our part, perhaps with parsley or lettuce or onion, or with a potato pot and bird feeder. Everything helps.

Before preparing a bed or larger plot, first study and treasure your sun. Vegetables need plenty of sunshine. Save your sunniest places for them. Only a few, such as land cress and alpine strawberries, grow in shade: like *livesimply* people in consumer societies, they are a small minority. Rotate crops even in a single bed. Some growers still prefer rain fed compost heaps – 'just like grandad'. There are also varieties of bins now available, some wooden, some of recycled plastic, often from local authorities at reduced prices (my three are called 'Rother Rotters'). UK households squander more landfill than any other EC country. Composting reduces landfill and the methane that biodegradable waste generates in landfill. Compost a wide variety of materials: the more the mix the better it decomposes. You can also pick up biodegradable litter on pavements: apple cores, banana skins, the odd tomato. Lear said necessities 'make vile things precious'. There are no vile things, only vile deeds, like littering pavements with things. Gather leaves from beneath trees and put in bags. Leaves and wood chips decay slowly, over several years, yet improve soil structure.

In addition to beds and plots, most of us can 'catch crop' some attractive lettuces, peppers, chard, beets, crimson flowered broad beans, even in roof gardens or in front borders. Even people unfamiliar with vegetable and fruit growing appreciate attractive caught varieties. Whether 'main cropping' or 'catch', always plan for 'the hunger gap', roughly from March to late May, when local food is scarce, rare, and especially precious. The UK, Ireland, and Malta, and all islands, are especially import dependant and vulnerable in late winter. Sow greens and roots that are still around and harvestable in deep winter and early spring. Learn preserving: kilnering, drying, pickles, chutney. Grow nuts, late apples, potatoes and root crops. Kilnering, preserving, and storing, unlike freezing, uses little energy and is a way to live simply in city and country, north and south. Try to 'cook simply' too with as little energy as possible. If we grow and preserve some food, in partial self sufficiency, and if people in the South do the same, we may be similar to the 'good life' organic growers of pre-embargo Cuba. When the Soviet (and USA) oil and fertiliser embargo came they were able to help their fellow Cubans to grow food locally and survive. In the post peak oil transition, cities may become short of food. *Livesimply* people should prepare now to help towns relocalise food production and consumption. Begin now by removing those garden slabs and planting traditional hazel, walnut, sweet chestnut and fruit trees through our cities.

Finally, and very important, leave a wildlife corner for local companions. In a garden grabbing, garden and verge slabbing and paving, earth illiterate culture, these wild creatures deserve space too. Include a pond, or at least a bird bath, and use lots of feeders and bird, hedgehog, and insect homes. Birds live simply. They recycle egg yolks, fat, crusts, skins and leftovers which shouldn't go to landfill, even from flats. And wildlife helps parents, teachers, and catechists to educate children to what is important in life, and to live simply.

Seeds for life

Often unnoticed is the central importance of seeds in the Bible, especially in the Joseph story: 'Buy us and our land for food, and we with our land will be slaves to Pharaoh; and give us seed, that we may live, and not die, and that the land may not be desolate' (Exodus 48.19). Seeds are literally at the root of life – and the transnational chemical giants know it. They buy up small seed

companies, discarding less profitable (in their terms) varieties, genetically modifying others (John Seymour called it 'mutilating'), engineering crops to be resistant to their herbicides, patenting indigenous heirloom varieties – now known as biopiracy, stealing living heirlooms from poor people. At present writing the chemical giants, with a complicit New Labour government and ineffectual opposition, lobby to legalise so-called 'GM coexistence' with organic crops, a known contradiction because of cross-pollination contamination. They lobby for marketing of so-called '99% organic' foods, a thin wedge to introduce diluted crops as virtually organic.

Just two decades ago there were thousands of seed firms, none of which on its own accounted for more than one per cent of the world market. Today the 10 largest seed firms (such as Dupont, Monsanto, Syngenta) control 30 per cent of the world market.²³ But perhaps the worst case of corporate concentration is the GM technology known as Terminator technology, which is currently under development. The first Terminator patent was granted to the US Department of Agriculture and the US corporation Delta and Pine Land (D&PL) in 1998 in the US. Since then different companies have obtained patents for their versions of Terminator technology, and in October 2005 D&PL and the US Department of Agriculture were granted the first European patent on Terminator. Terminator is the genetic modification of plants to make them produce seeds that become sterile in the second generation, so that farmers cannot save seeds to replant for the next harvest and are forced to buy them every year.

In recognition of the serious threats that Terminator technology poses for the food security and livelihoods of the estimated 1.4 billion small-scale farmers who depend on seed saving, the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) established a moratorium on Terminator and other genetic use restriction technologies in 2000. However, this moratorium has repeatedly come under attack by multinational corporations and some pro-GM governments, who want to ensure that when the technology is ready, there are no obstacles in their way.

We can support small farmers by maintaining our opposition to Terminator,²⁴ and incorporating seed saving in our own *lives* simply lifestyles. I am a seed guardian for a lettuce (Emerald) given to the national collection by Sister Barbara of the Carmelite Convent, Ware. I also save a Yellow Ripple Currant tomato, with blight resistance and

world class taste, which cannot be purchased. Join the Heritage Seed Library, Dyfi Valley Seed Savers or the Irish Seed Saver Association.²⁵ Through these associations you can make seed saver pen pals with whom you can swap endangered varieties. Attend seed saver events like Brighton's 'Seedy Sunday' and Grow Organic's 'Potato Days'.

Never without water

Only about three per cent of the earth's water is fresh water. Yet each of the earth's growing population requires about 40 litres per day. Fred Pearce observes that we need a water ethics which 'requires us to find ways of storing water without wrecking the environment; of restoring water to rivers and refilling lakes and wetlands without leaving people thirsty; and of sharing waters rather than fighting over them. It requires us to go with the flow. And to do it before the rivers finally run dry.'²⁶ All religions respect water. Christians are water people. With other religions and spiritual people, therefore, we can make a difference by living simply with water, the cosmic Jordan, wherever we live. Water is God's gift to all people. Unfortunately not all live simply with water. Especially in Africa and Palestine, water flows into a global class system. Timothy Gorringer writes:

On Palestine's West Bank, Israeli settlers have sprinklers to keep their lawns green while Palestinian women queue at taps. Israel has kept its parks green and grown cotton by limiting supplies to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Israeli per capita consumption is three times that of Palestinians. More than half of South Africa's raw water is used for white-dominated commercial agriculture, and half of that water is wasted in poor irrigation practices. About 12 per cent of South Africa's water is for domestic consumption, but of that amount more than half goes into white households, including water for gardens and swimming pools. Sixteen million South African women still have to walk at least one kilometre to get water. Water privatisation in Puerto Rico has meant that poorer communities have gone without water while US bases and tourist resorts have an unlimited supply.²⁷

We mentioned garden ponds. These 'harvest' God's gift of rain, sharing water with wildlife, including birds and mammals and pollinating insects which, in their way, 'rule the world'. Rainfall and

clouds know neither boundaries nor apartheid. We can also harvest water with wood or recycled plastic water butts on our home and on church hall and school downpipes. We can baptise with harvested 'living water', and explain the preciousness of water at our baptism ceremonies. Increasingly people who live simply in the developed world harvest 'grey water' from baths and kitchen, sometimes through a downpipe. This reminds us that some parts of the earth have *only* grey, or untreated, water, and helps us to begin to understand the poverty of others and to be aware of how we can appreciate and live in some sort of solidarity with them. We can share with them, by returning our grey water to aquifers. At our home we collect and carry grey bath and shower water in buckets, returning it to aquifers through dormant grass in winter, and near a thirsty fruit bush in summer. John Fowler, formerly of Christian Aid and now of Farm Crisis Network, worked in Kenya where he learned the preciousness, even rarity of water and rain clouds. John, and Denis Lucey, chair of local World Development Movement and Cafod branches, gladly connect water butts to downpipes at home and church, for the unskilled rest of us. Some people harvest winter rain from roofs, storing it in a cistern beneath the garden, and pumping it back to the bathroom. People in city flat blocks can harvest rain for a common bird bath in a pond. Respect and reverence for and conservation of water is a way we can share and be in solidarity with the world's water-poor people.

Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, suggests famously that we flush loos only intermittently. Never use bottled water. Refuse it when it's offered at meetings: instead fill a cup at taps. The plastic bottles, their manufacture, and the transport of bottled water is one of the more unscrupulous attempts to capitalise on people's need of water. Take some water to conferences and when travelling by bus or train, so you won't be dependant on bottled water. Every slab, bit of concrete, or Leylandii conifer you remove from your garden makes a difference to the earth's water. At an Academic Inn event, Matthew Wilson, an organic fruit farmer, remarked that if we removed one slab, we could grow a fruit tree.

Through the charity Wells for India, Nicholas and Mary Grey and many others help Rajasthan people to harvest water. Wells for India helps local people to harvest monsoon rain in natural watersheds and store water in underground 'taankas', similar to our cisterns, for

homes and schools. In Otavalo in Ecuador, CEPCU (referred to above) is working to recuperate the high mountain *paramo* (moorland above the tree line) which plays a crucial role in retaining rainwater, so that it can filter down to the water table for people to use in the communities below.

Most small-scale farmers in developing countries have no access to irrigation and depend on rainwater for irrigating their crops. This makes them extremely vulnerable to changes in rain patterns, which are becoming more frequent under climate change. A drought can put not only their livelihoods but also their food security at risk. Low-input technologies (such as rain harvesting techniques and small-scale irrigation) can have enormous potential for poverty reduction. Development organisations like Progressio can play a key role in promoting these technologies, while respect for water is something we can learn from India and Africa and water-stressed communities throughout the world.

Conclusion

We began this Comment with Horace Dammers' 'Live simply that all may simply live'. The *livesimply* breakthrough is that you and I in the affluent West actually *do* and *don't do* some things. We live 'with a sense of wholeness, at peace with our earth,' as the Archbishop of Canterbury said. We do more than complain about injustice, we even do more than raise money, we actually live simply here because all things are connected.

And because all things are connected, we begin to see that what we do and don't do has a direct impact on people living elsewhere in our earth community. Living simply connects us with this knowledge, and inspires us to connect our lives with the rest of the world's people: to stand up for their causes, to support their efforts in an unequal world to build lives of sustainable sufficiency. In this, we are not imposing a form of development that serves mainly to further our own economic interests: we are participating in a process of human development that offers a sustainable future to all of the earth's people and our shared planet. Like the Progressio approach to development – which places development workers with local organisations in a mutually beneficial exchange of skills and experiences – living simply is a two-way process. By living simply we can learn from the people of the global South and their indigenous

wisdom. We can learn from other cultures how to live simply here, by planting, for example, our own bioregional equivalents of the Indian prosopis tree, which is drought resistant, nitrogen fixing, and wood, food and medicine providing. And by living simply, we also show our solidarity for the struggles of so many people in the developing world: we show, through our voices and our actions, that we are with them in their efforts to create a sustainable future.

I conclude this Comment with a recent message from the flooding Marshall Islands to the World Council of Churches: 'We do not want your aid. We do not even want fairer trade. We just want you to change your lifestyle.'

Notes

- 1 *Our common future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, Oxford University Press, 1987.
- 2 Susan Baker, Maria Kousis and Dick Richardson (eds) *The politics of sustainable development*, Routledge, 1997.
- 3 Barbara Ward, Lady Jackson, was founder of the International Institute for Environment and Development, and author with René Dubos of *Only one earth* (Pelican, 1972). Barbara Ward championed 'sustainable development' but not in the sense it was later used to promote economic growth at the expense of the environment.
- 4 'Gaia and the global corporations' at www.edwardgoldsmith.com/page22.html (accessed March 2007). See also Paul Kingsnorth, 'The man who got there first,' *The Ecologist*, March 2007, pp46-49.
- 5 See *This is Progress*, an abridged translation of *Populorum Progressio*, Progressio, 2006.
- 6 Nicholas Stern, *The economics of climate change: The Stern Review*, Cabinet Office – HM Treasury, 2007.
- 7 Michael McCarthy, 'This coming winter is already likely to be one of the warmest ever', *The Tablet* (16/23 December 2006), p21.
- 8 From 'Stopping by woods on a snowy evening' by Robert Frost.
- 9 Sir John Houghton, *Weather warning: Why we must take responsibility for the damage we are doing to the earth's climate*, CIIR (Progressio) environmental action leaflet, 2005.
- 10 Tim Flannery, *The weather makers*, Penguin, 2005, p306.
- 11 Tony Juniper, 'Comment', *Earth Matters*, Autumn 2006, p2.
- 12 Mikhail Gorbachev, *Manifesto for the earth: Action now for peace, global justice, and a sustainable future*, Clairview, 2006, p88.
- 13 E O Wilson, *The Creation: An appeal to save life on earth*, W W Norton, 2006.
- 14 Colin Campbell, 'The availability of non-conventional oil and gas', paper prepared for the Office of Science and Innovation, Department of Trade and Industry, London, 2006.
- 15 Second century Jewish Mishna, M. Sheb. 9.2.
- 16 From 'I see His blood upon the rose' by Joseph Plunkett. See also Edward P Echlin, *The cosmic circle: Jesus and ecology*, Columba, 2004, pp107-127, and *Changing climate, changing Church*, Catholics for a Changing Church, 2006, pp18-19.
- 17 See www.biofuelwatch.org.uk
- 18 John Madeley, *Food for all: The need for a new agriculture*, Zed Books, 2002, p4. See also the Progressio Comment *Food sovereignty: The people's alternative* by Ernest Cañada (2006) and Charlotte Hollins, 'Building on success: A new project' in *Friends of Fordhall in association with Fordhall community land initiative*, Spring 2007, p4.
- 19 Alan Durning, *How much is enough? The consumer society and the future of the earth*, Earthscan, 1992, pp137-138.
- 20 Patrick Holden, *One planet agriculture*, Soil Association, 2007, p1.
- 21 Tony Hodgson, *Good food stories: Our choices make the world of difference*, Shephard-Walwyn, 2006.
- 22 Colette Bond, '2700 schools and growing', *The Organic Way*, Winter 2006, p12.
- 23 Ernest Cañada, *Food sovereignty: The people's alternative*, Progressio, 2006, p2.
- 24 Progressio chairs the UK Working Group on Terminator Technology and is actively campaigning to ensure that the CBD moratorium is not lifted. For more information, see Progressio's environmental website www.eco-matters.org and the international Ban Terminator Campaign at www.banterminator.org

- 25 Heritage Seed Library, Garden Organic, Ryton Organic Gardens, Ryton-on-Dunsmore, Coventry CV8 3LG (www.gardenorganic.org.uk). Dyfi Valley Seed Savers, Ecodyfi, 52 Heol Maengwyn, Machynlleth SY20 8DT (www.seedsavers.machynlleth.biz). Irish Seed Saver Association, Capparoo, Scariff, Co Clare, Ireland (www.irishseedsavers.ie).
- 26 Fred Pearce, *When the rivers run dry: What happens when our water runs out?* Transworld, 2006, p351.
- 27 Timothy Gorringe, *Harvest: Food, farming and the churches*, SPCK, 2006, pp78-79.



The *livesimply* project is a radical call to people in the global North to look hard at our lifestyles, and to choose to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor. In this way we can help create a world in which human dignity is respected and everyone can reach their full potential.

Progressio is a member of the *livesimply* network of over 40 organisations and agencies from the Catholic community in England and Wales.

For more information about the *livesimply* project, see www.livesimply.org.uk



Live simply: Let others live

In this Comment, Edward Echlin argues that it is time for people in the global North to recognise the impact that our unsustainable lifestyles are having on people and poverty in the global South. Taking the environment as his theme, he shows that what we do – and don't do – in our lives has a direct impact on people living elsewhere in the earth community. The message is simple: live simply, because all things are connected; live sustainably, so that all people can have sufficient for their needs; and live in solidarity with the world's poor, by taking action for the change that is needed to sustain our common future.

£2

PROGRESSIO
CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES

Progressio is an international charity working to tackle poverty and injustice in developing countries

www.progressio.org.uk

live simply