

THE LAST WORD

Modern-day Chaldeans?

By Jamie Buckingham

I admit to the anger I felt, sitting there in front of the TV. On camera was one of the Arab ambassadors to OPEC. He was commenting on the last increase in the price of oil—and why the Arabs, with all their money, had decided to sock it to us again.

"It's time the American people changed their way of living," he said. "You've had too much for too long. Now you'll find out how the rest of the world lives."

"What audacity," I fumed. "What right does some Arab have to change my life style? They are just jealous over our paved streets, working sewers and kitchens with refrigerators and electric stoves. Now that they control the oil, they're trying to pull us down to their level."

I was angry that someone was tampering with my way of living and with my right to own three cars, a tractor and a pick-up truck.

But after my anger subsided I sat and thought. We *are* a wastrel people. We waste water. Our family throws away enough food scraps each week to feed an entire slum family in Cambodia.

Yet, as Americans we bristle when someone tries to push us around. We're cocky. We're independent. Especially are we independent.

Management doesn't like being pushed around by organized labor. Working men don't like being pushed around by bosses. Women don't like submitting to men—even to husbands. In the church, words like "submission" and "discipleship" send us into a teeth-gnashing fury.

We simply don't like being

pushed around: by the police, the IRS, the Iranians, our elders—even God. To live for the moment is the prevailing passion—to live for self, not for God, not for predecessors or posterity.

In his brilliant book, *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch says it is a "sense of ending" which is giving shape to the world today. Impending disaster has become such an everyday concern that nobody gives much thought to how disaster might be averted. Instead, people busy themselves with survival strategies, measures designed

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to prolong their own lives, or programs guaranteed to ensure good health, peace of mind and sensual gratification.

It's no wonder we hate the Iranians. We hate everyone who would interrupt our last efforts to be happy.

Fiercely independent, we have developed a philosophy—even in our churches—of doing what we please, and what pleases us. Since God wants us to be happy, we preach, then we have the right to that happiness—even at the expense of others.

But what do we do when a handful of Arabs control the oil spigot of the world? We explode. We rattle our sabres in the Persian Gulf and in the name of the Almighty threaten the heathens who would shut off the oil to the kingdom of God.

I asked a fellow Christian why he attended the "Washington for Jesus" rally back in April. He said he had gone to take a stand for God and country. But one wonders: Is God calling on Americans to "stand up" for him or to "bow down" in humility? A careful reading of 2 Chronicles 7:14 might prove embarrassing to hymn-singing demonstrators. Maybe cutting off our oil will help with the answer.

Surely, though, God would not punish us Christians—especially us charismatic Christians—along with the infidels, would he? The oil crisis cannot be from God, can it? Would the God who commissioned us to buy fleets of buses, who told us to go millions of dollars into debt to the world system in order to build air-conditioned churches, who with a wave of his hand established the electronic church—all dependent on oil—would that God also shut off the oil valve to America?

If ever we seemed to have a divine mandate to set up a military blockade in the Persian Gulf, it is now. How else can we please God, who taught us to sing, "Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning, burning, burning"?

Yet the nagging question remains: If God sent the Chaldeans to give his chosen people, the Israelites, a hard time for becoming sloppy and irreverent, is it not possible that once again "men from the east" might be sent by God to call us to task—not only for our hedonistic way of life, but for our attitudes of narcissism and independence?

Or have the watchmen gone inside to watch TV? ☞