

While the issue in this thinksheet is Who gets to shape the question, how come, and how?, I begin by stating that the Christian begins by noting the Christian roots; and you'll not find a more competent and concise statement here than Alan Richardson's "Poor, Rich, Possessions, Wealth" in A THEOLOGICAL WORD BOOK OF THE BIBLE, which he edited. Wealth is a spiritual danger because of its power to divert devotion from God and attention from the needs of "the less fortunate," i.e. social misery. Otherwise (!), it's good, and a divine blessing (more for all, as shalom, than for some as "favor"). In late Judaism, the pious poor (e.g., Jesus' "Blessed are you poor") hope not through material prosperity or political schemes but through direct divine action in soul and society through worship, Torah-attention, mitzvot (deeds done because of, and while remembering, God). The larger-barns rich man fails the test of wisdom because his heart is not where the real treasure is, and the same test applies to all: Jesus is a Wise One, not "a social reformer in any primary sense." Lazarus lives in the lap ("bosom") of luxury in the next life: the rich man had stupidly identified his material possessions and powers as the "good things," the value-center of life, and thus had practiced plutism (wealth-worship), not theism. Jesus' theism implies indifference to possessions: God gives the trusters bread "daily" (L.11.3), and gives hell to the riches-trusters. As beggar, Jesus practiced in purity what he preached, yet was no ascetic: we nonbeggar followers of his have had to adjust his model to our impure mode of living, rationalizing the impurity by leaning hard on the nonascetic quality of Jesus' life ("winebibber and glutton," partygoer with rich friends) and on situational hermeneutics (Jesus' ecstatic eschatologism, the anticipated imminent inbreaking of theocracy). In this most radical sense, only the nonreluctant beggar (e.g., Francis of Assisi) is a first-class Christian, and most of the nonreluctant beggars in history have been Buddhists! To put the same truth as baldly from another direction, virtually all Christians have been and are "rich," and the rest have been and are loafers and welfare-chiselers. (Reluctant begging, to keep body and soul together, is another matter.)

1. Let's grid Jesus' distinctions: "AC" are the HAVE-NOTHINGS, not just the "have-nots." No money-or-property power, and no inner resources (the late-Jewish phrase "poor in spirit" being ironic for "rich toward God," in Jesus' translation). "BD" are the shalomers, the HAVE-EVERYTHINGS who've already entered into the biblical promise of inner and outer riches--including the filthy-rich "evangelicals" now being media-paraded for public delectation and disgust, but also including me and most of the readers of this thinksheet. "AD" are the RICH POOR, the unworldly saints God bless 'em. "CB" are the POOR RICH, the Lazaruses of this world, against whom the prophets and Jesus railed. Let's "do Bible" and "do theology" with this grid as aid.

		persons	
		poor	nonpoor
p o u t e r	outer	A	B
	inner	C	D

2. Now let's work on the question-shaping, eliminating all other relevant questions (e.g., How eliminate poverty?), concentrating on causation. "Situation definition," the first stage in attacking a problem and therefore in planning, must include root-causes. How did poverty come to be? is dialectical with How can poverty be caused to cease to be?

over

3. "Poverty" is an abstraction for "poor people." One cause of poverty is desire: some of the poor want to be poor, and we should let them be no matter why they want to be, at least as far as their parasitism is socially insignificant. For our purpose here, then, this reduces "the poor" to "the *reluctant* poor-in-relation-to-outer-riches" ("riches," here, meaning worldly power: money, real-and-other-nonmonetary property, and "connections"--i.e., the power to move matter and energy toward oneself, to one's own advantage as one understands advantage). Now, the reluctant poor either do or don't have inner wealth: some do, some don't. Those who do may come to provide the ideology and base for an eco-balanced and an inner/outer-balanced life-style which we now so desperately need models of: those who don't are the most properly called "poor," i.e. those who have virtually nothing inside or outside....But can't we, in shaping the blame-question, deal only with box "A" on the grid (above)? Obviously not, because "A" (the merely outwardly poor) is an abstraction: real poor are always the poor-because-of; if it's "because they want to be," obviously there's no blaming issue, no locus of culpability because no culpability....Let's now reduce "the poor" to class "A" reluctant: those who are in worldly poverty and don't want to be (setting aside the issue of whether they should want to be). And let's assume this class should not exist, at least the subclass those-in-worldly-poverty-who-don't-want-to-be-and-should-not-want-to-be. Can we shape a *nonloaded* question as to how they came to their present condition, looking toward their deliverance from their present condition?

4. These shapes are loaded: (a) Who's to blame for poverty of this sort? (b) How come some have "more of this world's goods" than others do? (c) ....less....? (d) How come we don't all have the same? (e) Why are there such great differences? (f) Why are there differences in material status? Even the cleanest etiological shape--How did this poverty come to be?--is loaded with attention to the material dimension of life (and gets, from Hinduism and Buddhism, the karma answer, rather than the profounder and comprehensive "sin" answer of the Bible). Let's grid etiology here: *Poverty is*

	persons	
	poor	nonpoor
<i>self-caused</i>	A	B
<i>others-caused</i>	C	D

"A" poor say We're to blame for our condition, and "B" nonpoor agree with them. Class "C" are the pass-the-buck poor (It's not our fault that we're poor), and class "D" agree with them. ....Think of the pejorative slogans used for these classes! E.g., "D" is bleeding-heart liberals (but also Amos, whom we read last night--5Nov78--in family devotion, and Mark said "What a sensitive social conscience!"--so much so that he, identifying his and God's feelings, predicts doom on all power within range).

5. Instead of serving the ideologies and self-entrapping in the appropriate slogans of "B" or "D," the churches and seminaries should be forums and bases for transideological facing of the full range of realities distributed over the above two grids, which I created as cures for the worst disease in economics discussion, viz. *concentric-contextual impoverishment*, the failure to attain and maintain awareness of the full range of etiological questions transecting the full range of social realities, and/or the failure to become and remain aware of the full range of social realities: thus, the impasse of hard-headed worldly types and soft-hearted churchly types--an unreal but real enough secular/sacred, laic/cleric chasm.