

Devout rabbis of critical intelligence put quotation marks on "Moses" and "Jesus"--whether actually, or only in their minds--to indicate that these two mytho-historical characters are, in the light of critical history, shadowy figures both despite, and to some extent because of, their being the personal origin-centers of, respectively, Judaism and Christianity. Compensating for this loss of bright, sharp focus, the old picture-book availability of Moses and Jesus to the uncritical mind, are (1) a gain in intellectual modesty in affirming and denying, (2) a consequent potential gain in Jewish/Christian relations and (3) in openness to light from contiguous studies (secular history, linguistics, social psychology, philosophy, anthropology), and (4) a profoundly enriched biblical interpretation ("hermeneutics" and "hermeneutic")....This thinksheet raises some critical questions on the use of "Jesus" vis-a-vis MONEY by, e.g., Washington DC's Church of the Savior, the Sojourner Community, and (in particular, the direct references in this thinksheet) Doris Donnelley's "Christians and Their Money" (XnC 27Apr83).

1. I challenge the easy identification of "following Jesus" with (Ac.4.19) "obeying God." Rather, what is the "dynamic equivalence" of our following God and Jesus' following God? (Fellow-students of mine, Bob Bratcher and Gene Nida, came up with this phrase to describe the translation principle Bob used to make "The Good News Bible.") To use a Fosdick subtitle, what shall we put under "abiding truths" and what under "changing categories"? For "imitating Jesus" cannot mean, in light of modern knowledge and understanding, merely repeating, copying, Jesus. Or merely following what lie in the Gospels as representing his verbal instructions to his original followers.

2. "Catenism," a particular form of scribism, is (1) stringing together, from sacred books, quotes on a single theme, for edificatory/rhetorical purposes, and then (2) structuring the catena into a doctrine-dogma. In Talmud, Judaism does (1), but Jewish theology tries to avoid (2); whereas in NT and the Fathers, Xny tends to move from (1) to (2), especially in periods/groups of rigidification (e.g., Scholasticism, "Spiritual Writings," and Fundamentalism). The XnC art. (above) uses the usual Jesus-and-money catena: Mt.6.24;19.21;26.6-13; M.12.42-44; L.6.20;12.15-21,33 (+, though without ref., Mt.5.3). (This type of scriptural sanction, viz. authority by sententious-sayings collections, is well-known in China: Kung-fu-tzu ("Confucius says"), Lao-tzu, and "The Sayings of Mao-tze-tung.") It's sometimes called "proof-texting," and was powerfully nailed by Abelard in his "Sic et Non" (the Fathers set in yes/no contradictory columns). Two of the critical principles questioning this hermeneutic are (1) *argumentum e silentio* (scriptures being silent, unlike modern historiography's ideal, except where making points), and (2) *vaticinium ex eventu* (sayings' wordings needing to be examined for shapings given in oral and written tradition, authors and redactor's not having modern historiography's *ipsissima verba* concern, i.e., to give us the "veriest words" of the original sayings). But for this thinksheet, I set aside these critical concerns to see what Jesus-and-money looks like if (as by Donnelly et al) we accept uncritically the sayings' wordings in our Gospels.

3. These days we have a low opinion of leaders who effect followers' dependency on them--e.g., the Rev. Jim Jones and his 913 corpses. Jesus did this (or anyway "Jesus" did this), impoverishing his disciples on earth and promising them "treasures in heaven" (and Luther's 95 Theses were published because of his being enraged that the Catholic Church's indulgences were doing it). Throughout Xn history a few groups and quite a few individuals (Francis d'Assisi, Peter Maurin/Dorothy Day, Taizé Community, Teresa of Calcutta) have more or less literally followed "Jesus" in "evangelical poverty," making a dramatic witness counterbalancing the mass of Christians' unexamined lives on the subject of worldly possessions (\$, as a symbol). Ignatius Loyola demanded dependency in the interest of converting/killing Protestants. I believe God sometimes honors those who fail to trust "with all their minds," i.e., ^{with} trust mindlessly, in defiance of common sense; but to run a guilt-trip on mindful Christians is moralistic, mindless, and unconscionable.

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4. Honest, intelligent Christian thinking on \$ requires untangling biblical concern for "the poor" from romanticism about them. Here are a few fingers to help with the untangling:

(1) Rhetorically, the poor are the most useful class for embarrassing "the rich," i.e., both the filthy rich (loaded phrase!) and the middle class. "Just LOOK what you've done to...!" So "Repent, and receive the Justice-Rule of God!" Good clean fight, this. The Hebrew Prophets. Jn. Baptist. Jesus. Responsible confrontation toward justice throughout the ages, under biblical mandate. My record shows I'm for it, and have paid some price for my witness. Indeed, I consider that this issue is, for biblical persons (Jews and Christians who yearn for and lean toward the Rule of God), undebatable. ISSUES: (a) So, here and now, what action? (b) With whom? (c) Using what pressures, internal (motivations) and social (sanctions) and political (media and organizations)? For a good, blurred, and bad use of this rhetoric, see Ron Sider's RICH CHRISTIANS IN AN AGE OF HUNGER.

(2) Devotionally, the spirit of abandon (the height of adoration) has led many "saints" to wild independence of \$. This numinous romanticism has read the "evangelical poverty" passages as invitations to world-abandonment rather than to world-responsible action. The Jesus impulse (his version of the messianic impulse) was, in his perception, world-responsible: far from abandoning the world, he was calling it (especially if not exclusively his folk, the Jews) to such vulnerability as God requires for the Gift of the Kingdom. In early Christian monasticism and its lineal decedents we see this transmogrified, through gnostic influence, into a theophilosophy and life-style--in my view, a perversion of Jesus. Donnelly as an expert in this spirtualia colors her view of \$ with it and comes up with a naughty-money article (though she denies the naughtiness is in the \$).

(3) The romantic notion of God's favoritism to the poor needs debunking if we are to deal realistically with Xny and \$. Once granted theological status (i.e., as a fact about God), it (1) loses its historical grounding as a call of God to man to make a fact, viz., justice, and (2) gains illegitimate ideological status as a proposition sanctioning "liberation theology," viz., that we biblical people should be where God (who says "I am holy, be thou holy") is: identification with the poor. Assuming all that, all that remains is, How identify? Only with the passive poor or also with the revolutionary poor? And away we go into the political theology now fashionable in WCC, NCC, and many denominational bureaucracies. I'm not stating a position here; I'm only saying ideas have consequences: "the foot bone is connected to the head bone." And we'd better be as critical of the top bone as the bottom bone. So far, I've seen no gospel-and-\$ writing that is. ...A few chewy quotes on this: "We must be kind because God is not" (Camus); "God must have loved the common people, seeing as how he made so many of them" (Ab. Lincoln); "Lord, we've been your chosen people long enough: couldn't you please choose some other people?" (current Jewish humor); "The poor's most implacable and unwearying enemy is their Father in Heaven" (Mark Twain, see my #1705).

(4) As an article and passion of faith, I believe (as in the Magnificat and many other biblical passages) God ultimately elevates the lowly and denigrates the highly--but the Church has anticipated the divine action by elevating the voluntary poor into high status among "the saints." The thin-purse is poor in \$ power, the celibate is poor in genital fulfilment (and in its conjoint spirituality), the bureaucratic submissive ("vow of obedience") is poor in decisional freedom. What a perversion to imagine all this to be a "higher" way, as does all pop Xny except Protestantism (and, now, even some Protestants are agog about one or more of these copouts). And all this life-denying zeal "in Jesus' name!".... Jesus' Resurrection says, as central symbol of Xny, God elevates the lowly.

(5) A thicket of questions here, here a few twigs: (a) When/where has "identification with the poor" been "good news to the poor"? When/where have "the rich" been "good news to the poor"? My only point in beginning such a series of questions: The utter complexity and ambiguity, concealed by Donnelly's phrase, "the poor way--the gospel way."

(6) There is a "cost and joy of discipleship," but beating God's folk with excessive guilt involves a cost without joy. Humane guilt is functional to health, wholeness, happiness. The dysfunctional guilt of biblical literalism on \$ bears only bitter fruit.