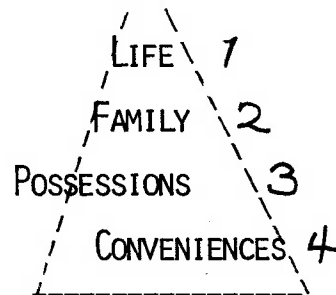


Luke 14.33 says that if you have (own, possess) anything, you're not a disciple of Jesus. Most people on earth at that time were virtually in that condition--as are most people today: than the rich, one step less in to discipleship. The commentaries either skip this verse or use various stratagems to dull its violent edge. This thinksheet faces the verse in light of Jesus on "the rich" and "the poor."

1. The gospels, in varying intensity, present levels of renunciation--Luke's language thereon being the most violent and (doubtless) closest to Jesus' own speech (which was so violent that it left him dead and, just before that, almost discipleless). Here is a visualization of the degrees of demand:

I, JESUS, DEMAND THAT YOU GIVE UP:



Minimal Christianity is level #4, and the minimal inconvenience is giving up part of Sunday a.m. to come to public worship: all Christians are regular about Sun.a.m. worship (though of course all Sun.a.m. worshippers are not Christians). (I'm being objective, not dogmatic, about this: The only distinctive thing Christians do--different from the rest of the populace--is Sun.a.m. worship.)

At level #3, Christians forsake some of their possessions. Dennis the Menace, upon leaving Sun.a.m. worship: "A pretty good show for a nickel." In degrees of rigor, some level-#3 Christians unload 10% of their gross, some 10% of their net, some their investment portfolios, some their leisure appurtenances, some their real estate, some everything (as St.Francis' vow never again to let money touch his hand)...At level #2, some walk away from their families, others swear off acquiring family (for a motive different from pagan monasticism)... At level #1, some give up life itself "for Jesus' sake": at this level, all disciples are already dead and buried or cremated.

2. By mid-4th-c., level #2 Christians held virtually all positions of power in the Church; by c.-end, true also of the State (the Roman Empire). But the Reformers moved back or up or down to level #3: clergy marriage was the greatest social revolution of 16th-c. Europe. Traditionally, Catholics have considered #2 superior in gospel-faithfulness, and Protestants #3 in its non-radical form (the radical form of #3 being a literal life-reading of the total possessions-renunciation flatly stated in L.14.33--a position impossible to those with, or contemplating being with, family).

3. Unlike Buddhism (and much of Western as well as Eastern Christian monasticism), the NT does not preach that renunciation is virtuous: rather, Jewish-fashion, it preaches that all we are and have is to be available to God, including our plans for being and having: under both creation and grace, we are "stewards" or "trustees" of all God's invisible and visible gifts. Our Lord, accordingly, asks us one by one to be open to guidance as, e.g., the soldier is open to command-obedience. (The metaphor was developed, even within the NT canon, as a sanction against marriage; and finally developed into the extended analogy that is the constituting literature of the Jesuits.)

4. The nuttiest form of level #1 is deliberately getting yourself killed "for Jesus' sake" (as did some ancient martyrs, expecting thereby to move from gospel poverty--literally giving up everything, even life--to getting rich with "treasures in heaven"). In this, what they weren't nutty about is this: Our Lord's primary concern vis-a-vis rich/poor is spiritual, not material. The farmer planning a barn-expansion program is condemned, in the parable, not for being (materially) rich but for failing to be rich toward God--the obverse being his failure to perceive that he was (spiritually) poor toward God. In a project I did for Herman Kahn (Hudson Inst.), I predicted that Latin Ameri-

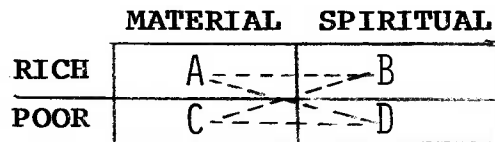
OVER

can priests, then bishops, would marxize Jesus, using the dominical sanction to bless the (materially) poor and curse the (materially, "capitalistically") rich. Now, 20 years later (mid-'84), Latin-American "liberation theology" is well developed, providing some permanent gifts to Christian consciousness (albeit also some ephemeral marxistic effluvia). What for Jesus was secondary (though DEFINITELY NOT unimportant!) has become primary, and the Pope has rightly condemned the distortion (while underlining the IMPORTANCE of the economic factor in the life and work of the Church and the Christian).

5. "Need" is a slippery term in rich/poor argumentation. Obviously, the body needs water; but one of our children would be a vegetable if he'd been given water when a severe accident caused cranial edema (brain-swelling): for days he screamed for water which he needed NOT to have!...Advanced yoga says you need NOT to have oxygen in your brain: oxygen fasting for "deeper" meditation (which I experienced by having the oxygen removed from my brain for 2½ minutes). Hindic metaphysics behind and within yoga assumes that our primary needs are spiritual, not material: the reverse of 19th-c. mechanistic materialism, including Marxism. Our society is sufficiently marxized-freudianized to make it "obvious" that material needs come first: God, if coming to the hungry, must come in the form of bread. In other cultures (including the Bible), this is not at all "obvious." Yet in our culture it's so "obvious" as not to be discussable: anybody proposing it for discussion is antediluvian or at least philistine (+, doubtless, "pharisaic"). ...More evidence that "need" is slippery: (1) Ecosphere needs are increasingly conflicting with the "needs" of homo sapiens; (2) The Palestinians "need" a homeland?; (3) The elderly "need" to be kept alive at least to the extent of their wallets?; (4) The rich "need" adequate increment-incentives for investment?; (5) The poor "need" to share in the riches of the rich? I'm distressed by the propaganda use of "need" parading as God's truth and inflating egos with arrogance.

6. When-where I was growing up, "What is he worth?" = "What are his total assets?" = "What does he own?" *Having* was more impressive than *doing*, *belonging* was important but less so than having and doing, and *being* (emphasized in the Eastern Hemisphere and now, in Am., in "New Age" folks) was scarcely thought of except in moral terms ("character," the prime determinant of both doing and having). Focus on having divides the world into haves/have-nots, and both Capitalism and Communism operate within this focus, as does (unfortunately) much of "liberation theology." Belonging (primarily to God) is the biblical control-focus (on which see #1863).

7. Hebrew's 4 terms for poor/poverty--all in Ps.82.3f--are virtually synonyms, interchangeable; of Greek's 2 terms (in NT), one means low-income and the other means destitute; all 6 are used both physically and (for invisible poverty, "toward God") metaphorically, as here:



**AB** is shalom, outer & inner riches.

See Elsie McKee's PhD thesis on "liturgical almsgiving" (U.Geneva, Sw.; she teaches at ANTS). But Jesus

never tires of warning that "A" tends to subvert "B" in cultural captivity: the gospel tends to get harnessed to vested ("establishment") interests. Wealth is a form of power, and power easily slips over into maintaining itself by oppression, which demoralizes both oppressed and oppressor--so the oppressor rationalizes the oppression and corrupts worship into supporting the oppressor's life-style (and so the Prophets cry divine punishment for the evil conspiracy of liturgical idolatry and social injustice). So "AB" tends to deteriorate into....

**AD**, "rich in things and poor in soul." Watch out, or what you own will own you! Then you "go away sorrowful," you trust in your wealth increasing and your prayer-and-trust in God decreasing (as also probably your "almsgiving," "charity," material "benevolence," in Judaism the twin of prayer in the life of the pious). Jesus may ask you to reverse this--which is **BC**, the condition of most "saints."

**CD** is the pits: the oh-so-common double poverty.