

Reflections on The Camel in the Needle's Eye

READINGS

The rich man is rich precisely because he does not know how to give, because he does not know how to share. If he had known how to share he wouldn't be rich any longer. He who has shut himself into a world of defensiveness and pride cannot enter into the kingdom of sharing. The key to the kingdom, the only key, is openness: to open one's arms, one's eyes, one's heart, because the kingdom of God is just like that—the place of meeting, of communion, of peace, and of giving.

We are ill at ease before Jesus and his Kingdom because we feel incapable of leaving human security to follow him. We are afraid when we consider what he might ask of us. We do not trust that his love will satisfy our deepest aspirations. We are afraid to give in to him even a little. But still he says: "Follow me; do not be afraid; leave everything; sell everything and become, with me, a prophet of peace."

But we are rich and we feel so far away.

We feel within ourselves the sky-scrapers, the slums, the world of darkness—this mud up to the knees, up to the neck, which stops us from getting up and going forward. We don't seem able to follow Jesus and then we are sad, even despairing. It is hard to be faced with ourselves; with our mediocrities, our



The Transfiguration, 6th century mosaic. St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai.

cowardices, our fears and weaknesses, and all this when we feel in our hearts aspirations toward peace, universal love and the struggle for justice. It is hard to feel the weight of all the mud and mediocrity which stops us from moving.

—Jean Vanier, in *Be Not Afraid*, pp. 22-23¹

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By the time of adolescence, money has taken on still greater significance. Primarily, a person discovers that he needs more of it. He wants to be independent, and that means he must himself buy much of what had been provided him. He is becoming conscious of the other sex, and that stimulates the desire to be attractive. He soon learns that money is a real factor in attractiveness. He becomes increasingly aware that with money come power and status.

Money comes to have a direct bearing on the deep emotional experiences of life. There seems to be, for instance, a relationship between money and happiness. A study on happiness by the National Opinion Center at the University of Chicago showed that there is a positive correlation between earning good money (or possessing wealth) and happiness, especially for people who have reached the age of forty. Could it be that the happy-go-lucky spirit of the ne'er-do-well is just a front?

Karl Menninger points out that to be able to give money away is indicative of mental health. "Generous people are rarely mentally ill people." On the other hand, stinginess is usually a sign of neurosis. It is a mental attitude that bears little relation to the amount of money one may have. The person with millions may live in just as desperate fear that he won't have enough as the person who will be thrown out on the street if the relief check doesn't come in time to pay the rent. Menninger said to one patient, "What on earth are you going to do with all that money?" The patient replied, "Just worry about it, I suppose!" The doctor went on, "Well, do you get

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that much pleasure out of worrying about it?" "No, but I get such terror when I think of giving some of it to somebody." The terror was real.

—Martin E. Carlson, in *Why People Give*, pp. 15-16¹

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We endow the dollar
with power it does not possess
we allow yearning for it
to wreck our most cherished dreams
we cherish control of it
and warp our human caring
we let worship of it
squeeze the meaning out of life
we are trapped by the magnetism of it
and stupify our minds
we avow love for it
and destroy our very souls
and in the end we die for it
enthroning it as king

Lois Shank Hertzler²

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The church so often either ignores the subject of money—which symbolizes our greed and lack of joy—or starts at the wrong end of dealing with the problem, by raising up technical matters of estate planning—wills and deferred giving, building campaigns, often misdirected stewardship campaigns and fund-raising—rather than starting with the biblical and psychological bases. In the Ministry of Money it is our exciting discovery that when the following order is followed, both the awareness of the

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sin of greed and the grace of joy release the Christian to the fuller potential of growth in discipleship and obedient healing power. The order we find helpful is:

1. *Obedience to the Word.* Live into the theological and biblical truth of God's second most recurring scriptural theme, money—its deadly dangers and its life-giving potential.

2. *Psychological.* Live into the emotional feeling tones of this often taboo subject from its buried tape messages of the past which often block, bind, and enslave to the freedom of giving, starting with the tithe, and on into the joy of giving that heals and releases love.

3. *Sociological.* Live into the brokenness and suffering of others around us in society, including Third World: the hardness of heart (greed) can be transformed in this profound way through this selfless reaching out into new relationships and concerns.

4. *Technology.* Live into the realities of the whole household of gifts and riches God has given us to share and manage—His Kingdom building through possessions, services, and presence in responsible estate planning.

—Don McClanen, in "Another of the Paradoxes of Money"¹

QUESTIONS

1. Compared with the majority of people in the world, most Americans are "rich." Does this mean that we cannot enter the kingdom of God? Explain your answer.

2. Someone has suggested that we are "rich" if we have more money than we need for the necessities of life. How much money does this actually represent in today's world? Is there any principle in the teaching of Jesus to help us answer this question?

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3. Would you be willing to discuss your personal financial affairs with two or three members of your church? What does your answer tell you about your feelings toward the church? About your feelings toward money?

4. What is your most painful and your most pleasant memory concerning money before you were ten years old? What do these memories tell you about your present attitude toward money?

5. What "messages" did you receive from your parents about money and possessions? How do these influence your life today?

MEDITATION

"Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee." (Isaiah 26:3)

I remember once more the blessings that you constantly provide, Lord God, and consciously let body, mind and spirit come to rest in you. In the quiet of my heart I begin to know deep tranquility. As I affirm love and trust, a sense of welcome peace comes to my whole being.

Silence for relaxation and renewal

In the silence, I confidently await inspiration and direction. Being in touch with you, my God, clarifies thoughts and feelings, and brings the light of your gracious love to the dark areas of life. A new hope lifts my spirit.

Dear Lord, teach me to trust you more completely, and to see the folly of faith in transitory things. I want to use my possessions, rather than let them use me. Help me to learn from my mistakes, and forgive myself and others. For I know that with you all is possible, forgiveness is complete, and wholeness of life a reality. Bless all persons everywhere with the joy and fulfillment of your love.