



The Good Shepherd. Sculpture by Walker Hancock, carved in pink granite by Roger Morigi. Chapel of the Good Shepherd, Washington Cathedral.

Reflections on What Does It Profit?

READINGS

At the weekend workshop on money, April 14-16, 1978, fifteen men and women and the three leaders—Don McClanen, Allen Hollis and Alan Green—met together to discuss money and its impact on our lives. On Friday evening each participant was asked to say why he or she had come to the workshop and what s/he wanted to get out of being there. Each reply was unique, but each had one thing in common: a tie to feelings about money that went much deeper than a bookkeeper's reckoning of dollars and cents.

Some felt fear—of debt, of asking for something, of failure—others were burdened with guilt, for having too much, for being selfish, not sharing enough of their abundance. There was anger, too, at a sense of being cheated, and grandiosity at the stunning power money was thought to possess over the lives of others.

Money was obviously vested with great importance and loaded with the kind of emotional freight peculiar to symbols—those things in our culture that are believed to possess great power, power beyond the thing itself.

Much of the symbolic power of money stems from messages we have received, spoken or unspoken, from our parents or significant others in our early lives. At the Workshop, partic-

ipants were asked to write down for their own consideration and, if they were willing, for later sharing with others, their responses to the following three questions:

- (1) What is your most painful memory concerning money before you were ten?
- (2) What is your most joyful and pleasant memory concerning money before you were ten?
- (3) What messages did your parents give you about money before you were ten?

Everyone was then asked to reflect on these responses and to think of them in relation to why they had come to the Workshop. In many instances, very important light was shed on present money problems from those early experiences and messages.

Some people receive ambiguous signals from their parents in early life. On the one hand they may be praised warmly for earning and saving, yet be scolded for stinginess and selfishness because they are not generous with younger brothers or sisters. Or they may be encouraged to grow up to be rich and successful, only to hear in Sunday school or from family Bible reading that the poor are blessed and it is easier for a camel to pass through the needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

All of our lives are filled with messages about money, and because money plays such a key role in our culture—it even determines very importantly the “class” to which we belong in a highly mobile yet hardly classless society—and any contradictions in those messages heighten and exacerbate our feelings about it. Even when we have plenty, we do not experience freedom, but rather another kind of bondage.

Yet as Christians we are called to be free, in Christ. What kind of freedom have we then when we are afraid to discuss money freely, even—perhaps especially—among our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Perhaps the most moving experience of the weekend for all of us was to face that fear squarely, talk about our concerns

openly, and find that in affirming those "parts" of ourselves we disliked or were ashamed of, we were not only not judged, but we gained control over feelings and actions we thought were beyond us.

Fear, guilt, anger, greed, selfishness—all are real. At one time or another in our lives we all experience them when money is concerned, and they add strength to its power when they are unacknowledged. But when we name them for what they are, accept them and ourselves for what they and we are, money more easily becomes a tool of our freedom, rather than a symbol of our bondage.

These are the truths towards which we worked over the weekend.

—Alan Green, Reflections on a Wellspring Money Workshop¹

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D. H. Lawrence's short story, "The Rocking Horse Winner," centers around Paul, a little English boy, who lives with his family in affluent circumstances, which they cannot afford. The father is a gentleman and the mother is a lady; both have very expensive tastes. Although both parents work, there is a chronic shortage of money and they cannot make enough to "keep up." The house becomes haunted by the unspoken phrase: "There must be more money! There must be more money!" Paul and his sisters live under the pall of this unspoken phrase. The mother contends that they do not have enough money because the family is unlucky. Little Paul tells his mother that he feels lucky, but his mother only laughs at him. While riding his big rocking horse, he keeps asking for the clue to "luck." He suddenly learns that if he races his rocking horse fast enough, the names of the winners of forthcoming horse races come mysteriously to him. He places bets through Bassett, the gardener, and wins again and again. Although he continues to win, it becomes ever more difficult for him to elicit the name of the winner. Finally he dies from

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exhaustion in a frantic but last successful attempt to force the name of the winner from his unknown source. Paul has been sending his winnings anonymously to his mother and only at his death does she learn the source of these funds. The little boy had given his life to get the house to stop whispering: "There must be more money!"

"The Rocking Horse Winner" is a painful commentary on family life in our society. No doubt, it takes a certain degree of affluence for people to complain about "there not being enough," especially when in the attempt to "keep up with the Joneses" no amount ever is enough. Possibly much of our buying, spending, and selling in this peculiarly affluent world is governed by a real or fancied sense of deprivation.

—James A. Knight, in *For the Love of Money*, pp. 114-115¹

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Money and its allure
has marked the centuries
with a plethora of feelings
longing for it
we have lied
desiring it
we have cheated
for greed of it
we have killed
in the sharing of it
we find happiness
in the generous giving of it
we find satisfaction
in the tithing of it
we find joy
in acknowledging the rightful ownership of it
we find God

Lois Shank Hertzler²

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"The characters which accompany wealth," said Aristotle, "are plain for all to see. The wealthy are insolent and arrogant, being mentally affected by the acquisition of wealth, for they seem to think that they possess all good things; for wealth is a kind of standard of value of everything else so that everything seems purchasable by it." This is true not merely of individuals but of societies as well. The true "Law" of our day is the law of wealth and material power. The fate of men, indeed of mankind itself, depends on the laws of economics. It is the market that in reality determines the existence, indeed the survival, of all men and dictates the ideals and the actualities of social life. In our time the struggle of mercy is, then, not against rigid and inflexible morality but against a different and more subtle hardening of heart, a general loss of trust and of love that is rooted in greed and belief in money. What irony that this faith in money, this trust in the laws of the market, this love of wealth and power, should have come to be identified with Christianity and freedom in so many minds, as if the freedom to make money were the freedom of the sons of God, and as if (Bloy pointed this out) money had demonically usurped the role in modern society which the Holy Spirit is supposed to have in the Church.

The love of power and gain becomes the demonic pseudo-pneuma which leads men and institutions, ostensibly "Christian," to trample on the hearts of their fellow men, to destroy primitive social structures which had a semblance of equity, beauty, and order, leaving in their place nothing but slums built out of gasoline cans and ultimate degradation. Obedience to this "spirit" and to the social values which it inspires, whether in marketing nations or in totalistic societies, is servitude to an inhuman banality that is blind to the most elementary human instincts and insensitive to the most fundamental contacts (the infinitely banal "sanity" of an Eichmann, and the hideous caricature which was his "obedience"!). Our whole future, the very survival of humanity, appears mortgaged and *closed* by this demonic legalism, this blasphemous caricature of "order."

Can the power of evangelical mercy possibly break through this iron ring of satanic determinism? We must believe that it can or else we are not fully Christians.

—Thomas Merton, in *Love and Living*, pp. 217-218¹

ASSIGNMENT

Read Luke 12

Write a three-page autobiography which deals with the meaning of money in your life. These are questions you might want to address in your account:

What is your happiest memory in connection with money?
What is your unhappiest memory?

What role did money have in your childhood? What attitude did your mother have toward money? What attitude did your father have? What was your attitude toward money as a child? Did you feel poor? Or rich? Did you worry about money?

What was your attitude toward money as a teenager? What are your memories of this period?

What role did money play in your life as a young adult? As a parent? At age forty-seven? fifty-four? sixty-one? sixty-eight? . . . Did your attitude or feelings shift at different stages in your life?

What is your present financial status? How do you feel about it? What is your monthly income? What are your other assets? What will your income be at age sixty-five? seventy-five? eighty? Will you inherit money? Do you think about that? What do you consider responsible planning for the future? What is hoarding? At what point is security a valid issue? At what point is it invalid?

Are you generous or stingy with your money? Do you spend money on yourself? If so, do you do it easily? Do you feel guilty about the money you have? Do you feel grateful? Do you count your money? Do you take risks with your money? Do you gamble with your money? How? Do you "throw it away"? How? Do you worry about money? Do you have

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feelings of anger or resentment about money? When? Be specific.

When you dine out with friends and there is a single check, are you the one to pick it up? Or do you make sure that you pay your share, including the tax and tip? If not, what do you think this might tell you about yourself?

Do you tend to be more on the giving end of things, or on the receiving end? How does this make you feel?

If you lacked money, how would you feel about having others help pay your rent, or treat when you were not in a position to reciprocate?

If you had money, how would you feel about subsidizing a friend's rent, or paying more than your share of things? What would you want in return? How would you feel if that friend then spent money on something that in your value system was "extravagant"?

Can the poor and the rich live happily together? If your answer is "yes," what do you think it requires of each? If your answer is "no," why did you come to this conclusion?

—Elizabeth O'Connor, in *Letters to Scattered Pilgrims*, pp. 7-8¹

QUESTIONS

1. If you were a preacher today, would you put a greater emphasis on faith or works? Give reasons for your answer.

2. Explain the definition of religion given in James (1:27) in your own words. What are the strengths and weaknesses to this approach to religion?

3. James suggests that using our money to care for those in need is one way for the individual to deal with the problem of wealth. What are some other practical suggestions?

4. James writes in a way that tends to make the rich feel guilty about their wealth. Can you identify any feelings of guilt in connection with your own attitude toward money? How

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can guilt be used as an instrument of change and growth in our lives?

5. What specific steps can the Christian community take to erase economic distinctions in the membership? Why is it so difficult to take these steps?

MEDITATION

*"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."
(Matthew 6:21)*

God of love and wisdom, speak through my thoughts and feelings in this time of prayer. Guide and encourage the complex process of turning from reliance on earthly treasure toward trust in you. Help me to know and develop the inner resources that are indestructible and that really matter. When longstanding habits and thought patterns need to be changed, help me use the courage and good judgment that are within, for I am made in your strong and loving image. Let me see clearly the solid things to build on. Free me from discouragement, and from trying to fool myself, or others, or you.

Lord, thank you for guiding each of us on the journey toward wholeness. Thank you for your patience and forgiveness as we work to develop wholesome, healthy attitudes toward money and things, and to act on them. May all your children respond to the gift of your love, take hold of the eternal life to which you call us, and know the joy of living. In the name of our savior, Jesus the Christ, thank you.

Quiet for contemplation