

Money Changes Everything¹

Mark 10:17-31 Then and Now

by Daniel Ethier

¹ The title *Money Changes Everything* is from a song by Cyndi Lauper.

Jesus' encounter with the rich man and his teaching on the dangers of wealth lie within a part of Mark's gospel which tries to bring out who Jesus really is and what it really means to follow him along the way.

Mark 10:17-31 breaks naturally into four parts. First there is a story about a rich man who refuses a call to follow Jesus in verses 17-22. Then Jesus teaches his disciples about the danger of wealth in verses 23-27, and the rewards of renunciation in verses 28-30. Finally there is a saying about the first and last in verse 30.²

All three synoptic gospels have this story about the rich man and the teachings that follow it (see Mt 19:16-30 and Lk 18:18-30). Yet it probably did not come to Mark in the tradition as a single unit.

Verse 31 appears in Matthew and Luke in completely different contexts (see Mt 20:16 and Lk 13:30). This is most likely an independent saying that Mark has appended to the rest.³ Verses 28-30 do not go well with what comes before them. They mention possessions and relationships, but never mention wealth. Mark probably added “for the sake of me and the gospel” in verse 29, “now in this time” and “with persecutions” in verse 30, and the list of things received a hundredfold. Peter's question in verse 28 was probably added by Mark as well to introduce what follows.⁴

If there is an authentic saying of Jesus behind verses 28-30, it would most likely be a combination of the versions in Matthew and Luke:

There is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, who will not receive a hundredfold, and in the age to come eternal life.

In verses 23-27, Mark has probably added verses 23a, 24, 26, and 27. “Look” in verses 23 and 27, “amazed” in verse 24, and “astonished” in verse 26 are all Markan. The question “Who then can be saved?” in verse 26 is in the vocabulary of the early church. Only the sayings in verses 23b and 25 are likely to be authentic sayings of Jesus.⁵ Mark has created the rest as a setting for these sayings, and to help interpret them.⁶

In verses 17-22, “as he set forth on his way” in verse 17, “looked at him with affection” in verse 21, and “for he was one who had many possessions” in verse 22 are probably all Markan. Mark uses “way” several times in this part of the gospel as a symbol for the

² Ernest Best, “Uncomfortable Words”, *Expository Times* 9, pages 83-4; John Dominic Crossan, *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1983), page 221; and Daniel Malone, “Riches and Discipleship: Mark 10:23-31” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 9, page 79.

³ Best, page 84.

⁴ Best, page 84; and Malone, pages 79-80.

⁵ Best, pages 84-5; and Malone, page 79.

⁶ Crossan, page 221.

way of discipleship (see 8:27; 9:33; 10:32 and 52). Again, “look” is Markan in verse 21. And Mark often adds explanatory comments at the end of stories (see 1:16; 2:15; 5:42; 6:14, 52; 7:3; and 11:13).⁷ But the rest probably came to Mark in the tradition.⁸ While Mk 10:17-31 did not come to Mark as a unit, it is possible that the story in verses 17-22 came to Mark with the sayings in verses 23a, 25, and 29 already appended to it.⁹

The question of whether any part of verses 17-22 can be traced back to Jesus is a little more difficult, but there are some clues. The use of the word “follow” in verses 17-22 to symbolize the fullness of discipleship seems more at home with the early church than with Jesus. This is the language of a call story.

The plot of the story of the rich man called by Jesus resembles the plot of other call stories in the synoptic tradition. In these stories Jesus sees someone, tells that person to follow him, and that person immediately leaves family and work to follow Jesus (see Mk 1:16-20; 2:14; Mt 4:18-22; 9:9; Lk 5:1-11 and 27-28).¹⁰

But Mk 10:17-22 adds something new to this pattern. The rich man approaches Jesus. There is a discussion about how to inherit eternal life. Jesus does tell the rich man to follow him, but he also tells him to sell what he owns and give to the poor. And the rich man chooses not to follow Jesus – the only place in the synoptic gospels where someone refuses to follow Jesus.¹¹

If Mk 10:17-22 is an expanded call story, it is not the only example. Luke, or one of his sources, has rewritten the call story found in Mk 1:16-20 and Mt 4:18-22, adding additional material (see Lk 5:1-11).¹² The gospel of the Nazarenes has an expanded version of the rich man called by Jesus. It seems to be a reworking of the version in Matthew, with an insertion explaining why the rich man must sell what he owns.¹³

So Mk 10:17-22 seems to be either an expansion of a simpler call story, or more likely, a story based on the familiar plot of the call story, using the rich man's refusal to follow Jesus as a way of underlining the danger of wealth. Mk 10:17-22 was almost certainly created by the early church. Still, it may represent something of the teaching of Jesus.

⁷ Best, page 84.

⁸ Best, page 84; Crossan, page 221; and Malone, page 79.

⁹ Best, page 86.

¹⁰ Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, (Richmond: John Knox Press 1970), page 212; and Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, (London: MacMillan & Co. 1959), page 429.

¹¹ C.S. Mann, *Mark*, (New York: Doubleday & Co. 1986), page 401; Vernon Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1984), page 210; and Taylor, page 430.

¹² Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, (New York: Doubleday & Co. 1981), page 561.

¹³ Crossan, page 225; and Joachim Jeremias, *Unknown Sayings of Jesus*, (London: SPCK 1964), pages 44-47.

Of Mk 10:17-31, this leaves the saying in verse 25 as the one that is most likely to be an authentic saying of Jesus. The sayings in verses 23a and 29 are also probably authentic. The command in verse 21 may represent authentic teaching, but the saying itself is probably not authentic.¹⁴

In order to understand what these sayings meant, and to understand Jesus' teaching on wealth, it is essential to understand what the Old Testament has to say about poverty and wealth.

Wealth was generally seen as a sign of God's blessing in the Old Testament (see Gen 24:35; 26:12; Deut 8:18; Job 42:12; and Prov 22:4).¹⁵ Poverty was generally seen as a result of carelessness or laziness (see Prov 6:6-11; 10:4; 13:18; 21:17; and 23:21), or as punishment by God (see Prov 13:25; 15:6; 19:27).¹⁶ However, the blessing of great wealth was understood to bring with it the responsibility to take care of the poor and vulnerable (see Ex 22:21-23, 25-27; 23:6, 9; and Lev 25:35-37).¹⁷

To prevent the endless accumulation of wealth by the rich and debt by the poor, the Torah provided that every seventh year was to be a year of release. All debts were to be forgiven, all slaves were to be freed, and the poor were to have special claim to the produce of the fields (see Ex 21:2; 23:11; Deut 15:1-2).¹⁸ And every fiftieth year was to be a Jubilee year. All land was to be returned to its original owner or the heir (see Lev 25:13). It seems that these ideals were neglected in practice (see Jer 34:8-22).¹⁹

The main criticism of wealth in the Old Testament came from the prophets. They condemned the exploitation of the poor and the unjust accumulation of property and wealth (see Is 10:1-2; Jer 5:27; Am 5:10-12; and 8:4-6).²⁰ The wisdom literature also criticized unjust wealth, but also praised honest wealth and condemned voluntary poverty (see Sir 13:3; 31:5-8; and 34:20-22).²¹ There was some praise for the pious poor which saw the wealthy as ungodly, but this was a rare point of view (see Ps 147:6).²²

¹⁴ Malone, page 79.

¹⁵ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, (London: Cambridge University Press 1959), page 331; and Best, page 87.

¹⁶ Josef Schmid, *The Gospel According to Mark*, (New York: Alba House 1968), page 193.

¹⁷ Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society*, (New York: Orbis Books 1978), page 101-2; and D.E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark*, (New York: Seabury Press 1963), page 271.

¹⁸ Cassidy, page 103 and Martin Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Church*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1974), page 14.

¹⁹ Hengel, page 14.

²⁰ Schmid, page 193.

²¹ Hengel, pages 16-17.

²² Cranfield, page 193; and Schmid, page 193.

The rabbinic tradition had a mixed view of wealth. Some wealth was needed to study Torah, but the pursuit of great wealth would interfere with that study.²³ One rabbi gave up his wealth to be able to study better.²⁴ But another story has it that a man wanted to give away his property, but a friend would not allow it. There were limits to charity - no one was allowed to become poor as a result of their charity.²⁵

Jewish communities took the obligation of wealth seriously. They had a well organized system of charity for the poor, that was funded by the second tithe (see Deut 14:28 and 26:12). But no one was allowed to give more than one fifth of their wealth.²⁶ However, the rabbis generally still held the view that wealth was a sign of God's blessing, with poverty signifying the lack of that blessing.²⁷

It is also helpful to understand the economic conditions of Jesus' time. The evidence is scarce, but some things can be said.²⁸

The economy of Palestine in Jesus' time was probably based mostly on agriculture, with some commerce and trading.²⁹ The main source of wealth would then be the owning of animals and land.³⁰ But most of these were owned by a small minority of the people.³¹

Most of the working people were probably day-laborers, with some artisans, merchants, and small land owners.³² The majority of the population was probably barely able to meet their own daily needs, much less create any economic security.³³

Jesus' teaching on wealth as expressed in the sayings in Mk 10:23a and 25 breaks with what is found in the Old Testament and the Judaism of his day. Wealth is seen as an obstacle to entering the Kingdom of God rather than a sign of God's blessing.

The saying in verse 25 is a striking combination of comedy and tragedy.³⁴ The camel was the largest animal usually seen in Palestine, while the eye of a needle was the

²³ Best, page 87.

²⁴ page 87.

²⁵ A.E. Harvey, *Companion to the Gospels*, (Oxford University Press 1970), page 165 and Hengel, page 20.

²⁶ Hengel, page 20.

²⁷ page 21.

²⁸ Cassidy, page 99.

²⁹ pages 99-100.

³⁰ page 108.

³¹ Hengel, page 15.

³² Cassidy, page 110; and Hengel, page 15.

³³ Cassidy, pages 101 and 110.

³⁴ Crossan, page 222.

smallest imaginable opening.³⁵ This is hyperbole (see Mt 7:3-5 and 23:23-24 for other examples).³⁶

The key to understanding this saying is to recognize it as metaphor. The point is not to say that it is equally impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God as it is for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle,³⁷ but to challenge fundamental assumptions of those who hear it.³⁸ What would be challenged was the commonly held view that riches were a sign of God's blessing while poverty was a sign of God's curse.

No clear alternative is presented by this saying, although it seems to place Jesus with those who would identify the poor with the pious and condemn the rich as ungodly. But Jesus seems to have pity for those burdened by great wealth more than he condemns them.³⁹

Mk 10:21 and 29 suggest, if they accurately represent the teaching of Jesus, that Jesus asked his disciples to leave behind family, home, and possessions. The Mishnah required that one honor God and the law more than one's teacher, and that one honor one's teacher more than one's parents.⁴⁰ Mt 10:37 and Lk 14:26 ask for similar priorities from those who would follow Jesus, while Mk 3:35, Mt 12:50, and Lk 8:21 record that Jesus called those who did the will of God his true family. These sayings are probably authentic.⁴¹

Lk 12:33-34 and 14:33 have Jesus requiring that his disciples sell their possessions and give alms. But these sayings are probably Lukan insertions and not authentic sayings of Jesus.⁴² The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value (Mt 13:44-46) have the finder selling "all he has" to buy into something priceless. These parables are most likely authentic sayings of Jesus.⁴³

All three synoptic gospels report that Jesus sent his twelve apostles out to preach (see Mk 6:7-11; Mt 10:1-10; and Lk 9:1-6). The list of things not to be brought along resembles that of Cynic-Stoic itinerant preachers.⁴⁴ These accounts have been adapted

³⁵ Best, page 88; and Wilfred Harrington, *Mark*, (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc. 1979), page 162.

³⁶ Best, page 86.

³⁷ Although many commentators say it is or speculate on the degree of difficulty intended. See Best, page 88 for example.

³⁸ Bernard Brandon Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker for the Kingdom*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1981), page 15.

³⁹ Cranfield, page 331.

⁴⁰ Vincent Taylor, *Interpreter's Bible*, (New York: Abingdon Press 1951), page 374.

⁴¹ Harrington, page 42.

⁴² Fitzmyer, pages 981 and 1062.

⁴³ Taylor, *Interpreter's Bible*, page 421.

⁴⁴ Howard Clark Kee, *Community of the New Age*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1977), page 89.

by the early church as a guide for its own missionaries.⁴⁵ Paul refers to these guidelines in his own defense (see 1 Cor 9:14). And the Didache has guidelines for recognizing legitimate missionaries.

What this suggests is that Jesus and his disciples were itinerant preachers. The reason for leaving family, home, and possessions behind is eschatological: the nearness of the Kingdom of God.⁴⁶ Jesus and his disciples would not have been alone in their eschatologically oriented poverty. In the Qumran community and in the Pythagorean communities, there was no individual property, as each member was required to place everything in the common fund.⁴⁷

But this eschatological point of view does not exclude a social justice point of view, as some commentators have suggested.⁴⁸ On the contrary, an eschatological point of view often sharpens the demand for justice.⁴⁹

To understand what the story of the rich man called to follow Jesus meant to Mark and his community, it must be seen in the context of the gospel as a whole.⁵⁰

Mark's gospel was written along the lines of a Greek drama.⁵¹ It has the usual five parts: prologue, complication, argumentation, denouement, and epilogue.⁵² In Mark's gospel these five parts are: the Wilderness (1:2-13), Galilee (1:14-8:26), the Way (8:27-10:52), Jerusalem (11:1-15:41), and the Tomb (15:42-16:8).⁵³ The central part of a Greek drama is usually the key to understanding the whole.⁵⁴

In Mark's gospel, this part takes the form of a journey. Along the way, Jesus announces his passion three times, his disciples repeatedly misunderstand him, and he tries to teach them who he is and what it means to follow him.⁵⁵ Mark has Jesus healing blind men at the beginning and end of this journey, just as he must deal with the blindness of his own disciples along the way.⁵⁶

⁴⁵ Best, page 88.

⁴⁶ Robert M. Grant, *Early Christianity and Society*, (New York: Harper & Row 1977), page 97; and Kee, pages 87, 90, and 154.

⁴⁷ Grant, page 100; and Kee, page 151.

⁴⁸ Grant, page 98, for example.

⁴⁹ Daniel Berrigan, *The Nightmare of God*, (Portland: Sunburst Press 1983).

⁵⁰ Augustine Stock, *Call to Discipleship*, (Wilmington: Michael Glazier 1982), page 12.

⁵¹ Stock, page 24; and Augustine Stock, "The Structure of Mark" *The Bible Today*, September 1985, page 292.

⁵² Stock, *Call*, page 48; and "Structure", page 293.

⁵³ Stock, "Structure", page 295.

⁵⁴ Stock, *Call*, page 48; and "Structure", page 293.

⁵⁵ Malone, page 78; and Stock, *Call*, pages 128 and 145.

⁵⁶ Nineham, page 271; Stock, *Call*, pages 129 and 131-2; and "Structure", page 295.

By placing Jesus' teaching on discipleship in this framework of passion announcements and blind disciples in need of a miracle, Mark is trying to tell his community what it really means to follow Jesus:

to deny oneself, to take up one's cross, to lose one's life, to be last and least, to drink the cup that Jesus is to drink, and to be baptized with Jesus' baptism.⁵⁷

It is along this way of discipleship that Jesus calls the rich man and teaches about the dangers of wealth.⁵⁸

The story in Mk 10:17-31 has two scenes. Each scene is a conversation between two actors:

Scene 1 : Jesus and a man
Scene 2 : Jesus and his disciples

The first scene begins with "As he set forth on his way..." Mark is reminding his readers that this is a story about what it means to follow Jesus along the way of discipleship.⁵⁹ Mark introduces the rich man as simply "a man" to encourage his readers to put themselves in his shoes.⁶⁰

The question that the rich man asks Jesus was a familiar one. It was asked by those who came to the temple in Jerusalem. As the rabbis did, Jesus reminds the rich man of the commandments.⁶¹ But Jesus did what no rabbi would have done. He told the rich man, who had kept the commandments from his youth, that he still lacked one thing: "go sell all you have ... and come follow me."⁶²

With this call to follow Jesus, Mark creates the expectation in his readers that the rich man will do what Simon, Andrew, James, John, and Levi had done: leave everything and follow Jesus. But this expectation is broken. The rich man does not follow Jesus, but goes away sadly.

Mark explains this unexpected refusal by pointing out that the man "had many possessions." The Greek is more precise: the rich man owned a lot of land.⁶³

⁵⁷ Stock, *Call*, page 146.

⁵⁸ Nineham, page 271.

⁵⁹ Best, page 84.

⁶⁰ Schweizer, page 210.

⁶¹ page 210.

⁶² Stock, *Call*, page 144.

⁶³ Mann, page 401; and Taylor, page 430.

The second scene has Jesus explaining the dangers of wealth to his astonished disciples. This pattern of public conversation and private explanation also appears in 9:14-29 and 10:1-12.

This hints at the conflict between insiders and outsiders in Mark's gospel. The insiders, the disciples, repeatedly misunderstand who Jesus is and what it means to follow him, while the outsiders repeatedly act as examples of discipleship.⁶⁴

Peter tells Jesus to stay away from Jerusalem (8:32) and to stay on the mountain with Elijah and Moses (9:5). His disciples cannot heal a possessed boy (9:18), argue about who is the most important (9:33), stop someone who had been healing in Jesus' name because he was not one of them (9:38), and ask Jesus for a special favor (10:35). But the father of the possessed boy asks Jesus to help his unbelief (9:24), someone who is not a disciple is able to heal in Jesus' name (9:38), Jesus points to children as role models (9:37 and 10:15), and a blind man follows Jesus after being healed (10:46).

The rich man is clearly an outsider. But he passes up a chance to be an example of discipleship. He chooses not to sell what he has and follow Jesus. But the disciples, who have nothing else right, have left everything and followed Jesus. Mark has reversed the usual role played by insiders and outsiders in his gospel.

By presenting the rich man as the only one called by Jesus who does not then follow him, and the only outsider who passes up a chance to be an example of discipleship, Mark is underlining the dangers of wealth for his community.

Mark does this in another way. He has arranged the entire story as a chiasmus,⁶⁵ revolving around the saying in 10:25 –

- A "life everlasting" (10:17)
- B list of commandments (10:18)
- C "sell all you have ... follow me" (10:21)
- D "looked ... said" (10:23)
- E "astonished" (10:24)
- F "It is easier for a camel ..." (10:25)
- E' "astonished" (10:26)
- D' "looked ... saw" (10:27)
- C' "left everything ... followed you" (10:28)
- B' list of rewards (10:29-30)
- A' "life everlasting" (10:30)⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Augustine Stock, "Hinge Transitions in Mark's Gospel", *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15, page 30.

⁶⁵ For an extensive discussion of the importance of chiastic structure in Mark's gospel, see M. Philip Scott, "Chiastic Structure: A Key to the Interpretation of Mark's Gospel", *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15, page 25.

⁶⁶ See Crossan, page 221 for the chiastic structure of verses 23-27.

By building the story around this saying, Mark is saying all the louder that wealth is an obstacle to discipleship.

Mark is writing to address specific problems in his community.⁶⁷ He is not writing a history,⁶⁸ but uses the story of Jesus as a way to speak to the needs of his own community.⁶⁹ Looking at Mark's gospel in this way, it becomes obvious that his community had some problems with wealth.

The explanation of the parable of the sower (4:13-20) gives three reasons for the failure of some seeds to bear fruit: Satan, persecution, and the desire of riches and other things. These reasons are drawn from the experience of the early church.⁷⁰ The story of the widow's mite (12:41-44), with its criticism of those who give only from their surplus, also says something about the problem of wealth in the early church.

The early church had problems with wealth because the early church included the rich, the poor, and those who were somewhere in the middle. Many early Christians came from the "god-fearers" and were middle class. Some early Christians were wealthy: Erastus was a city treasurer (Rm 16:23), Crispus was head of a synagogue (Acts 18:8), Prisca and Aquila had a business (Acts 18:2), and Philemon had slaves (Phm 2). And there were some who were poor (see 1 Cor 1:26 and 2 Cor 8:2, 13).⁷¹

Conflicts that had something to do with these differences are reported in 1 Cor 11:20-22 and James 2:1-7 and 5:1-6.

The issue in Mk 10:17-31 is property, not possessions. In the rich man, Mark is presenting a caricature of certain members of his community: those who have more land than they need to support themselves and will not sell it to help support the community. By not revealing the full identity of the rich man until the very end of the story, Mark lays a trap for these people. They will be fully involved in the story before they realize that they are the rich man. When the rich man chooses not to sell what he has and follow Jesus, they will face a tough choice. If they accept the validity of the story, they must either do as Jesus asks, or be excluded from the circle of disciples who have given up everything to follow Jesus.

Mark is not trying to make poverty a value in itself. The rich man is not asked to sell all because it is better to be poor, but because there are many within the community who are poor. His surplus could help meet their needs.

⁶⁷ Malone, page 78; and Stock, *Call*, page 130.

⁶⁸ Scott, "Chiastic", page 17.

⁶⁹ Stock, *Call*, page 44.

⁷⁰ Ernest Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology*, (Cambridge University Press 1965), page 182; and Kee, pages 154-5.

⁷¹ Hengel, page 37.

This is well within the biblical tradition. Like John the Baptist, Mark is asking those with extra to share with those who have nothing (see Lk 3:10-11), but without the limits that had been placed on such charity.

For Jesus, leaving everything behind was both a sign that God can be trusted and a warning that the end was near. Although the economic realities have changed, this story remains relevant today.

In our own nation between fifteen and twenty percent of our people live in poverty.⁷² At least one third of those living in the third world live in total poverty. And forty thousand children die every day as a result of malnutrition.⁷³

There have been many responses to this situation, including exploiting it or trying to ignore it. But there are several responses to this situation which may help us to better understand what Mk 10:17-31 may ask of us today.

The Catholic Worker movement began in 1932 when Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day met. Peter Maurin was a philosopher. Dorothy Day was a former socialist and a journalist who converted to Catholicism. Together they started a newspaper and welcomed those who came to them for food and shelter. Dozens of similar houses of hospitality have started under their inspiration.

In their writings, they emphasize that voluntary poverty is a natural response to a neighbor in need. In one of his Easy Essays, Peter Maurin writes:

Bishop von Ketteler says
that we are bound
under pain of mortal sin
to relieve the extreme needs
of our needy brother
with our superfluous goods.

We seem to think
that poor people
are social nuisances ...

And because we think so
we refuse to feed the poor
with our superfluous goods.⁷⁴

And Dorothy Day writes:

⁷² Michael Harrington, *The New American Poverty*, (New York: Penguin Books 1984), page 88.

⁷³ Arthur Simon, *Bread for the World*, (New York: Paulist Press 1984), page 7.

⁷⁴ Peter Maurin, *Easy Essays*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press 1984), pages 122-4.

Through voluntary poverty we will have the means to help our neighbor. We cannot see our neighbor in need without stripping ourselves. It is the only way we have of showing our love.⁷⁵

Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day saw voluntary poverty as the result of the Christian obligation to love one's neighbor.

While the economy of our nation is very different from what Jesus and Mark faced, the economy of the third world is very similar to what existed then. Land is the main source of wealth and is owned by a few. The majority of the population is poor and has no economic security.

Liberation theology was born in this context and it also emphasizes voluntary poverty. One of the main theologians behind this theology has been Gustavo Gutierrez. He sees voluntary poverty as both a way to condemn the evil of poverty and a way to be closer to those who are poor:

Solidarity with the poor, therefore, and rejection of poverty.⁷⁶

Not only does voluntary poverty help meet the needs of the poor, it condemns the injustice that is behind so much poverty, and allows a fuller relationship with those who are poor.

Although the economies of our nation and the third world are very different, they are connected. While the United States has only six percent of the world's population, it uses between forty and fifty percent of its available resources.⁷⁷ This hints at a cause and effect relationship between our nation's wealth and third world poverty.

Robert Aldridge is a former engineer who helped design the Polaris and Trident missile systems. Reflecting on the situation in the world today, he turned to the story of the rich man called by Jesus. Paraphrasing this story for today, he writes:

Reduce your consumption of goods to where you do not provide a market for big business. If it cannot sell the goods it will not be profitable to exploit the land, labor, and resources of the Third World.

Reduce your consumption of goods to where you only use your share of the world's resources. Then you will not be taking what belongs to someone else.

Reduce your consumption of goods to where you will not need a large salary. Then you will not need the high-paying jobs offered by weapons factories.

⁷⁵ Dorothy Day, "Poverty and Precarity", *Catholic Worker*, May 1952.

⁷⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, (New York: Orbis Books 1984), page 123.

⁷⁷ Robert C. Aldridge, *First Strike*, (Boston: South End Press 1983), page 292.

Reduce your consumption of goods to where you can live below the taxable level. Then you will not have to pay for those weapons of war.⁷⁸

The story of the rich man called by Jesus has much to say to us today. It challenges our assumption that wealth is a sign of God's blessing, while the poor have only themselves to blame.⁷⁹ It calls on us to see how poverty often results from exploitation and the pursuit of wealth. And it warns us that those who cling to their surplus while others lack the basics cut the bonds of community.

⁷⁸ pages 294-5.

⁷⁹ For an extensive study of this attitude in our own society, see William Ryan, *Blaming the Victim*, (New York: Vintage Books 1971)