

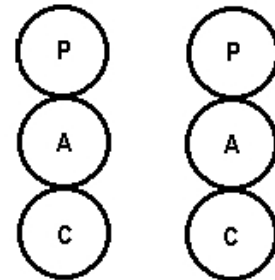
A Transactional Analysis of Money

By The Rev. Dr. William Carl Thomas

Without going deeply into Transactional Analysis, mid-twentieth century psychiatrist Eric Berne's theory on human interaction makes the phrase "Transactional Analysis of Money" more than a clever pun when set against the backdrop of one of Jesus' many teachings about money. There are two interesting characters in Luke 12:13-21, which includes the warning against greed and the parable of the Rich Fool: the person in the crowd seeking a judge and the rich man of the parable. Take a moment and read the following scripture aloud:

13Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." 16Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' 18Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' 20But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God." Luke 12:13-21 NRSV

Transactional Analysis, in its simplest form, attempts to understand the state in which people be-have, feel, or think as rooted in Parent, Adult, or Child. When in the Parent mode, a person is most likely mimicking how his or her parents or other influential parental figures acted. When in the Adult mode, a person holds emotions in check and acts out of well-defined principles and is very much in the here and now. When in the Child mode, a person is most likely reacting to a situation as he or she did in childhood. A child can be very childish when expressing emotions or can be very open to creativity, spontaneity, and intimacy. In short, Transactional Analysis can be viewed as a communication tool that helps people better understand how information is offered and received.



What tone of voice did you hear the person in the crowd use when asking Jesus to "tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me?" It was most likely not an adult voice but that of an immature child or the echo of learned response from a parent. Jesus answers from his Adult and warns against greed that comes from a learned behavior that integrates scarcity rather than abundance as a core value. To reinforce this teaching, Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool. How did this character come to value himself so highly as evidenced by the six "I" statements? As is the case with the brother wanting a

portion of the family inheritance that might not be his, how did this rich man learn about money as expressed in the phrase “ample goods”?

In my own life I learned about money from my father in the following manner. When Dad returned from service in World War II, he expected to use the money he sent home for saving by his mother to build his future. Unfortunately, his mother spent the money unwisely. Dad, while earning a good living, let me know that “we don’t have enough money.” Scarcity and not the abundance, which was evident from where we lived in Westchester County, New York, be-came the guiding rule in our family. Sadly, this was one of the tensions that might have caused my parents to divorce when I was in college. I chose to respond immaturely from my Child and lived my early professional life as if I had plenty of money when what I really possessed was easy credit. Eventually, I came to embrace Adult responsibility and live in the here and now. I developed spending, saving, and giving principles that undid my childish response to my Parent’s example. I was no longer afraid of money and was able to trust in God because God trusts me. In other words, my Adult finally met the Adult God presented to me in Jesus Christ.

An analysis of your financial transactions will reveal much about your decision making process when it comes to money. The passage that follows the rich fool in Gospel according to Luke (12:22-31) speaks clearly of the trust necessary to undo a poor Parental teaching or poor Childish response when it comes to placing your Adult before the Adult God presents to us in Jesus Christ. The passage begins with Jesus saying, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and body more than clothing.” It ends with a loving admonition to stop striving “For it is the nations of the world that strive after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Do your financial transactions reveal that you are rich towards God in how you manage your treasures? This was the question placed before the rich man in Jesus’ parable.

If you pay attention carefully to how our vestry engages financial issues, you might discern that this group of leaders is making decisions very much in the here and now based on the core value of listening carefully to what is best for Saint Matthews. When this vestry draws on its collective Parent, the members share the helpful wisdom of their elders. When they are creative as is the case in how they are welcoming the Discovery Club to our campus, the vestry members are expressing the very best part of their collective Child mediated a secure sense of their collective Adult. The fruit of their hard work is evident as we approach a building program and a capital campaign. We will be rich towards God with leaders such as these to manage our treasures.