

Jesus and the Scum

Taken from the book of Fr. P. Ribes, s.j. "To be Like Jesus"

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Intent of these Jottings.

- ✓ *To reflect on the attitudes Jesus had towards the "scum" of society.*
- ✓ *To open our eyes to the fact that the so called "scum" of society are also created in the image of God. *
- ✓ *To be able to sympathize with, accept and love the social deviants, whom our "respectable" society have "proscribed" and excommunicated*
- ✓ *To become aware that the "scum" solely is not to be blamed for being so; in truth, the blame lies, to a large scale, on our "respectable" society and even more on our 'societal structures' for causing them to be the "scum" they are.*

Hints on How to Conduct the Exercise (For the Moderator)

At the start, do not disclose to the participants either the subject matter or the purpose of the exercise.

Dynamics of this exercise The exercise consists of three steps

1st Step: It starts with a 'projective test questionnaire' whereby the participants, "unawares" may project or manifest their attitudes, feelings and biases towards the "scum".

2nd Step: Next: Soon after they complete the questionnaire (the processing and analysis of the questionnaire will be done later on) we pass on to study the attitudes Jesus had towards the "scum". We base our study on Gospel quotes.

3rd Step: Finally we process the participants' answers to the Questionnaire

- The participants are requested to share their answers to the questionnaire with the group.
(From past experience we discovered that, mostly, the attitudes emerging from the answers to the questionnaire, are rather negative, spiteful, disdainful, and even hateful towards the "scum".)
- Next, the participants are asked to "compare" and "contrast" their attitudes towards the scum, as they surfaced from the replies to the questionnaire, with the attitudes of Jesus (Cfr: Step 2nd below)
- Finally, from such comparing and contrasting of attitudes the participants are led to a more sympathetic attitude towards the "scum" and "outcasts" of society.

PROCEDURE:

Step One: A Questionnaire for all participants

Reply in writing the questions below.

After you finish your work, keep the questionnaire with you till further notice.

Part One: Word Association

- Listed below are the names of several categories of “unwanted” persons found in human societies, whom we call “the scum”.
- Go over the list, one name at a time, and immediately write against that name, **the first word, or feeling, or idea, or image or thought that spontaneously surfaces into your consciousness.** Do not think! Do not delay! Do not hesitate!

1. Drunkards.....
2. Beggars.....
3. Thieves.....
4. Prostitutes.....
5. Drug Addicts.....
6. Pick Pockets.....
7. Rapists.....
8. Murderers.....
9. Gamblers.....
10. Extortionists.....
11. Usurers.....
12. Child Abusers.....

Part Two: Incomplete Sentences

- You will find below a series of incomplete sentences.
- Read them one after the other, and **complete them, as fast as you can, writing just what comes first into your mind without thinking or reflection.**
- Be quick. Be spontaneous. Be short.

1. I feel that drunkards should be.....
2. Beggars are beggars because
3. Thieves to my way of seeing things
4. I think that prostitutes.....
5. To stop drug addicts from.....
6. If I could catch a pickpocket
7. Rapists should be.....
8. The best way to deal with murderers
9. Gamblers are people who
10. Extortionists should be.....
11. Usurers are not to.....
12. Child abuses are most.....

Step Two: New Testament Study

Jesus' Attitude towards the Scum and the Attitudes of his Contemporaries

Take one text at a time, read it carefully, study it and answer in writing the three points below. .

1st What was the attitude the Scribes and Pharisees and the Jewish Society had towards the persons mentioned in the text?

2nd What was the attitude Jesus had towards the same person or persons?

3rd What is our common attitude today towards similar persons?

Texts from the Gospel of Luke

Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee: Sinful Woman	Lk 7:36-50
The Pharisee and the Tax Collector:	Lk 18:9-14
Jesus and Zacchaeus:	Lk 19:1-10
The parable of the Prodigal Son:	Lk 15:1-32
The parable of the Good Samaritan:	Lk 10:25-37
Attitudes of the people and of Jesus towards the hateful Romans, their conquerors and exploiters:	Lk 7:1-10
The Call of Matthew, the tax collector and publican:	Lk 5:27-32
The Baptism of Jesus:	Lk 3:21-22
The parable of the lost sheep:	Lk 15:1-7
Do not judge others	Lk 6:37-42

Texts from the Gospel of John:

The woman at the well (Samaritan and sinful):	Jn 4: 1-41
The adulterous Woman:	Jn 8:1-11
The man born blind:	Jn 9:1-39

Thoughts Arising from Jesus' attitudes towards the "Scum"

- There is an inborn dignity in all human persons even in those we name the "scum" that has to be respected by all.
- They too possess a true but dormant "humanity" and treasures of "hidden" goodness...
- Every person has been made into the image of God. God's image can never be effaced completely.
- Every man and woman is an object of God's love, the outcasts and the scum even more.
- To realize that God loves them as much as he loves us, though, of course, does not approve of their behaviour. God loves the sinners, not their sins.
- Jesus loved sinners and outcasts unconditionally.
- He came to call the lost and the sinners, not the just!
- A very large number of social rejects are victims of life circumstances, prejudice, injustice, oppression, society's egotism, and social ostracism.

- Many “so called” criminals are so because of the way our society treated them.
- We haven’t loved them and cared for them enough as persons. Straightaway we rejected them!
- Many of us ‘respectable’ people, had we found ourselves in their circumstances, would have been like them or even worse!
- To become aware that the “scum” solely is not to be blamed for being so; in truth, the blame lies, to a large scale, on our “respectable” society and even more on our ‘societal structures’ for causing them to be the “scum” they are.
- In fact, the “scum” is sort of a by-product of our human society and its structural organization
- It is only through love, patience support and understanding that we can help them out of their present state.
- It is only by changing our attitudes that we shall become brothers and sisters to them!
- We are biased against the “scum” because we feel let down, hurt, inconvenienced, and threatened by them.
- They are threat to our “respectability”, our “status” and “our values”. They are a “sore-spot” to us all.
- Quite often we use them as “scapegoats” for the evils of society. We project into them our miseries, anger, frustrations and shame!

Step Three: Checking Our Attitudes Towards the scum; **Are our attitudes like those of Jesus?**

NOTE FOR THE MODERATOR

Processing the answer to the questionnaire

- ✓ *Questionnaires based on word associations and incomplete sentences share the nature of projective tests.*
- ✓ *Through the type of our word associations and the tone of our completed sentences, unawares, we are likely to give away – project - what our thoughts and feelings are towards the “scum”.*

Part (A) of the Questionnaire: Reflecting on our “Word Associations”

Analyze and reflect on the tone and nature of your associated words:

- Are they positive or negative in value?
- Friendly or hostile? Accepting or rejecting?
- Are the attitudes surfacing, through your word association, like the attitudes Jesus had towards the scum? Compare.
- Would Jesus have written the same word associations?
- Is there any change you should make so that your attitude towards the “scum” is more Jesus-like? Explain.
- What will you do?

Part (B) of the Questionnaire: Reflecting on your “Incomplete Sentences”

Note:

Part (B) of the questionnaire may serve as a confirmation of your attitudes towards the scum discovered through your associated words.

Analyze and reflect on the tone and nature of your completed sentences:

- Are they positive or negative in value and approach?
- Friendly or hostile? Accepting or rejecting?
- Are the surfacing attitudes, through your completed sentences, like the attitudes Jesus had towards the scum? Compare.
- Would Jesus have completed the sentences in the way you did?
- Is there any change you should make in your attitudes towards the “scum”? How can you make them more “Jesus-like”? Explain.
- What will you do?

Closing Prayer: End this Exercise in Prayer

Suggested items for the prayer could be:

Bible Texts:

Mt 9:35-36: Jesus had pity on the crowds

Lk 23:34: Forgive them, Father. They do not know what they do!

Hymns:

The World Stands in Need of Liberation

APPENDIX ONE

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES to Help us and others to Overhaul Our Attitudes towards the “Scum”

1. FANTASY EXERCISES

Based on Gospel Texts

- Go through a prayerful and contemplative fantasy on any of the following texts:
 - Lk 7:36-50 The sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee.
 - Lk 19:1-10 The story of Zacchaeus.
 - Jn 8:1-11 The woman caught in adultery.
- Impersonate Jesus.
- Try to feel the way Jesus felt towards those people.
- Assimilate the attitudes of Jesus towards the so-called “scum” of society.

2. ROLE-PLAYINGS

At the end of the role-plays, have a short evaluation and analysis from the viewpoint of Jesus’ attitudes towards the “scum”

A) Acting Gospel Passages in Modern Settings

In particular you can take the following passages:

- **The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax collector: Lk 18:9-14**
Try to explicate the underlining hostile attitude we may harbour against those we consider fallen and deviants. “I thank you, Lord for I am not like those drunkards, prostitutes, drug-addicts, cheats and the likes of them!”
- **The Parable of the Last Judgment: Mt 25:31-46**
Let the participants apply it to the “social deviants”. It sounds shocking yet it is theologically true, Jesus telling you:
 - ✓ I was a drunkard and you chucked me out of the house.
 - ✓ I was a drug addict and you handed me over to the police.
 - ✓ I was a beggar and you shut your door against my face.
 - ✓ I was a prostitute and you despised me.
 - ✓ I was a cheat, a robber and a pick- pocket and you lynched me, etc.
- **The Parable of the Prodigal Son: Lk 15:1-3, 11-32**

B) Role-playing Instances Happening in Daily Life.

Ask the participants to role-play situations where “respectable” and “honourable” people like us, despise and spurn the “outcasts” and “deviants”.

- The way we treat ex-convicts, fallen women, drunkards, professional beggars, cheats, drug-addicts, etc
- The way we condemn them even without hearing them or trying to understand their plight and their life situation.

C) Based on Imaginary Personal Incidents

Make the participants imagine they have an encounter with a person or persons towards whom the group members are likely to feel hostile. For instance,

- A drunkard father or husband.
- A member of your home who disgraced or cheated the family.
- A pickpocket who has picked pocketed you.
- A drug addict that accosted you on the road and extorted money from you, etc.

Help them through this fantasy to accept, forgive, respect, understand, and even love those so called “despicable” people.

