

Wheels of fortune: "In case of rapture, I have dibs on your Bugatti"

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [July 25, 2006](#) issue

Luxury, the dictionary tells us, is "the use and enjoyment of the best and most costly things that offer the most physical comfort and satisfaction." In a special advertising section on luxury autos, the *New York Times* (June 21) updates us on the concept:

Luxury today means being able to live wherever you want and commute via the Internet. Luxury today means having the time and money to pursue whatever takes your fancy. Luxury today means being secure enough, emotionally and financially, to not worry about what the neighbors think. . . . Twenty years from now, we'll look back and think this was a special time, a New Gilded Age of Luxury.

The writer assumes that if we stay our present course, we'll be around 20 years from now.

What we now call "mid-luxury" is what used to be the entire luxury . . . segment, before marketers splintered the market into entry-luxury, mid-luxury, true luxury and ultra-luxury.

This would be the place to quote the prophets, as in Jeremiah 15:13 or 17:3. But Jeremiah is so uncool.

Historically, luxury has been trapped in the stuffy, self-conscious conventions of status. But, like all things, luxury is changing. Luxury is no longer simply about the physical object. It is vibrant, dynamic, alive. It could be a breathtaking moment, a striking color or even simply a refined experience. This new luxury is liberated. It is a cultural movement that favors the creative. The brave. The innovative.

This would be the place to quote Jesus, perhaps from Mark 10:23 or Luke 12:16. But we don't hear much about that Jesus these days.

A \$30 Oregon Scientific "atomic clock" might tell time more accurately than a \$30,000 Rolex, but no one would ever choose one over the other. The kind of person who

pays top price for the ultimate product is not driven by a desire for practicality. They're driven neither by hubris nor by some unfathomable psychosis.

Nor by a fathomable sense of humble stewardship and healthy-minded generosity.

"Anything worth doing at all is worth doing to excess," quoth John P. Grier.

If you can't take Jeremiah or Jesus, how about Aristotle on moderation and balance? Scratch that. Aristotle is also uncool.

For the kind of people who'll buy a Bugatti, \$1.3 million is less than the annual maintenance bill on their Gulfstream V.

Forget theological comment. It's time to offer up a prayer for those in the waiting line for a Bugatti car, giving thanks for the tax cuts they enjoy and praying for repeal of the estate tax.

And it's time for a new bumper sticker: "In case of rapture, I have dibs on your Bugatti."

Final M.E.M.O to M.E.M.: It's time to climb back into the glass garage next to my glass house. It's very cool.