

The Life of the Spirit

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ECONOMY IS TO EMPLOY WHAT ONE HAS

By

MDME. ISABELLE RIVIERE.¹

To set fire to a field of ripe wheat or to leave the ground untilled surely amounts to almost the same result? Everything in this world is made to be of service, and, because there is only what is necessary for all, the bread that is not sown, like that which is thrown away, is taken from someone. It is bad, it is monstrous to pay thousands of francs for a dinner given to Ambassadors, five hundred francs or more for a bottle of champagne at a fashionable dance, when so many people are hungry; but to put the amount in a woollen stocking, is as bad, as monstrous. Even worse sometimes. For, at least, some persons profit by these follies, and if it is a very despicable means of livelihood they have found, it may be that they themselves are not all despicable. Whilst as for this money which men pile up and set by for their hypothetical needs, to which they presently sacrifice even the satisfaction of these needs, what does it serve? There was someone in this world for whom it was indispensable and who is thus deprived of it. If we want a seed to germinate and fructify, we do not, unless we are mad, enclose it in a box. In being used it is undoubtedly destroyed, but it bears fruit a twentyfold.

That wicked and slothful servant, who had done nothing but dig a hole in the earth to hide the money confided to him by his master, whose only fear was to lose it, what anger did he not incur when the master returned: *Take ye away the talent from him, and give it to him who hath ten talents . . . And the unpro-*

¹ Translated from the French of Madame Isabelle Rivière. Extract from the 5th chapter of the 1st part of *Sur le Devoir de l'Imprévoyance*. With kind permission of the Author and Publisher (Editeurs du Cerf, 29 Boulevard de la Tour-Maubourg, Paris).

fitable servant cast ye out into exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What! Hell for only an omission? If he did no good, at least he did no evil.

He did not do what he had to do. The child who does not write his exercise is punished as severely as the one whose exercise is full of faults. Yes, hell (it is the gentle Jesus Who says so) for the suspicious servant who took measures against his master's supposed avarice, and hence condemned to sterility what he received to turn to account; hell the same as for the wicked rich man who had spent his life *clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day*: the non-employment punished by the same penalty as the useless or bad employment.

Is that not enough to convince us that God does not like what we call economy, that he wishes us to use what he lends us, that, in his eyes, the fear of losing money as the love of money, in a word all anxiety about money, in whatever form, is a crime that he strikes with his worst plagues? On the contrary, he rewards with a sense of security, with his ever present help, those for whom money is only a means, those who consider what they must do with it, but do not consider it in itself, those whom it leaves indifferent, those who do not think about it.

But after all, one is obliged to think about it! We cannot live without money. We must work if we want to gain it?

Work, certainly! Not to be over anxious about next day does not mean to spend to-day in idleness, to lose this day which has been given to us to bring forth its fruit. A man must employ his time like his money. Jesus sends out his disciples with neither money nor scrip. He says, *the workman is worthy of his meat*. It is taken for granted that they must work every day to obtain it. It is assured them, since to-morrow, in bringing round the work, will bring round the wages. In the same way Saint Paul, who no longer possessed anything in the world, made tents to provide for himself and his companions. Thus does every Christian; he works peacefully all the days of his life, using each scrap of precious time which, day after day, is confided to him . . .

It is idleness that leads to the workhouse; yes, that is too often true: *Thou wilt sleep a little, said I, thou wilt slumber a little, thou wilt fold thy hands a little to rest, and poverty shall come to thee as a runner, and beggary as an armed man*. But it is the idleness of to-day; there is no idleness of to-morrow. One cannot work in the future. It is the obsession, the haunting thought of our to-morrow which paralyzes our to-day and, stifling in their germ the rich fruits with which it abounded, leads to ruin and the workhouse as surely as does idleness. We must not leave God to do all the work, that is certain! But we must not work in defiance of Him, nor arm ourselves against him, nor think continually of setting up a fund for ourselves against his bad

faith and ill-will towards us, like those women who "make a burse for themselves" unknown to their husband, so much do they fear that he cannot or will not leave them enough to live on.

We must, according to the delightful saying of St. Vincent de Paul, *walk alongside Providence*, thus proving that we know we shall be lead along the right path. *How sovereignly well do those honour our Lord*, he exclaimed, *who follow His holy Providence and do not outstrip it!* God knows that St. Vincent de Paul never outstripped holy Providence, he who, without a sou, covered France with the marvellous institutions of his charity whereby thousands and thousands of bodies and souls have been saved, and whereby thousands are still saved daily. He invented, almost by himself, all that is being done up to the present day for the help and comfort of the unfortunate. God knows that he did not live for, that he did not economise money, and that is why he, who possessed nothing, could dispose of millions.

To be anxious about money, to accord it any kind of importance precisely as money, it is not enough to say that it serves for nothing. It serves for evil.

Whereas to forget it is to open the door to it. Money is like coquettish women, it only seeks to attract those who pay no attention to it. If you want to be sure of never lacking it, spend what you have.

TOWARDS A PRE-HISTORY OF MONACHISM

By

JOHN MORSON, O.C.R.

The Synoptic Gospels are a fundamental document of ascetic theology. They present a way of life. Their rich dogmatic content is largely implicit. The key-note is struck from the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in words which anticipate the whole: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". In St. Matthew's nineteenth chapter is recorded the question of the rich young man, and our Lord's commendation of those who have left all for his name's sake. This passage is often claimed as the foundation charter of the religious state. Its great advantage is that it expresses far more clearly than the earlier teaching the distinction between the commandment, obedience to which is necessary for entrance into the kingdom, and the counsel offered to those who would be perfect.

In the account which we have of the infant Church at Jerusalem distinction is not clearly made between the faithful who simply obeyed the commandments and the aspirants after perfection who followed the counsels. We might gather that the converts, as a matter of course and almost without exception, entered upon a way of life not unlike that which our Lord had counselled to the rich young man, and which was to be known