

---

---

# DEVOTIONAL CLASSICS

SELECTED READINGS FOR  
INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS

---

---


Edited by

Richard J. Foster

and

James Bryan Smith

A RENOVARÉ Resource for Spiritual Renewal

 HarperSanFrancisco  
*A Division of HarperCollinsPublishers*

1. "Nurture a love to do good things in secret" this week (rule 4). Let your acts of kindness go unnoticed. Simply do them for the sake of others, not for the praise you would receive.
2. Avoid manipulating conversations so as to receive praise or compliments from others this week (rules 6 and 10). As Taylor exhorts, "do not let praise for yourself be the design of your conversations." Also, when you do receive praise, "reflect it back to God" (rule 7).
3. Taylor believes that a thorough confession best helps us gain humility (see section 12). As you make your confession this week, be careful not to see your faults and failings as random and sporadic actions in an otherwise good life, but rather "unite them into one continuous representation of your life." This exercise, notes Taylor, when really applied to your soul, will be useful for increasing the grace of humility.
4. As Jesus commands, as you go about your week do not try to take a place of honor, but be content with the lowest place. Humble yourself, and let others do the exalting.

## REFLECTIONS

*In his preface to Holy Living Taylor speaks of the "instruments of virtue" that are to be utilized in the ongoing development of a holy life. Activities of engagement and abstinence that produce humility are just such instruments.*

*These are God-ordained means for the development of virtue, and we cannot expect the spirit of humility to grow in us without regular use of them. Indeed, this is true with all the virtues. Hence, according to Taylor, one of our enduring tasks is to continually seek out and "make use of the proper instruments of virtue."*



## GOING DEEPER

Jeremy Taylor wrote extensively (e.g., *The Great Exemplar* [1649] and *The Worthy Communicant* [1668]), but he is best remembered for *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* (1650) and *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (1651). I have not found a good modern edition of either *Holy Living* or *Holy Dying* and so most likely you will need to utilize old ones you can find in a

library. There is an 1875 edition (Boston: Estes and Lauriat). Just to give you an idea of what these books cover, here are a few chapter titles from *Holy Dying*: "Reflections on the Vanity and Shortness of Life"; "Reasons for a Daily Examination of Our Actions"; "Rules for the Practice of Patience"; "An Exercise Against Despair in the Day of Our Death."

# Elizabeth O'Connor (1921- )

## INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHOR

In 1947 a movement of the Spirit produced the founding of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C. Pastored by Gordon Cosby, this church demonstrated a radical faith witness to the rest of the world. Elizabeth O'Connor was one of the church's early members and would later join the church staff. Her writings would chronicle their story, letting the rest of the world know of the amazing work God was doing in their midst.

O'Connor is a gifted writer whose insights into the spiritual journey have helped countless women and men grow deeper in their own walk with God. Her writings challenge and confront, as well as encourage and inspire. The following selection comes from a book that comprises several letters written to the early faith communities of the Church of the Saviour. Although these letters were written to stir and nurture the faith and commitment of these young churches, they speak a fresh word of exhortation to all scattered pilgrims on the very important subject of money.

## EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS TO SCATTERED PILGRIMS

### 1. The Handling of Money

"Filthy lucre," as money is sometimes called, has been a favorite topic of conversation for us since the early days of The Church of the Saviour. We talk about it probably as much as Jesus did. When the founding members, young and poor, were forming themselves into a properly incorporated community of faith, they struggled for a discipline of membership that would help them and future church members to deal concretely with at least some aspects of the handling of money. In its first writing the discipline read, "We commit our-

selves to giving 10 percent of our gross income to the work of the Church."

While there was some precedence in biblical history for the 10 percent figure, our first members felt that this kind of giving would enable them to begin to tackle the injustices of society in a way that would be meaningful to themselves, as well as to others. Their proposed constitution and disciplines were submitted to Reinhold Niebuhr, an eminent theologian of the last generation who had agreed to read them and comment. His only



suggestion concerned the discipline on money. "I would suggest," Niebuhr said, "that you commit yourselves not to tithing but to proportionate giving, with tithing as an economic floor beneath which you will not go unless there are some compelling reasons." The discipline was rewritten and stands today in each of the six new faith communities:

*We covenant with Christ and one another to give proportionately beginning with a tithe of our incomes.*

## 2. Proportionate Giving

None of us has to be an accountant to know what 10 percent of a gross income is, but each of us has to be a person on his knees before God if we are to understand our commitment to proportionate giving.

Proportionate to what? Proportionate to the accumulated wealth of one's family? Proportionate to one's income and the demands upon it, which vary from family to family? Proportionate to one's sense of security and the degree of anxiety with which one lives? Proportionate to the keenness of our awareness of those who suffer? Proportionate to our sense of justice and of God's ownership of all wealth? Proportionate to our sense of stewardship for those who follow after us? And so on, and so forth. The answer, of course, is in proportion to all of these things.

Proportionate giving has kept us from mistaking our churchgoing for Christianity, and from looking at our neighbor to see what we should be doing. In our better moments we desire that each member and intern member work under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to determine what proportionate giving means in his or her individual situation. We have, of course, hoped for ourselves and for others that

the proportion of giving would increase as we identified with the oppressed and learned to trust God at deeper levels for our own future.

## 3. The Borders Have Been Pushed Out

By and large the discipline has served us well. Over the years we have kept the 10 percent floor for members and the 5 percent floor for our intern members. Many have struggled with the minimum giving, and some have turned away. Others have broken loose and showered our community with riches. The borders of the mission have been pushed out, and the suffering of our city has been eased a bit.

Sometimes the giving has been excessive and ecstatic, and sometimes impulsive—a diamond engagement ring dropped in the offering plate, a silver service set appearing at the door, a check for several thousand dollars representing the total accumulated wealth of a young couple.

## 4. Blessed Be the Tithe

I first heard the tithing discipline explained in a class in Christian Growth that I was taking when I was new to The Church of the Saviour and the Christian faith. Following the class we met with the members of other classes for a short worship service. The small chapel rang with the words, "Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love." My untutored ears heard the words as "Blessed be the tithe. . . ." I went home to explain the discipline to my nonreligious household, and commented, "They even sing about it."

The next Sunday we all went to see those strange people, and to hear about the things they were planning. Gordon Cosby was preach-

ing his annual sermon on money, which was as spellbinding then as now. Before the year was over my household was tithing, and when the time came to purchase a retreat farm, we threw caution to the wind and went with everyone else to borrow what we could toward the down payment. It was not that our souls were so quickly converted, but that we sensed that something important was going on, and we wanted to be a part of it. We had been captured by a man's vision of what a community might do if it really cared about the oppressed and the suffering.

## 5. Reclaiming Ourselves

In a recent sermon on money Gordon said as forcefully as ever that to give away money is to win a victory over the dark powers that oppress us. He talked about reclaiming for ourselves the energy with which we have endowed money: "Money is a hang-up for many of us. We will not be able to advance in the Christian faith until we have dealt at another level with the material. It is a matter of understanding what it means to be faithful to Jesus Christ."

He went on to say that the poor suffer because they are not able to give. Without any doubt Gordon's teaching-sermons on money have influenced the whole orientation of the new communities toward the material area of life. Each of them began on a sound financial basis because each began with a small nucleus of tithing members. All contributions of the communities are used to further the work of the missions within the year they are given. Nothing has ever been put aside for a rainy day. We have followed faithfully the injunction given by Moses to his people as he led them out of bondage, "No one must keep any of it for tomorrow" (Exod. 16:19, JB).

## 6. Stabilizing Our Standard of Living

Despite our corporate style and our exposure to the issues that are raised around the subject of money, we know that we have not gained much "downward mobility." While we have succeeded in stabilizing our standard of living, most of us cling to what we have known. Though the budgets of our faith communities are large by traditional standards, we are fully aware that they represent only a fraction of the potential giving of the congregation.

We still wrestle with fear when we consider abandoned giving. Our wills, with rare exceptions, look like the wills of those who have never been committed to the building of a faith community, or who have never had the poor in mind. This may indicate that, in the face of the threat caused by consideration of our deaths, we regress to old definitions of family and narrower spheres of identity. In any case, most of us would probably say that we are not as free as we would like to be where the material things of life are concerned. What may have looked like radical obedience to us a quarter of a century ago, no longer seems radical today.

## 7. Faces That We Know

Coming to know some of our suffering sisters and brothers in the Third World and in the ghettos of Washington has made all the difference in the way we view the earth. The unemployment statistics are made up of faces that we know. We behold the plight of the poor not only with fresh eyes, but with the awareness that our faithfulness in the past gave God one way of performing veritable miracles.

Scattered throughout our new faith communities are persons who ask with increasing uneasiness what it means to be faithful in this



time in their individual treks and in our slow migration as a people out of the old orders of "necessity and death." In a personal and in a corporate way we are wrestling once more with the question of what we are to do with our money. Some of us experience an inner division, for our hearts so often tell us one thing and our heads another.

When we begin to take the Scriptures seriously, "You cannot serve God and Money" (Matt. 6:24, NEB) becomes a personal address. One would expect God to applaud our small efforts at faithfulness; instead a Spirit comes and takes us where we are not yet prepared to go.

### 8. The Worship of Idols

As we become exposed to the poor and their needs, the rich young ruler and the widow and her mite lose the storybook quality of our childhood faith, and become figures in the counter-culture literature of a revolutionary leader—the very one whom we call Saviour. The First Commandment and all the Scriptures on the worship of idols begin to lay bare our own primitive selves. Some of us have looked into the face of our idols and found that one of them is money.

Though we along with millions of other churchgoers are saying that Jesus saves, we ask

### BIBLE SELECTION: MATTHEW 6:19–24

<sup>19</sup>"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup>but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

<sup>22</sup>"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be

ourselves if we are not in practice acting as though it were money that saves. We say that money gives power, money corrupts, money talks. Like the ancients with their molten calf we have endowed money with our own psychic energy, given it arms and legs, and have told ourselves that it can work for us. More than this we enshrine it in a secret place, give it a heart and a mind and the power to grant us peace and mercy.

### 9. Individual Answers

Do we believe that money and possessions have a way of coming between people who want to be in community with each other? Do we really believe that every life has resources more priceless than gold, and that our hearts, minds and labor are adequate for any task? What if the world is right and there are things that only money can buy, gifts of the spirit that only money can unlock, and blocks that only money can push aside?

The questions continue to be raised, and we continue to struggle for the answers that in the end have to be individual answers, for we are each at a different place in our spiritual trek with different understandings of what the Gospel has to say to us about what we do with our money.

full of light; <sup>23</sup>but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

<sup>24</sup>"No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The following questions can be used for discussion within a small group, or used for journal reflections by individuals.

1. After reading this selection, what are some of your "gut-level" reactions to this strong word about how we spend money?
2. Gordon Cosby urged his listeners to reclaim for "ourselves the energy with which we have endowed money." In what ways have you endowed money with energy? What would be gained by reclaiming that energy?
3. O'Connor quotes Cosby as preaching, "To give away money is to win a victory over the dark powers that oppress us." Has money ever seemed like a "dark power" that oppresses you? Explain.
4. How possible is it in a properly disciplined spiritual life to invest and use money for the greater good of others and the advancement of the kingdom of God?
5. Jesus preached that we cannot serve God and wealth (Matt. 6:24), because he perceived that Mammon (the spirit of wealth) functions as a false god for many. How has money tried to gain your allegiance? What struggles have you encountered in trying to "serve two masters"?

## SUGGESTED EXERCISES

The following exercises can be done by individuals, shared between spiritual friends, or used in the context of a small group. Choose one or more of the following.

1. Explore tithing for a month if you do not already practice this principle. Without becoming legalistic, look for ways to curb your unnecessary spending in order to give more lavishly to the poor.
2. Begin to identify with the "faces" of the poor. O'Connor notes that the Church of the Saviour was able to give so much to the poor because the poor were no longer "them" but "us." Spend an afternoon at an urban ministry center. Look carefully at the faces of those you meet, and listen to their voices.
3. Take a weekend to do a personal financial inventory. Look over your checkbook ledger for the past year, identifying the ways you spend your money. Take this information into your prayer chamber, asking God to help you gain victory over the power of money.
4. Jesus counsels us, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth" (Matt. 6:19). In an attempt to de-accumulate, put on a garage sale, giving all or a portion of your proceeds to the poor, or to some other ministry effort.



## REFLECTIONS

*I am deeply indebted to the ministry of the Church of the Saviour. At one point when I was all but ready to abandon the gospel ministry, Gordon Cosby, in a serendipitous one-hour visit, spoke life-giving words into my spirit. And, over the years, the writings of Elizabeth O'Connor have nurtured hope in me for the future of the Church. When I would see so many churches rushing after the little tin gods of self-aggrandizement and prosperity, I was sorely tempted to cry "Icabod!" over all outward religion. But O'Connor told another story—a story of discipleship and commitment amid honest struggle. I was encouraged to believe that the Church could actually be a redemptive fellowship rather than a religious equivalent of secular promotion. I am deeply thankful to God for the Church of the Saviour and to Elizabeth O'Connor, who has been led to chronicle its story.*



## GOING DEEPER

O'Connor, Elizabeth. *Call to Commitment*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963. This was the first book to tell the unusual story of the Church of the Saviour. At the time it was written, the church was in the forefront of defining new wineskins of Christian renewal—a position that it occupies to this day. You may also wish to read *Journey Inward*, *Journey Outward*, which continues to record the development of this incendiary fellowship.

O'Connor, Elizabeth. *Letters to Scattered Pilgrims*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979. These letters to the six faith communities of the Church of the Saviour have a way of calling us forward into uncharted waters of discipleship. Her discussion of money, from which the present selection is taken, is a penetrating analysis of one of the most persistent idols in Western culture.

---



---

# John Wesley (1703–1791)

---



---

## INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHOR

John Wesley was one of nineteen children born to Samuel and Susanna Wesley. His father was an Anglican clergyman and his mother was devoted both to God and to her children. John attended Christ Church College at Oxford, was ordained an Anglican minister, and was made a Fellow of Lincoln College. While he was at Oxford, he and a group of friends banded together to encourage one another to live a holy life. Their methodical approach to holiness led others at the college to refer to them as "Methodists."

Although Wesley grew up a deeply religious man, something was lacking in his heart. On May 24, 1738, he attended a prayer meeting at which the leader read Luther's preface to the book of Galatians. It was then, Wesley wrote, that he first understood that God loved him—even him—and the gospel became rooted in his heart. With his heart "strangely warmed," Wesley embarked on an unusual preaching ministry, especially to the common folk in the English countryside.

Historians have said that by evangelizing the common people of eighteenth-century England, Wesley saved the country from a bloody revolution. His impact upon England was dramatic during his lifetime, and even more dramatic on America after his death as many Methodist preachers crisscrossed the frontier with his message.

The following excerpts come from his famous work *Christian Perfection*. In that book, Wesley gives practical advice to those who want to move toward perfection, which for Wesley did not mean a state of sinlessness, but a desire to be fully in love with God with one's whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

EXCERPTS FROM *CHRISTIAN PERFECTION*

## 1. The Danger of Pride

The first advice I would give to those who have been saved from sin by grace is to watch and pray continually against pride. For it is pride not only to ascribe what we have to ourselves, but also to think we have what we do not. One

man, for instance, ascribed his knowledge to God and was therefore humble. But then he thought he had more than everyone else which is dangerous pride.