

Luz (2007: 348)

between the kingdom of God, which determined the carefree existence of the followers, and the world gave way to a peaceful coexistence between them. The second type of interpretation is especially able to make the text almost completely devoid of meaning. It is able to connect it with a Protestant work ethic, an affirmation of possessions and rational planning for the future that serves the general interest. All that remains is the warning against “despondent worry” and a “despairing heart” that no longer express Christian trust in God.⁸⁹

Meaning for Today

The text, which was increasingly emptied of meaning during the history of its interpretation, appears to be gaining new fascination today. For people whose lives are overly planned and everywhere institutionally cared for it appears to open up the possibility of “carefree vitality” and “free spontaneity.”⁹⁰ For the contemporary person who has grown tired of the constant Christian justification of possessions and who is suspicious about the emphasis on the supreme value of work, the text offers a glimpse of an alternative way of life. What is left here for the exegete is simply in the name of the text to warn against being too quickly fascinated. The alternative life of which this text indeed speaks is service to the kingdom of God, not merely an alternative lifestyle in the manner of a “return to nature”⁹¹ or simply a renunciation of a middle-class job.⁹² According to Matthew, part of this service is trust in God’s care while working on behalf of God’s righteousness. For Matthew this trust is the basis and the inner side of abandoning one’s own security about which 6:19-24 spoke and which is also in the background in our own text. The life of the early Christian itinerant radicals is the model for this attitude of trusting God alone. Without making laws, Matthew confronts the entire community with this exorbitant expectation. Now the task facing the modern church is to ask what poverty, renouncing a profession, or renouncing work might mean in one’s service on behalf of the kingdom of God. The text does not prescribe anything here, but it does point to directions and open up

alternative possibilities that we then must actualize ourselves.

Hardly anyone has understood that better than Søren Kierkegaard, for whom Matt 6:25–34 was a favorite text.⁹³ In “The *Instant*, No. VII” he tells a story that senses how much the text demands as well as how far one’s own situation is removed from the text. It is the story of the ministerial candidate Ludvig From, who “first” (cf. Matt 6:33) seeks a royal appointment as a pastor, therefore “first” must pass his exams, then “first” complete the church’s exams and graduate from seminary, then “first” get engaged, and finally, after “first” he “had” to negotiate his salary, he stands in the pulpit and preaches his first sermon on the text “Seek ‘first’ the kingdom of God.” The bishop is impressed by the “sound, unadulterated doctrine” proclaimed here, especially by “the way he stressed this word *first*.’ ‘But does it not seem to your Lordship that in this instance a correspondence between speech and life would be desirable?’”⁹⁴

89 Wilhelm Herrmann, *Ethik* (5th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1921) 155.

90 Hans-Richard Renter, “Die Bergpredigt als Orientierung unseres Menschseins heute,” *ZEE* 23 (1979) 96.

91 Weder, *Rede*, 215: It is not a matter of “a *retour a lanature* but of an *avant au royaume de Dieu*.”

92 For Matthew the itinerant missionaries were exactly *ergatai* (10:10).

93 See above, n. 81, along with, e.g., *Christian Discourses and The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air* (trans. Walter Lowrie; 1940; reprinted Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) 7–93 and 311–56; idem, *The Gospel of Suffering and the Lilies of the Field* (trans. David F. and Lillian Marvin Swenson; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1948) 165–239.

94 “The *Instant*, No. VII,” in *Attack upon “Christendom”* (trans. Walter Lowrie; 1946; reprinted Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) 208–9.