

# **ON RELIGIOUS RETIREMENT**

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On religious retirement by Francis Atterbury

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**FRANCIS ATTERBURY**

**ON RELIGIOUS  
RETIREMENT**



## Leaven Leaves.

*"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."*

GALATIANS V. 9.

ON

Religious

Retirement.

BY BISHOP ATTERBURY.



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“When He had sent the multitudes  
away, He went up into a mountain  
apart to pray.”—*Matt.* xiv. 23.



ON  
RELIGIOUS RETIREMENT.



IT hath been disputed, which is a state of greater perfection, the social or the solitary; whereas, in truth, neither of these estates is complete without the other; as the example of our blessed Lord (the unerring test and measure of perfection) informs us. His life (which ought to be the pattern of ours) was a mixture of contemplation and action, of austerity and freedom: we find him often where the greatest concourse was, in the market-places, in the synagogues, and at festival entertainments; and we find him also retiring from the crowd into a desert, or a garden, and there employing himself in



all kinds of religious exercise and intercourse with God, in fasting, meditation, and prayer. In imitation of his spotless example, we may doubtless lead public lives, innocently and usefully; conversing with men, and doing good to them; mutually sowing and reaping the several comforts and advantages of human society. But because the pleasures of conversation, when too freely tasted, are intoxicating and dangerous: because the temptations we there meet with are many and mighty; and even where the spirit is willing to resist, yet the flesh is often weak; we ought, therefore, to lessen the too great complaisance we are apt to have in such satisfactions, by fit intermissions of them; to strengthen ourselves for such public encounters by our religious privacies; to retire from the world sometimes, and converse with God and our own consciences; examining the state, and fortifying the powers, of our souls in secrecy and silence: we must do as our Lord did, "send the

multitudes away, and go up into the mountain apart to pray."

I shall from these words take occasion to discourse to you, concerning the great, but much neglected duty, of religious retreats and recollection. I shall first briefly show you under what limitations I would be understood to recommend the duty; and then, what the advantages are which arise from a devout and discreet performance of it.

I mean not to press upon you that sort of retirement, which is so much esteemed and practised in the Church of Rome; where all perfection is reckoned to consist in solitude, and no man is allowed capable of arriving at the height of virtue, who doth not strip himself of all the conveniences of life, and renounce all manner of acquaintance with the world, and the things of it. I see not wherein this state of life claims the pre-eminence over all others; how it is founded in nature and reason; what particular example,

precept, or direction there is in the gospel, inviting us to it. John the Baptist is indeed there represented as sequestering himself from human converse, and spending his time "in the wilderness;" but as he is said to have come "in the spirit and power of Elias" (a spirit far different from the spirit of the gospel), and did therefore professedly imitate that prophet in his severe manner of life, and look, and diet, and garb, and behaviour, and doctrine; so his example belonged rather to the Mosaic state, under which he lived and taught, than to the Christian dispensation, which began where his preaching ended. Nor did even the Baptist himself propose his own practice as a pattern to his followers: on the contrary, when the people, the publicans, and the soldiers inquired of him, "what they should do to flee from the wrath to come," he did not exhort them to go out of the world into the wilderness; but gave them such directions only as related