

1. *Except Jehovah build the house.* There is no reason why the Jews should deny that this Psalm was composed by Solomon. They think that the letter ל, *lamed*, which we translate *of*, is equivalent to, *in behalf of Solomon*; which is at variance with common usage, for such a title in all cases designates the author. Accordingly, they absurdly devise a new sense, for which there is no necessity, it being very suitable for Solomon, who was endowed with the spirit of wisdom in the affairs of government, to discourse of things which he knew and had experience about. In affirming that God governs the world and the life of man, he does so for two reasons: First, whatever prosperous event may fall out to men, their ingratitude is instantly manifested by their ascribing it wholly to themselves; and thus God is defrauded of the honour which is his due. Solomon, to correct such a perverse error, declares, that nothing happens prosperously to us except in so far as God blesses our proceedings. Secondly, his purpose was to beat down the foolish presumption of men, who, setting God aside, are not afraid to undertake to do anything, whatever it may be, in exclusive reliance upon their own wisdom and strength. Stripping them, therefore, of that which they groundlessly arrogate to themselves, he exhorts them to modesty and the invocation of God. He does not, however, reject either

the labour, the enterprises, or the counsels of men; for it is a praiseworthy virtue diligently to discharge the duties of our office. It is not the will of the Lord that we should be like blocks of wood, or that we should keep our arms folded without doing anything;² but that we should apply to use all the talents and advantages which he has conferred upon us. It is indeed true that the greatest part of our labours proceeds from the curse of God; and yet although men had still retained the integrity of their primitive state, God would have had us to be employed, even as we see how Adam was placed in the garden of Eden to dress it. ([Gen. 2:15](#).) Solomon, therefore, does not condemn watchfulness, a thing which God approves; nor yet men's labour, by which when they undertake it willingly, according to the commandment of God, they offer to him an acceptable sacrifice; but lest, blinded by presumption, they should forcibly appropriate to themselves that which belongs to God, he admonishes them that their being busily occupied will profit them nothing, except in so far as God blesses their exertions. By the word *house* he means not only a building of wood or stone, but he comprehends the whole domestic order and government of a family, even as a little after by the word *city* he denotes not only the buildings or

²“Ou que nous demeurions les bras croisez sans rien faire.”—Fr.

enclosure of the walls, but also the general state of the whole commonwealth. There is likewise a synecdoche in the words *builder* and *keeper*; for he intends to say in general that whatever labour, foresight, and skill men may employ in maintaining a family, or in preserving a city, will be to no purpose unless God grant from heaven a prosperous issue to the whole.

It behoves us to remember what I have just now touched upon, that since the minds of men are commonly possessed with such headstrong arrogance as leads them to despise God, and to magnify beyond measure their own means and advantages, nothing is of more importance than to humble them, in order to their being made to perceive that whatever they undertake it shall dissolve into smoke, unless God in the exercise of pure grace cause it to prosper. When philosophers argue concerning the political affairs of a state they ingeniously gather together whatever seems to them to answer their purpose—they acutely point out the means of erecting a commonwealth, and on the other hand the vices by which a well-regulated state is commonly corrupted; in short, they discourse with consummate skill upon everything that is necessary to be known on this subject, except that they omit the principal point—which is, that men, however much they may excel in wisdom and virtue, and whatever may be the undertak-

ings in which they may engage, can effect nothing, unless in so far as God stretches forth his hand to them, or rather makes use of them as his instruments. Which of the philosophers ever acknowledged that a politician is nothing else but an instrument guided by the hand of God? Yea, rather they held that good management on the part of man constituted the chief cause of the happiness of the social body. Now, since mortal men thus rise up with profane boldness to build cities, and to order the state of the whole world, the Holy Spirit justly reproves such madness. Let us then so occupy ourselves, each according to the measure of his ability and the nature of his office, as that at the same time the praise of the success attending our exertions may remain exclusively with God. The partition which many devise—that he who has behaved himself valiantly, while he leaves the half of the praise to God, may take the other half to himself, is deserving of all condemnation. The blessing of God should have the whole share and exclusively hold the throne.

Now, if our terrestrial condition depends entirely upon the good pleasure of God, with what wings shall we fly up into heaven? When a house is planned, or a certain manner of life is chosen—yea, even when laws are enacted and justice administered, all this is nothing else than to creep upon the earth; and yet the Holy Spirit declares, that all our endeavours in

this way are fruitless and of no value. So much the less to be borne with, then, is the folly of those who strive to penetrate even into heaven by their own power. Farther, we may gather from this doctrine, that it is not wonderful to find in the present day the state of the world so troubled and confused as it actually is—justice put to flight in cities, the husband and the wife mutually accusing each other, fathers and mothers complaining of their children—in short, all bewailing their own condition. For how few are to be found who, in their vocation, turn to God, and who, being rather inflated with arrogance, do not wickedly exalt themselves? God then justly renders this sad reward to ungrateful men when he is defrauded of his honour. But were all men humbly to submit themselves to the providence of God, there is no doubt that this blessing which Solomon here commends would shed its lustre on all parts of our life, both public and private.

The verb *עמל*, *amal*, which we have translated *to labour*, signifies not only to employ one's self in something or other, but also to busy one's self even to lassitude and distress. I have said that by the word *keepers* is to be understood not only those who are appointed to keep watch, but all magistrates and judges. If they are characterized by vigilance, it is the gift of God. There is, however, need of another vigilance—that of God; for unless he keep

watch out of heaven no perspicacity of men will be sufficient to guard against dangers.