MONEY has always exercised a special fascination on men's minds. Wealth, though it gives power and freedom from the burdensome necessity of making a living, has rarely brought happiness. Spiritual teachers have preached the virtues of poverty and enjoined men to "travel light", and one of the few occasions on which Christ took direct physical action against any group was when he chased the money lenders out of the temple.

But today our attitudes are changing rapidly. The great slump of 1929 proved that the individual virtues of financial restraint, of never spending beyond one's current income, were absolutely catastrophic when applied to national and international economies. When the crash came governments drew in their horns, cut their spending, reduced the sums payable to those out of work and limited their purchases in every possible way. Far from having the intended effect of restoring confidence and financial sanity, these steps merely accelerated the decline.

When the late John Maynard Keynes was appointed head of a commission to examine the slump and the economic situation and to recommend what should be done, he spent three days lecturing the government officials, business and labour leaders, and politicians who formed the commission, on his ideas about how a modern economy should be managed. Today the ideas which he put forward are used and applied the world over. This is the main reason why the world has not suffered any uncontrollable slumps since 1929. Keynes taught that when the economy falters and begins to go into decline the government must stimulate spending power, increase its orders for goods and services—in fact put more and not less money into the public's hands. Only when the economy begins to gallop out of control should its managers apply the brake, limit spending power and make money harder to obtain.

These ideas were a complete reversal of "traditional" economic thinking. Keynes showed that "sound economics", namely only spending what one actually has, is, for national purposes, fatal. That horror of the moralist, "deficit budgeting", turns out to be good national business sense, and within reason mortgages, hire purchase debt, and other such arrangements are essential means of keeping the wheels of a modern economy turning.

Indeed we have come a long way from the days when it was sound and virtuous to "save money". As every small investor knows, money steadily declines in its value or purchasing power. To save money as such is to lose it. Investment in growth stock, property and real estate, or if you are
wealthy, in paintings and jewelry, this is the way to multiply your real assets. Part of the trouble today is that everyone has learnt and is applying the lessons which Keynes taught, but strictly speaking that is another story. Alongside these gradual but complete reversals of attitude over the use of money (including credit) in national and international economic life, men's thinking about its use by individuals has also fundamentally changed.

In the past, moralists have rejected money. It has been regarded as evil and as a temptation. The injunction "to give up all and follow me" has been interpreted almost entirely in a financial and material sense. Rich men have parted with their wealth out of spiritual fear and from a desire to get into heaven, and not out of love for their fellows. And the poor have made a virtue from necessity, and all have indulged in mortification and various forms of self-sacrifice as a penance for unworthy desires. Thus sacrifice has come to mean only a rejection of the material world. The dominating motives have too often been a combination of fear and spiritual selfishness. Religious thought in the 2000 years of the Christian era has been characterised by a rejection of "the world, the flesh and the devil", and money has been regarded as the root of all evil.

Modern man however is unsympathetic to an ethic of rejection. Limitation is so negative and so much less attractive than abundance. And a "giving up" is not the only meaning of sacrifice. It can signify "a making whole," or holy. People today see no virtue in a poverty that halves their usefulness, and they welcome money not just because of the comfort it can bring but because it can make them so much more efficient and effective.

Intelligent modern thinkers of every kind assert that money is of itself an impersonal force. The important thing is not so much whether you have money or not, but your attitude toward it. Are you its slave or its master? It is the "love of money" that is the root of evil", not money itself. The rejection and past-fear of money is seen to symbolise the rejection and fear of the material world, and a denial of human responsibility to share in its redemption.

If money is both a symbol of materialism and of the material world, to be mastered and redeemed, our changing attitudes are to be welcomed as an advance. They do not however remove the problems which possession or non-possession poses to the individual man. The poor person has little opportunity to take much thought for the morrow, or what it may bring. He has to live dangerously, for he has no other choice. But as soon as he has money, he is tempted to play safe and to put some of it by as an insurance for the future. The poor man who wants to help worthy causes and to assist in the meeting of human need with money has little chance to exercise choice or discrimination as to how he shall give. But the man who has money in some quantity to give away is faced with many, and often acutely difficult decisions. How can he portion out
his limited offering to meet limitless need? How easy it is for the rich man to squander his wealth by supporting ventures which do not really assist the onward march of the human family. Therefore, as money has ceased to be an object of fear and distaste, largely as a result of the increase and more equitable distribution of wealth, the problem of its wise use and sharing has increasingly exercised men's thinking.

The significance of "the welfare state" lies partly in the fact that it is a means of sharing the good things in life, and partly as a symbol of man's escape from the bondage of the material world. The growth of charitable trusts and foundations, which today administer vast sums of money, is an example of how to channel private resources for the public good.

The emergence of institutions at the world level which are concerned with the control and distribution of money energy symbolises a quiet but none the less complete revolution in man's thinking about the material world. Money can be just as much a saving force at its own level as any other form of energy, and the right use of money is a highly skilled task. World money institutions represent the torch of world altruism working at the physical level.

Money is no longer left outside the range of philosophical and ethical thought, but is included on the basis that a thing is spiritual if it serves the needs of both God and man. The right and wise use of money is today being realised as a definite form of spiritual service, just as important and valuable in its own way as teaching, scientific research, international statesmanship and religious instruction and help.

Money is indeed the root, but not of evil. Rightly handled it can be a source of all that is good and beneficent in the physical world, a means of transforming the material world and subordinating it to spiritual purposes. We should note however that money can flow through those who would do spiritual work only when they are living sacrificial lives, and are so identified with the good of the whole that they ask nothing for the "separated individual self". The psychology and the practice of abundance and personal restraint and modest living go hand in hand.

We have reached the point therefore where money is no longer feared as such, but is welcomed as a human asset to be used for spiritual purposes. Time was when the use of prayer and meditative power, as a means of attracting money for spiritual work, was regarded as a form of black magic. Today we understand the importance of money and accept that it may rightly be invoked and prayed for.

Life is abundance and operates at every level of the known world. The secret of life and of abundance lies in giving and in sharing and in meeting need. Limitation, poverty, negativity, both material, mental and spiritual are caused by blocking the channels of divine flow. The cornering of money for selfish purposes is a cardinal sin against humanity. But the use of money for the welfare of humanity can be a modern demonstration of divine love.