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# **Introduction**

**The Imitation of Christ:** For 600 years, the worlds most read Christian devotional…next to the Bible itself.

But this is not a book report, or history lesson, per se, but a look at the work of a group of **men and women touched by God’s Spirit during a 14th and 15th century spiritual revival** that took place in the lowlands of Westphalia (northwestern Germany and northeast Netherlands)

**called, the New Devotion, also the Christian Renaissance**, lasting from A.D. 1380 to A.D. 1520 (140 years), out of which came a devoted man, a mystic apostle if you will to the movement, a deacon and religious leader, Gerard Groote, who wanted to know God and teach and preach to others to do the same. Groote was the forerunner of other notable leaders in the movement: Wesel Gansfort, Hegius, and Errasmus, and others, all coming out of this truly spiritual revival was a group of men and women, laymen, religious, priests, clerics called the **Brethren of the Common Life and the Sisters of the Common Life**, all of whom were of like-mindedness for devotion to Christ and interior perfection) and they pursued **perfection of their interior lives**, lived practical Christian lives, and worked (vs. begging like was done in many monasteries, convents and friaries, and they **built schools, educated children, and copied books, including the Bible, one of which is the Vulgate** currently used in our Church. The brothers lived in houses as a fraternity taking vows as in any clerical regular order, except without vows of obedience…the brethren and their disciples were **free to come and go**. The schools built and run by the Brethren of the Common Life in Deventer and Zwolle became prototypes of a revival of learning throughout the lowlands and Europe itself. Beloved by the magistrates, the people, yes, all with the exception of jealous and lazy priests and religious clerics at the time who despised their preaching, their favor with all, their productive education ministries, and their having all things in common without being an approved order.

One boy, from Kampen joined himself to the Brethren in Deventer in the northeast Netherlands named Thomas…from Kampen, or **Thomas A’ Kempis**, who recorded the biographies and writings of the Brethren and Sisters, eventually editing and summarizing their teachings and lessons regarding the Imitation of Christ…how to come after Christ, denying oneself, taking up one’s cross, and following Him:

**THESE ARE THEIR STORIES and THIS IS THEIR WORK**, and Book we’ll learn of tonight.

## **The New Devotion Grew out of an Age of Adversity**

The men of the **New Devotion** absorbed the wisdom of the ancients (they were exposed to Scholasticism), the essence of Christ’s teachings, the mystic religion of the Fathers and the saints of Medieval Europe, as well as the teaching of the Christian humanists of the Italian Renaissance…they embraced all of this in their preaching, teaching, and living the imitation of Christ.

**The Imitation written during the Age of Adversity.** During the time of Catherine of Sienna and prior to the births of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, there were Catholic Christian mystics, placed in what some called the Age of Adversity, during the Middle Ages, the 1300s through the 1400s, and where sin abounded, grace abounded, and a move of the Spirit of God abounded even more. It was the best of times and the worst of times.

**14th Century Europe, especially in the Netherlands: A World and Church in Disorder, Discontent, Decline, and yet, Revival and Christian Rebirth**

### **The Strife of National and Dynastic Wars Brought Misery to Western Europe**

* + **The Hundred Years' War (French: Guerre de Cent Ans; 1337–1453**) was a conflict between the kingdoms of England and France and a civil war in France during the Late Middle Ages. **With war came loss of economic strength and influence as a dominating force of learning, literature, and art..**It emerged from feudal disputes over the Duchy of Aquitaine and was triggered by a claim to the French throne made by Edward III of England. The war grew into a broader military, economic, and political struggle involving factions from across Western Europe, fueled by emerging nationalism on both sides. **The periodization of the war typically charts it as taking place over 116 years. However, it was an intermittent conflict which was frequently interrupted by external factors, such as the Black Death, and several years of truces**.
* **The Holy Roman Empire** consisted of many political and economic forces gradually undermining the prosperity of the people

### **The Church was in a Deplorable Estate**

**The Church**—growing from bad to worse the more the **CLERGY WERE NEGLECTING THEIR DUTIES**. Everywhere a decline in moral standards not only by the masses, but also by clerics, religious, bishops, and good Catholics from every realm. Gerard Groote wrote a tome against the concubinage of the priests. REFORM was greatly desired by the Catholic faithful…and even among many clerics.

**The "Babylonian Captivity**" and **the Great Schism** are two significant events in the history of the Catholic Church that took place during the late Middle Ages, reflecting crises in leadership and authority.

* **Babylonian Captivity (1309–1377)** The term "Babylonian Captivity" refers to the period when the papacy was based in Avignon, France, rather than in Rome. The severest difficulties faced by the medieval church involved the papacy. This period began in 1309 when Pope Clement V, under the influence of the French crown, decided to move the papal court to Avignon. The most extreme and inflexible advocate of papal authority, Boniface VIII, initiated a struggle with the French king, Philip IV, over Philip’s attempts to tax and judge the clergy. After Boniface issued the bull Unam sanctam (“One Holy”), which asserted the unity of the church and the authority of the pope over kings, Philip rallied the people of France and accused Boniface of blasphemy, murder, sodomy, and other crimes. In 1303, mercenaries in French pay and under French leadership harassed and humiliated the pope with impunity, arresting Boniface at his family palace in Anagni. Although freed by the people of the town, Boniface never recovered from the shock and died shortly afterward. The aftermath of this “outrage of Anagni” was the desertion of Rome by the popes and their long residence (1309–77) at Avignon (now in France), a chapter in church history called the “Babylonian Captivity” after the 70 years of Jewish exile in Babylon in the 6th century bc.
* **For nearly 70 years, seven successive popes resided in Avignon rather than in Rome.** The period is often seen as a time when the papacy was under the control of the French monarchy, leading to a loss of spiritual authority and the perception of the Church as being too worldly and politically entangled. The "Babylonian Captivity" ended in 1377 when Pope Gregory XI returned the papal court to Rome (**St. Catherine of Siena, the Mystic Doctor of Unity moved him through correspondence and prayers**). However, the return to Rome did not resolve the underlying issues of corruption, power struggles, and the weakened spiritual authority of the papacy.
* **Great Schism (1378–1417)** Shortly after the return of the papacy to Rome, the Church faced another crisis: the Great Schism. In 1378, following the death of Gregory XI, the College of Cardinals elected Urban VI as pope. However, his harsh reforms and volatile temperament led a group of French cardinals to declare his election invalid and elect a rival pope, Clement VII, who established a papal court in Avignon once again. This led to the existence of two competing popes, one in Rome and one in Avignon, each with their own supporters among the European powers. **The situation worsened in 1409 when a council at Pisa attempted to resolve the schism by electing a third pope, Alexander V, hoping to depose the other two**. Instead, this led to three concurrent popes, deepening the divide within the Church.

The schism was finally resolved at the Council of Constance (1414–1418), which deposed or accepted the resignation of the rival popes and elected Martin V as the sole pope, restoring the papacy to a single leader. These events severely damaged the Church's prestige and authority, contributing to the growing calls for reform that would later culminate in the Protestant Reformation.
* **Corruption within the Church and among Clergy**
	+ Immorality among priests, bishops, especially within the hierarchy: Groote saw this in his clerical work at Cologne. Clerics having concubines (women on the side)
		- Especially repugnant among the Germanic and northern European populations
	+ Corruption in the monasteries among priests and monks
	+ Ignorance of the Sacred Scriptures, spiritual and physical laziness, and not feeding the sheep

### **The Black Death:**

* The Black Death was a bubonic plague pandemic occurring in Europe from 1346 to 1353. It was one of the most fatal pandemics in human history; as many as 50 million people perished, perhaps 50% of Europe's 14th century population. The disease is caused by the bacterium Yersinia pestis and spread by fleas and through the air. One of the most significant events in European history, the Black Death had far-reaching population, economic, and cultural impacts. It was the beginning of the second plague pandemic. The plague created religious, social and economic upheavals, with profound effects on the course of European history.
* The Black Death was the second great natural disaster to strike Europe during the Late Middle Ages (the first one being the Great Famine of 1315–1317) and is estimated to have killed 30% to 60% of the European population, as well as approximately 33% of the population of the Middle East. There were further outbreaks throughout the Late Middle Ages and, also due to other contributing factors (the Crisis of the Late Middle Ages), the European population did not regain its 14th century level until the 16th century.[a][19] Outbreaks of the plague recurred around the world until the early 19th century.

**Discontent with Dead, intellectually-focused Scholasticism
Scholasticism** was a medieval intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated European universities from the 12th to the 17th centuries. **It sought to reconcile Christian theology with classical philosophy, especially the works of Aristotle,** and relied heavily on a method of critical reasoning and debate. The scholastic method involved a rigorous form of dialectical reasoning that sought to clarify contradictions and provide logical foundations for religious doctrine.

Key features of scholasticism include:

1. **Dialectical Method**: Scholastics would pose questions, gather arguments for and against a proposition, and then resolve contradictions through careful analysis. This method emphasized logic and structured debate.
2. **Integration of Faith and Reason**: Scholastics believed that reason could be used to deepen and defend faith, with theology and philosophy complementing each other. They sought to prove the existence of God and explain religious beliefs logically.
3. **Influence of Aristotle**: Aristotle's works, rediscovered in the West through translations from Arabic and Greek, became central to scholastic thought. His emphasis on empirical observation and logical deduction influenced scholastic debates on nature, ethics, and metaphysics.
4. **Major Figures**: Some prominent scholastics include:
	* **Thomas Aquinas** (1225–1274), who developed *Thomism* and harmonized Aristotelian philosophy with Christian theology (Augustine) sometimes called the Thomistic Synthesis, particularly in his work *Summa Theologica*.
	* **Peter Abelard** (1079–1142), known for his work in logic and his ethical writings.
	* **Duns Scotus** (1266–1308), who focused on metaphysics and theology, offering alternatives to Aquinas' positions.

**Scholasticism fell out of favor in the 14th and 15th century** during the rise of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Humanists saw scholasticism as overly abstract, dry, and disconnected from real human experiences and the cultural revival of antiquity. The mystics and the Protestant Reformers had little use for the theological speculation and the university intellectual logic of the Scholastics. Even Aristotle came under critique as modern philosophy evolved, thinkers like René Descartes, who sought clear and distinct ideas through radical doubt, and later empiricists like John Locke and David Hume, criticized the Aristotelian foundations that scholasticism relied on. They believed that knowledge should be grounded in direct experience or mathematical certainty, **not in the reconciliation of ancient philosophy with theology**. Biblical scholars and spiritual theologians, especially the mystics wanted to know God within…to be God with God and follow Christ, not just have an intellectual ascent of propositions and truths…but to know Truth Himself. **Gerard Groote at this time of the 14th century was a student of philosophy and that of Acquinas, but he felt that Acquinas spent a lot of time addressing and answering useless questions…as thought many in the 14th century**.

Regarding the New Mysticism taking a hold of the Rhineland from Cologne to the North Sea including the lowlands of the Netherlands in Deventer, **Whittier wrote this in his The Master: In joy of inward peace, or sense of sorrow over sin, He is his own best evidence—His witness is within.** Eventually, Acquinas was named Angelic Doctor, and his works eventually became the standard of Western intellectual traditions, particularly within Catholic theology and philosophy.

### **Growing Materialism, Mercantilism, and Religious Indifference**

* trading ports in the Netherlands, Portugal, and Italy growing in to family-owned enterprises, banks were in their infancy, business and prosperity starting to grow, which would result in the growing capitalism seen after the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.
* **On the Positive and Spiritual side, a Growing Mysticism was already taking place in Germany and the Netherlands…God’s finger scratching at the hearts of men calling them to Devotion to Him.**

## **A Growing Grace of Christian Mysticism**

* **Men wanted religious experience as opposed to only an intellectual ascent to the tenets of God**…they didn’t despise high learning regarding theology or dogma, but they did want to be partakers of God’s divine nature…and experience Him and His grace in the Church’s sacraments and in their private meditations. One begins to see the writing of books that describe the journey to spiritual perfection…to be holy as God is holy, and to see and know God, YET while being loyal to the Church, her authorities, and her teachings, and being devoted to the Scriptures and Sacred Tradition, and knowing oneself, detaching from this world’s allurements and following Christ.

It is the LOVE OF GOD Shead abroad in the heart…Gal. 2: I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

* **Books were abounding regarding the New Mysticism leading to the New Devotion**.

The mystical tome called **The Nine Rocks** was written by Jerome of Prague (also known as Jerome of Prague, the Younger). Story is an allegory that starts with fish swimming down a river from the hills into the sea, representing man departing from God, but must then find their way back to the hills, which have become a mountain in front of which are nine stones in the river that must be attained to get back to God…the nineth of which is perfection and communion with God through pursuit of holiness and interior, perfection of the soul…God with God. Stone 5 is the giving up of self-will, and the 6th rock is submission to the will of God. We will see pictures of perfection among the mystic…the ladder to God, the interior castles, the spiritual ascension, etc. Jerome was a Czech scholar, philosopher, and follower of Jan Hus, a key figure in the Czech Reformation. In The Nine Rocks, Jerome presents a mystical allegory in which a traveler ascends through nine metaphorical rocks, each representing stages of spiritual struggle and growth. The work explores themes of personal purification, moral challenges, and **the quest for divine enlightenment, reflecting medieval mystical and religious thought.**

### **Meister Eckhart**

* **In Germany, Eckhart von Hochheim OP (c. 1260 – c. 1328),[1] commonly known as Meister Eckhart,** Master Eckhart or Eckehart, claimed original name Johannes Eckhart,[2] was a German Catholic priest, theologian, philosopher and mystic. He was born near Gotha in the Landgraviate of Thuringia (now Thuringia in central Germany) in the Holy Roman Empire.[b]

**Eckhart came into prominence during the Avignon Papacy** at a time of increased tensions between monastic orders, diocesan clergy, the Franciscan Order, and Eckhart's Dominican Order. In later life, he was accused of heresy and brought up before the local Franciscan-led Inquisition, and tried as a heretic by Pope John XXII with the bull In Agro Dominico of March 27, 1329. He seems to have died before his verdict was received.

**He was well known for his work with pious lay groups such as the Friends of God and was succeeded by his more circumspect disciples Johannes Tauler and Henry Suso who was later beatified**. Since the 19th century, he has received renewed attention. He has acquired a status as a great mystic within contemporary popular spirituality, as well as considerable interest from scholars situating him within the medieval scholastic and philosophical tradition

**Notable writings from the Christian mystics associated with the ascent or journey to God:**

**“The Ladder of Divine Ascent" by St. John Climacus**

### **Theologia Germanica**

Also known as Theologia Deutsch or Teutsch, or as Der Franckforter, is a mystical treatise believed to have been written in the later 14th century by an anonymous author. According to the introduction of the Theologia the author was a priest and a member of the Teutonic Order living in Frankfurt, Germany. **The Theologia was written during the disruptive reign of the Avignon Papacy (1309–78),** **when many clerics were forbidden to perform Catholic rites because of the power struggle between the Pope and Holy Roman Emperor. Lay groups of pious individuals, like the Friends of God, became prominent during this time, and the author is usually associated with the Friends of God.**

### **The Mystics wanted a Relationship with God**

A relationship that flowed from a high and loyal view of the Church AND her sacraments. They wanted to walk with Christ, to know Him, to love Him, to devote themselves to Him and to the love and edification of one’s neighbor…These Germanic, French, and Dutch mystics were ready to throw off exaltation of self, superstition, vows of blind obedience, and theological speculation having come from the universities that were of no assistance to the cleansing of the flesh and the perfection of the soul.

* **As St. Paul wrote in Phil 2:** 7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 **that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.**

### **Detachment, Conversion, and Love**

**Love** was distinctly paramount in their writings, and a primary word in the vocabulary of the mystic that we’ll see in the imitation of Christ is**, “Abgeshiedenheit,” or DETACHMENT**. Meister Eckhardt’s word for self-detachment from the world and temporal things so as to know Christ and follow and imitate Him. It was important to meditate on the vision of God and the knowledge of Him through His Word, letting God perfect one by His Spirit. **John Tauler spoke of “Kehr,”** or conversion. The mystics desired an authentic and and effectual work of God in their hearts to experience conversion from original sin and concupiscence, and power and grace to perfect the soul by divine power and God’s presence within.

* **Spiritual Revival versus Theological Arguments**. This was a different pursuit and method from the blind, ignorant, or indifferent practice of sacraments as an external act, which is sacerdotalism, and it was different than the Scholastics’ dialectics trying to prove the existence of God through logic…you might recall Acquinas’ cosmological arguments for the existence of God…the mystics were skeptical because unless the Spirit of God opened one’s eyes to the Kingdom of God, one can neither see, nor enter the Kingdom of God…regeneration and interior perfection is a work of the Spirit, not of the intellect, although the intellect plays a part, it is the born-again will to believe that enables a man to understand. Augustine’s unless I believe, I cannot know. One can show the world an endless series of proofs to no avail unless the heart has been enlightened by God.

### **Jan von Ruysbroeck**

**or John of Ruysbroeck was a Flemish mystic** close to the Friends of God in heart. The Flemish folks came from Flanders in Belgium and they are Dutch speaking as in the Netherlands. Ruysbroeck sent his book, “The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage,” to the Friends of God in Strassburg, France, and John is the connecting link between the German mystics and John’s greatest pupil, Gerard Groote, the founder of the Brethren of the Common Life in the Lowlands of the Netherlands.

* A contemplative who at age 60 left the priesthood and put on the habit of the Augustinian order and became a prior. At his death, his biographer wrote that the bells rang without hands working them and perfume exuded from his dead body.
* **He was given the title, Doctor Ecstaticus**. He was a man that focused and wrote on the spiritual phases one achieves to realize oneness with God. He wrote about the ways to get to that blessedness. He also wrote, “The Mirror of Blessedness,” and “Samuel,” a work that justifies the work of contemplation, and he wrote the “Glistening Stone” about the white stone spoken of in Rev. 2: 17, which he interprets as Christ.

He emphasized love and oneness with God, and he ensures Christ is written on every page of his works…Christ is our canon, our breviary, our everyday book, and He belongs to laity and clergy alike…**ONE CAN SEE THESE PREACHERS and TEACHERS LEADING THE PEOPLE TO DEVOTION TO LORD.**
* Yet Ruysbroeck taught men to pursue inner perfection, namely “the contemplative phase wherein wherefore the soul is transferred into a purity and brightness which is above all intelligence. It is a peculiar adornment and heavenly crown, and only one in a thousand find it. A man must live virtuously; he must like a fire that never goes out, love God constantly and he must lose himself in the darkness in which men of the contemplative habit no longer find their way by the methods known to the creature. In the abyss of this darkness, a light incomprehensible is begotten, the Son of God, in whom we see eternal life.”
* **Ruysbroeck’s greatest pupil, Gerard Groote** did not follow his style of contemplation, but on the other hand devoted himself to a practical life of following Christ closely associated with everyday living, answering everyday questions, and fervently doing good to one’s fellow man…

### **The Spirit of God Falls on the Lowlands of the Netherlands**

**Then in the early 1300s, the Spirit of God falls in the Lowlands** of old Westphalia, in the Netherlands along a quiet river called the Oude Issel, or Old Issel (I-shall, sometimes spelled Yssel) river, a river along which are the towns of Deventer, Zutphen, Kampen, and Zwolle, minor municipalities and very old cities along this quiet river flowing alongside and nearby the Rhine River as it makes its way to the North Sea and Amsterdam. These cities at the time were only slightly impacted by the growing Dutch commerce of the cities of Amsterdam, Leiden, Dordrecht, and Utrecht, where the bishopric of Deventer, Zutphen, Kampen, and Zwolle were. **The Bishop of Utrecht as he interfaced with the Brethren of the Common Life played a large part in this New Devotional movement**.

* **Deventer lie beside verdant meadows, grain fields, stunted pine trees, barren sand dunes, and radiant colors of flowers and shrubbery. A beautiful place to contemplate the things of God, a place perhaps like David found as he contemplated Yahway God in Psalm 23.** Contemplatives and great mystics have always loved to seek communion with God along rivers, soft and quiet meadows, forests, and deserts.
* **This was the center of the movement of the New Devotion, the Devotio Moderna** with vibrancy over a 140 year period from 1380 to 1520. It was the working of the Spirit of God among brothers (laymen, priests, deacons, clerics regular and others, monks/religious, as well as women (lay and religious).
	+ Followed on the heels of the spiritual movement that exalted the works and spiritual reforms, including monastic reforms of St Francis of Assisi and St Bernard of Clairvaux that took place in Paris, Amien, Brussels, and Cologne and inspired clerics and the masses to higher ideals than the worship of self and materialism.
	+ The New Devotion, although embracing the learning of the ancients as presented by Acquinas and other Scholastics, was NOT influenced by the Italian Renaissance, which had its focus on the exaltation of man…and man as the Measure. The Devotio Moderna sought to follow Christ and to come under His Way and to live out His Words
	**The Brethren had a very high and loyal view of the Church, her Pope in Avignon, and her and their Bishop in Utrecht, with whom they had a vital, vibrant, and supportive relationship.**
* From this group of Brethren in the Yssel Valley came not only **Thomas A Kempis** and the Imitation, but **Gerard Zerbolt**, a leader among the Brethren who wrote the **Spiritual Ascensions**, a true discipleship book; and then came John Mombaer’s or Mauburn’s **Rosary of Spiritual Exercises**, which would later have a profound influence on Ignatius Loyola. Zerbolt’s work affected Erasmus, another Dutch theologian schooled in the Brethren of the Common Life’s schools, and Martin Luther gave it significant praise. And in the Yssel Valley due to the work of the Brethren, Gansfort and Erasmus acquired a desire for spiritual and ecclesiastical reform that pressed the entire Catholic Church toward a precipice that would lead to internal reform, as well as the Reformation, for it has to be mentioned that the desire for God and the desire for reform, NOT SCHISM, NOT Protestantism, but true spiritual and institutional reform brought about by this devotion did inspire others who were touched by the Brethren of the Common Life: Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli.

### **A Christian Renaissance**

* **To NOTE: the entire world was changing at this time…historians also call this time the Pre-Reformation Reformation, or the CHRISTIAN RENAISSANCE of a Spiritual Awakening, A Rebirth that reformed education of the young and the Church and Monasteries.**  One notes the transition beginning from Feudalism, the power of secular rule of Popes and Dynasties, monastery influence to the faint sounds of nation-states, capitalism, a biblically knowledgeable populace reading the Scriptures in their own languages, and most of freedom of conscience and will.

**All of these works including** **exhortations about detaching from the things of this world, pursuing holiness and spiritual perfection, denying oneself, taking up one’s cross, and following Christ** through the perfecting one’s interior life and leaning hard into the grace of God for victory. **These would indeed lead to the production of the** **Imitation of Christ** is the devotional that has served the Church for 600 years in doing just that, especially for those religious.

**A beautiful and powerful portion of God’s tapestry to disciple the nations**

### **To Imitate Christ is to Love from a Purified Heart.**

**The Imitation of Christ, is not a devotional about how to love your neighbor or how to execute social justice**, and its not the consummate book on theological conclusions and presuppositions, and its not a product of the great universities that brought forth the sterile ritual and lifeless Scholasticism that brought no life to the people…

**BUT The Imitation of Christ IS A BOOK** about **how to perfect your interior life, detach from the habits, sins, and vices and self-absorption…yes, and the attachment to the things of this life that keep us from being tied to the true Vine, Christ, as well as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the unknown pride of life and self-delusion that rests in your soul and discolors your imitation of Christ**…that keeps you from loving God and loving your neighbor with all of your heart. It teaches you the way of detachment, yes, but also exhorts you to nurture through habit how to overcome the wiles of the devil, the trials, tribulation, rejection, and false accusations of this world, and even from Christian friends, SO THAT YOU DON’T stumble in your following Christ and that you persevere to the end in your imitation of our Lord.

**“If you love me, Keep my Commandments**,” said Jesus, which is exactly what the wisest man who had ever lived prior to Jesus, Solomon, said as he concluded Ecclesiastes, 12: 13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: **Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all. His everything!**

**St. Paul said in 1 Tim 1: 5 Now the purpose of the commandment is *love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,***

A pure heart…a good conscience…and a sincere faith…this, brothers and sisters, is what **Interiority**, the perfection of the soul, the pursuit of the divine life, the Imitation of Christ is ALL ABOUT. **Pursuit of a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith…ALL OF WHICH FLOW from a JUST DEVOTION to GOD and a perfecting and perfected love toward neighbor**.

**As we will see in the lives of the Brethren of the Common Life**, as well as in their summarized writings in the Imitation of Christ, is that spiritual perfection, flows from devotion to God, to Christ who saves us. **AND EVERYONE IS JUSTLY OBLIGATED TO DEVOTE THEMSELVES TO GOD AND WALK AS CHRIST WALKED…**As the Priest says in Mass: "It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God."

To adore, to remain faithful, devoted and put off sin and vice and self, detaching from this world, the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes and pride of life, and putting on virtue…new perfected habits given by grace. Removing the vice of curiousness (**CURIOSITAS**) from our heart that seeks and appreciates learning everything else in the world BUT TRUTH ITSELF…HIMSELF…and put on **STUDIOCITUS** to seek first the Kingdom of God and His Truth and Righteousness from which a true understanding of all truth begins and continues, and flourishes.

* Recall Jesus said, Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect, meaning perfected in heart: So we look to perfect the interior life.

### **The Devotion to Be as God with God**

Athanasius was a contemplative of the things of God, and he also wrote that **"He [Christ Jesus] became man so that man may become God"** explaining the mystery of the Incarnation—God becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ.

* This statement reflects the theological concept known as theosis or divinization, which is central to Christian theology, particularly in Eastern Christianity. Theosis is the idea that through the Incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, humanity is offered the possibility of sharing in the divine nature. This does not mean that humans become God in essence, but rather that they participate in God's divine life through grace.
* **One doesn’t stop being human, but one becomes as God, dwelling with God**…in this life.

**The contemplation of God and of spiritual things flows from a desire of DEVOTION. To know God, and to know His ways…to Be as God via Redemption in Christ, and to be with God…seeing the Beatific vision. To Be God With God.**

**"Be God with God"** is attributed to **St. John of the Cross**, a 16th-century Spanish mystic and Doctor of the Church. This expression encapsulates his profound understanding of the mystical union with God, where the soul, through deep contemplation and spiritual purification, reaches such a close and intimate union with God that it participates in the divine life in a way that could be described as "being God with God." St. John of the Cross often explored themes of the soul's journey toward God, emphasizing the transformative process that leads to such a union. This idea is deeply rooted in his writings, particularly in works like "The Spiritual Canticle" and "The Living Flame of Love."

***Not unusual desire, we read of St. Peter of these things: Devotion, being as God, pursuing perfection to be as He is with Him: See 2 Peter 1:*** *1 Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord,* ***3 as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*** *5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither [e]barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

**The words of the mystic John Ruysbroeck** (1293-1381): “God’s interior stirring and touch makes us hunger and strive, for the Spirit of God is pursuing our spirit. The more there is of the touch, the more there is of the hunger and striving. This is a life of love at the highest level of its activity.”

* From his work "**The Spiritual Espousals**", where he delves into the mystical union between the soul and God. In this text, Ruysbroeck describes the interior movement of God within the soul, emphasizing the dynamic and active presence of God that draws the soul into deeper communion with Him. The idea of "God's interior stirring" reflects the intimate and transformative experience of God's love and grace working within the soul, guiding it toward spiritual maturity and union with the Divine. **THE BRETHREN WANTED THIS AND WANTED IT TO BE LIVED OUT IN THEIR LIVES AND TEACHINGS, and this is where the fruitfulness of their lives of devotion came forth and changed the culture…reformed the Church, continued the reform of the religious, and built into the heart of men throughout Europe and beyond and desire for God-given freedom to live, move and have their being in the world, while detaching from it, as they imitated the Lord Christ Jesus.**

**The Imitation of Christ** flows from **Detachment from the World, and DEVOTION, the pursuit of Spiritual Perfection, Detachment from the things and desires of this world to Take up one’s Cross and Follow and Imitate Christ.**

The book itself comes from the collective writings of the contemplatives and mystics, along with truths from the Church Fathers. **Mysticism is popularly known as becoming one with God, synonymous with "union with God"** “**Mysticism**" means also the shutting the eyes and mouth to experience mystery. Its figurative meaning is to be initiated into the "mystery revelation." Thayer's Greek Lexicon, the term μυστήριον in classical Greek meant "a hidden thing", "secret". The Catholic Vulgate often translates the Greek term to the Latin sacramentum (sacrament).

**So, a mystic desires unity with God, to know Him, as St Paul wrote in Phil 3:10, to be united with Him and to know His ways.** To walk with Him, to partake of His divine nature while walking in holiness and doing good…so the mystics associated with the Imitation of Christ affirmed this world, yet wanted to be one with God as they followed Christ and imitated Him here and now by grace through faith. **An intimate experience with God including hesychia (inner stillness—why we contemplate during Eucharistic Adoration), in which contemplative prayer silences the mind to progress along the path of theosis (deification).**

**You’ve all heard of the mystical “Doctors of the Church"** referring to those saints recognized by the Catholic Church for their **significant contributions to mystical theology and doctrine through their writings, teachings, and holiness.** They had profound mystical experiences and writings on the spiritual life, particularly the union of the soul with God. A focus on the perfection of the interior life…**INTERIORITY**. And several here were influenced by the Imitation of Christ and the movement and men and women who wrote it. The most well-known mystical Doctors of the Church include:

**1. St. Teresa of Ávila** (1515–1582), Doctor of Prayer, Feast Day: October 15

Contribution: Teresa of Ávila was a Carmelite nun and mystic. Her most famous works, such as "The Interior Castle" and "The Way of Perfection," describe the stages of spiritual growth and mystical union with God. She was the first woman to be declared a Doctor of the Church in 1970.

**2. St. John of the Cross** (1542–1591), Doctor of Mystical Theology, Feast Day: December 14

Contribution: A Carmelite friar and mystic, John of the Cross is known for his poetry and writings on the "dark night of the soul," a profound experience of spiritual desolation and union with God. His major works include "The Dark Night of the Soul" and "The Ascent of Mount Carmel."

**3. St. Catherine of Siena** (1347–1380), Doctor of Unity, Feast Day: April 29

Contribution: Catherine of Siena was a Dominican laywoman and mystic. She is known for her work "The Dialogue of Divine Providence," a treatise on prayer and divine love, as well as her letters and other writings that demonstrate her deep mystical experiences. She was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1970.

**4. St. Thérèse of Lisieux** (1873–1897), Doctor of the Little Way, Feast Day: October 1

Contribution: Thérèse of Lisieux, also known as the "Little Flower," was a Carmelite nun whose spirituality, often called "The Little Way," emphasized simplicity, trust in God, and love. Her autobiography, "Story of a Soul," reflects her deep mystical experiences. She was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1997.

**THEN, in an age of Adversity, with the spark of God’s living and powerful Spirit, men’s hearts were ignited and they sought fellowship together to live the New Devotion and ultimately affect the world as the Brethren of the Common Life.**

## **The Rise of the Devotio Moderna**

**The Devotio Moderna grew out of the sterile and dry ritualism and sacramentalism of Catholicism of the time, the decaying nature of theological scholasticism** (e.g., Thomism, Nominalism, Universalism, the bringing of a confusing mix of Aristotle and Augustine that didn’t speak to the people, and an uneducated and immoral canon regular clericalism among priests and monks. The people were left starving spiritually. Their characteristics were as follows, and one notes these tones throughout the Imitation of Christ, one of their most famous productions. Characteristics of the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life

* **Pious persons living in common, sharing expenses from their work**
* **Devout persons, not professed religious, who frequented their local parishes and who were in no way trying to start new orders apart from the Church**
* **Prevailing teachings were the fear of the Lord without which one could not depart from evil, each day a particular meditation regarding spiritual things from Scripture**
	+ Sat: sin; Sun: Kingdom of Heaven; Mon: death; Tues: Blessings of God; Wed: final judgment; Thurs: pains of Hell; and Fri: the passion of Christ
* **Obedient disciples loyal to their prelates and to the Church and not aligning with theological error**
* **Brothers with brothers, sisters with sisters living in humility and love while pursuing virtue** Their voices were seldom heard on the street, they didn’t self-promote, and rarely placed a name on a writing or production.
* **Open confession of faults and admonishing one another according to the Scriptures very helpful in combatting evil** Short prayers together (ejaculations), hearing the Word of God at dinners from Scriptures
* **Producing and sharing with one another sermons and teachings**
* **Translating devotional treatises into the vernacular of the peoples**

### **Gerard Groote and the Work of God Beginning at Deventer, The Netherlands**

**THEN GOD RAISED UP A MAN, Gerard Groote**, as God does in the biblical times of trouble, He looks for and raises up a man for the time, or a woman if the men refuse to go. This is what God did in the middle of the lowlands of the Netherlands, in the 14th century, a move of God along the IJssel (I-shell) River (a distributary from the Rhine River) starting with the towns of Deventer, Zwolle (Windesheim monastery), Zutphen, Kampen, and others. The man was Gerard Groote, the founder of the Brethren of the Common Life, and the Sisters of the Common Life. Groote said, **"Better a good deed than a learned discourse."** A man, a clerk within the Church who was converted in heart, and would architect the Brethren of the Common Life through God’s grace in his conversion, practical holiness and works, education of the young, and his preaching and teaching throughout the Lowlands.

This saying reflects Groote's belief in the **importance of living a devout and practical Christian life, where actions speak louder than words. He preferred a life of action among men. “My desire is that you remain in the world and be not OF the world.**

His focus was on inner reform and personal holiness INTERIORITY rather than mere intellectual knowledge and ritual. His beliefs and teachings, and powerful preaching became a cornerstone of the movement attributed in part to him…

**the Devotio Moderna, the New Devotion, also called the Christian Renaissance**, included the rise of Brethren of the Common Life, made up of **mystics, reformers, clerics, laymen and women, Christian humanists** and their publishing of books, their education of children, their preaching and teaching, and their Houses (not monasteries) and the monasteries in which many of them lived **influenced the likes of St. Teresa of Avilla, St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Francis De Sales, even Martin Luther, Zwingli, and John Calvin**, and many later figures, even changing culture itself from an age of Scholasticism, Monasteries, and Feudalism to what we now know as Western Culture. They affected reform in the Church. They affected a young man from Kampen, named Thomas Haemmerlein from a town north of Cologne, Germany along the Rheine River, namely **Thomas à Kempis, the complier, editor, and notably known author of The Imitation of Christ.**

**To understand these 14th and 15th century saints and the move of God’s Spirit at this time is critical to understanding the Imitation of Christ,** and that is why I'm sharing this wisdom of these saints: the Brethren of the Common Life, like Gerard Groote, Florentius Radewijns, Gerard Zerbolt as well as Thomas A’ Kempis, as well as the Sisters of the Common Life.

As it is written in the Book of Wisdom, or The Wisdom of Solomon 7:13-14: “Simply I learned about Wisdom, and ungrudgingly do I share— her riches I do not hide away; For to men she is an unfailing treasure; those who gain this treasure win the friendship of God, to whom the gifts they have from discipline commend them. And as it is written in the Breviary: RESPONSORY: Let the peoples proclaim the wisdom of the saints.

**— Let the peoples proclaim the wisdom of the saints.**

With joyful praise let the Church tell forth

**— the wisdom of the saints.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

**— Let the peoples proclaim the wisdom of the saints.**

**Gerard Groote, or Master Geert Grote of Deventer.**

* Born in 1340, died in 1384 of the Black Plague while nursing a friend with the plague. The friend lived and sponsored another house for the Sisters of the Common Life.
* His father, Werner Groote, was a Burgermeister (a schepen, or alderman).
* Gerard studied at St. Lebwin as did Erasmus and at the University of Paris, studied law, received his Masters of Art, and deeply regretted the time he spent learning magic. Groote was thoroughly versed in the Church’s Canon Law and the Corpus Juris Civilis. He was an ordained deacon and had appeared before the Bishopric of Utrecht. He taught in Cologne as a clerk, handsome, highly intellectual, no brothers or sisters, but a bastard child from his father and a mistress, named Bernard took the family position in the Merchant Guild. Befriended Florentius Radewijns (1350-1400), who would be the first overseer of the Brethren of the Common Life, who had studied at Prague.
* Afterwards enjoyed an extremely good living from two prebends as a canon cleric (not an ordained cleric regular) from the Church at Utrecht and Aachen. The Municipal Council of Deventer dispatched Gerard to the Court of Pope Urban V at Avignon where he successfully negotiated problems
* He loved Paris at the time more than the quiet life of the river and fields of Deventer. Lived like a man of the world. For a time he was a wandering student who could not long be satisfied with one school, or home, or woman. **In one of his letters he wrote that he made love to women “in every green woods and upon every mountain**.”

	+ Parents left him a fortune, added to his lucrative Church stipends, and lived in great luxury in the city of the Bishop’s seat of Utrecht. A’ Kempis wrote that he walked in the ways of this world.
	+ This well educated, wealthy, respected profligate, as a Church deacon and cleric, composed a book on marriage from a religious and medical standpoint.
	+ **He was confronted by a mystic while there**, “Why do you stand here, intent upon empty things? You ought to become another man.” That made a bit of an impression, but not for long.
	+ **A second warning came to Groote while in Deventer. He fell very ill**; however, the priest of the local parish refused him the Sacrament of Communion because he would not give up his love for astrology and magic. Gerard’s sickness grew worse, he knew he was at the end, he felt as though he were a drowning man while going down reviewed the events of his deplorable life. He realized he spent his life in self-aggrandizement, especially in Cologne, being indifferent to and participating in the sins of the clergy, especially the higher clergy, instead of working to reform them. He realized the waste of time and opportunity when the Church all around him, in which he worked as a deacon and cleric, was in terrible need of spiritual reform. He had much reason to condemn himself says Hamma. He ordered his books on magic to be burned and seemed to be a changed man, which lasted for a short period of time. Yet, these 2 warnings prepared him for the final phase of his conversion
	+ In 1374, at the age of 34, **Groote met an old friend, Henry of Calcar**, both became friends at the Univ of Paris, a strong friendship, that made Henry’s words powerful to Gerard. Henry had since submitted to the Lord. After a talk together, Gerard, by the words of Henry energized and made effectual by the Spirit of God converted Groote never to go back to his profligacy. He detached from his 2 prebends, returned to Deventer, sold his houses to house poor women, except for two rooms for himself. Hamma says, that he entered the Carthusian Monastery of Monnikhuizen and “entered upon the task of mastering his lower self…Yet Groote did NOT fail. The greater the load of his former wrongs seemed to him, the strong his desire became to root up the last vestiges of his sin and to replace the conquered vices by virtue. He didn’t spend more than 2 years in the monastery. There he was encouraged by the monks. He dressed in hair-cloth, ate no meat, and gave himself to watching and praying. Gerard was thankful for their influence…left due to his thinking it was too austere for most disciples of Christ.
* Yet he was profoundly affected by **Augustine’s writings, The Confessions**, etc., regarding a man who lived it up in the world squandering his livelihood, dabbled in heresies, and black magic, and yet having a profound conversion to Christ that changed his life and the world around him.
* **John Ruysbroeck had an significant influence on Groote’s life** during his spiritual struggles. John was Prior at Groennendaal an Augustinian monastery in the forest of Soignies, near Brussels. Groote heard of Ruysbroeck and sought him out. Upon finding him, **Jan said, “Before I saw you, I knew you were coming.”** Ruysbroeck was deeply mystical, and abstract regarding the Kingdom of God, and Gerard was not there yet, so he eventually departed. Jan said, “Some day you will understand.”
* Gerard worked with another friend, John Cele, the rector at the School of Zwolle. They both would have a strong influence on each other regarding the religious and educational reforms in the schools of the Netherlands and Western Germany.
* 5 years of conversion, two of which were at the Monastery, and then at the end of this stay, the Carthusian monks, astonished at his education, spiritual maturity, gifts of argumentation and persuasion and intellect persuaded Gerard to pursue the priesthood and go about preaching. He didn’t consider himself worthy enough to pursue the priesthood, but considered the deaconate sufficient…so he was ordained a deacon by the Bishop of Utrecht in 1380…and he began preaching from a heart full of devotion to Christ.
* **Groote preached the Gospel of Repentance to the cities of Deventer, Zwolle, Kampen, Zutphen, Amersfoort, Amsterdam, Leiden, Utrecht , Gouda, Delft, and Ghent** like John the Baptist, as Thomas A Kempis wrote. Groote preached and taught that all men should imitate Christ, read the Gospels and do what Christ said to do upon denying themselves, taking up their cross and following Him. Was referred to as the Hammer of Heretics. He Strongly denounced the immorality of the clerics because he was a secular cleric within the Church and saw how they operated and their immorality of life.
* **He preached in the Masses in the vernacular and to the priest in Latin.** He warned the people and clergy of a future that would bring severe regret and punishment if they continued in indifference and sin.
* **Throngs of people came to hear Gerard Groote’s preaching and teaching and the large churches in the larger cities could NOT hold the masses of people who came.** This in a world of sin and indifference to Christianity. The people had no fervent shepherds, and they had no use for the sterile university scholasticism that fell on dead ears, let alone the frustration of the Church schism, the displaced papacy to Avignon, while working to avoid the black plague…**a MAN WAS RAISED UP TO PREACH THE WORD OF GOD**…To clerical dignitaries at Utrecht, he exhorted them to turn from their most flagrant sins, immorality, simony, laziness (mental and physical). Many of the clerics were wolves in sheep clothing, as he knew and said that he knew.
* BUT GROOTE WAS ALSO CONCERNED FOR THE PEOPLE who were roaming about without the guiding help of shepherds. He exhorted them to love God and to love their neighbors. He focused on the practical. As the men in Jerusalem said to Peter, “What shall we do.” Gerard Groote told them. **Follow Christ the Lord, take up your cross, purge yourselves from your vice, supplant them with acquired virtues. Man has fallen low, but he does not have to remain in the dust. Man is free to choose and he must choose a future of blessedness. Groote shared from his own experience from depravity to an Imitator of Christ.**
WHICH APPEALED TO ALL CLASSES OF MEN
* Men from all over the Lowlands were aroused from their apathy. Groote preached, taught, and lent the peoples spiritual books. **AND AT DEVENTER, Groote gathered a band of 12 faithful men, disciples,** one of whom was Florentius Radewijns, who was a vicar of the altar at St. Paul Church in Lebwin. Radewijns forsook his clerical prebend at Utrecht to join Groote in his preaching, teaching, and discipleship ministry, and the ever growing group of these followers and imitators of Christ began meeting in the house of Florentius, which became the first visible beginnings of the society or congregation of the Brethren of the Common Life.
* **Success was apparent, and so weren’t the enemies**…they came not from the world, but from the Church…secular clerics as well as Mendicant Monks. The term "mendicant" comes from the Latin word mendicare, meaning "to beg." This reflects the monks' practice of begging for their needs. The most well-known mendicant orders include the Franciscans, founded by St. Francis of Assisi, and the Dominicans, founded by St. Dominic. The mendicants take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and unlike the Benedictines who worked for their sustenance, the mendicants begged for theirs, which was somewhat repugnant to the townspeople and the magistrates. The Brethren of the Common Life eventually would take vows of chastity while working for their sustenance by leading and teaching schools and copying and publishing books, including copying and distributing Bibles. The Brothers and Sisters lived in separate houses and had leaders who were formators in accordance with the teachings of the Brethren. The Brethren were free to leave or to come back to the Houses, and although they did not take vows of poverty, they lived lives of simplicity as to material things. **It was Groote’s learning, purity and authenticity of life, and unselfishness that confounded his detractors.**
*With much tribulation we enter the Kingdom of God, and as St. Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*
* At first, **three classes of haters** came to the Bishop of Utrecht to get him to stop Groote’s speaking: **Heretics, the immoral clergy, and the mendicant monks** who all accused him of leading the faithful away from the Churches (which he did not) and in assembling a group of men and women who were not approved Clerics Regular (priests who lived according to an Order, in this case Mendicant). Bishop Florens Van Wevelinchoven had nothing to speak against Groote, but due to the powerful Franciscans and Mendicants (who by the way disliked the Sisters of the Common Life), whom he didn’t want to offend, he ruled that all deacons were forbidden to preach in the diocese of Utrecht.

	+ **The monks considered their way of life superior spiritually and accused Groote and his brethren of starting an order apart from the approval of the Pope, which was not the case.**  Even the bishops said that they were spiritual, yet not monks. The mendicants thought that the Brethren having a common purse, or having their funds in common for the good of all was equal to them starting an unofficial monastery, but it was NOT.
	+ It was **Gerard Zerbolt** a brother in Deventer, who would become a leader of the Brothers due to his learning and organizational gifts, who would write a tome to the Pope showing the biblical justification of brother Christians dwelling together in common, **with a common purse**, yet not doing so in rebellion against the Church or her bishops and clerical authorities.
	+ Groote, Radewijns, and Zerbolt, and the others **all desired reform within men’s hearts, the Church, and the world, yet they** were loyal to Christ’s Church and thus produced many writings exalting the ministry of the priests and the efficacy of the Sacraments…all of which went into Book 4 of the Imitation of Christ called, “Of the Sacrament of the Altar,” depicting a high view of this ultimate communion between God and His people in the public assembly of the Mass.
* **Ultimately, the Brethren perfected an appeal on behalf of Gerard to the Pope via a brother Priest, who granted Gerard Groote permission to preach**, however, when the message got back to Deventer, Gerard had died of the Black Plague after assisting a brother’s recovery from the plague. The brother recovered after Groote’s death and then gave money to start another House for the Sisters of the Common Life.
* **Groote’s brotherhood was one of the chief causes during the 14th through the 16th century of not only monastic reform, but also of the near disappearance of monasticism in the Lowland regions,** AND everywhere in western Europe of a personal Christian faith among believers, more Christian religion being taught and practiced in schools, more knowledge of the Bible, a saner method of discipline, and a reaction against all empty and Pharisaical formalism and ritual, including a return to the people’s language within the Church: Dutch, German, French, and English, vs. Latin only.
* **At Groote’s death…came the END of the great Dutch follower of Christ whose mantra was to know God, the Scriptures, remain in the world, but don’t be of this world, and to embrace a practical faith**…obedience to the Commandments, Loving God with all of the heart and loving neighbor as self.

### **The Brethren of the Common Life**

**Groote was the spiritual father of The Brethren of the Common Life and the Sisters of the Common Life AND that is what grew from his work…This outgrowth of the New Devotion architected by Groote, Radewijns, Zerbolt and others** were a gathering of canon regular and non-regular clerics and laymen and women who sought to devote themselves to following and imitating Christ, they lived together in a non-binding relationship, these were not monasteries, but somewhat fraternities who took vows, and worked and provided services of ministry, especially that of copying manuscripts of spiritual works (e.g., the Bible and their own devotional works), and establishing schools and educating the young.

* Groote always spoke to himself, **“Some of these boys will become priests, religious, magistrates, farmers.”** He wanted the schools of the brethren to be ordered well, substantive in religious and secular education, and spread throughout the low country and beyond…and they were.

**The Brethren of the Common Life’s focus was on discipleship……emphasizing spiritual interiority, namely perfection of the soul, and instructions in virtue to follow and imitate Christ to men and women of all vocations and sectors of society.** Their discipleship, preaching, and writings brought revival of spiritual perfection and the imitation to Christ all over Europe, and inspired further development of detachment from this world and development of the interior life from those inspired by the Brethren, such as Ignatius Loyola (Spiritual Exercises), Francis De Sales, Teresa of Avila, Martin Luther, Desiderius Erasmus, and John Calvin.

**As the Brethren Houses grew, 3 branches came about:**

**Individual pious brethren** and sisters

who embraced the teachings of the Brethren, yet lived in their own houses following Christ and loyal to their Church parishes

**The established Houses of the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life**, such as those at Deventer and the House at Zwolle. Typically when a house had more than 40 brethren or sisters, a new house would be started. **By 1530, the Brethren of the Common Life had established approximately 80 to 100 houses across Europe**. These communities were mostly found in the Low Countries (modern-day Netherlands and Belgium), northern Germany, and surrounding areas. At its peak in the late 15th century, the movement was highly influential, especially in education and religious reform. However, by the early 16th century, the visibility of the Brethren's houses and such began to vanish from the scene due to the Protestant Reformation and the major reforms within the Church and the Monasteries…the work of the Brethren had been accomplished.

**Congregation at Windesheim** **of Canons Regular**: The Congregation of Windesheim (Latin: Congregatio Vindesemensis) is a congregation of Augustinian canons regular (i.e., ecclesiastics living in community and bound by vows). **Many of the brothers after time spent in the Houses of the Brethren of the Common Life joined the Congregation at Windesheim because they wanted to live as monks, yet follow the teachings of the Brethren. Also this Congregation was established as a protection for the religious and priests who were members of the Brethren to go for protection from authorities who were falsely accusing them of schism from their churches.**
Windesheim takes its name from its most important monastery, which was located at Windesheim, about four miles south of Zwolle on the Ijssel, in the Netherlands. This congregation of canons regular, of which this was the chief house, was **an offshoot of the Brethren of the Common Life** and played a considerable part in the reform movement within the Dutch and German Catholic Church in the century before the Protestant Reformation. Six of the brethren, carefully chosen as specially fitted for the work, among them **John, elder brother of Thomas a Kempis,** were sent to the monastery of Eymsteyn (founded 1382) to learn the usages of the canons regular. In 1386, they erected huts as their temporary monastery at Windesheim, and in March of the following year commenced the building of a monastery and church, which were consecrated by Hubert Lebene, titular Bishop of Hippo and auxiliary bishop of Utrecht, on 17 October 1387. At the same time the six men took their vows. They adopted the apostolate of hospitality.

* **Unlike other congregations of canons regular, those of Windesheim followed a monastic life as if they were an enclosed religious order, but they were not**. The life of the canons was strict, but not over-severe. A postulant was asked if he could sleep well, eat well, and obey well, since, "...these three points are the foundation of stability in the monastic life."[7] Their constitutions exhibit in many points the influence of the Carthusian statutes. The canons wore a black or grey mozzetta and rochet over a grey tunic.[9]
* Windesheim followed the example of the newer Orders, such as the Carthusians and Dominicans, and adopted a more centralized form of government. Like the Carthusians, Windesheim broke from the standard practice in monastic life by having all members of the congregation subject to the Prior General, who could transfer them from one house to another as needed. The prior of Windesheim was initially automatically the Prior General, or head of the congregation, with considerable powers. After 1573 the Prior General was elected from among the priors of the various monasteries.
* **When the Windesheim Congregation reached the height of its prosperity towards the end of the fifteenth century, it numbered 86 houses of canons and sixteen of nuns, mostly situated in what is the Netherlands, and in the ecclesiastical province of Cologne.** Those that survived the Reformation (they still numbered 32 in 1728) were suppressed at the end of the 18th or beginning of the 19th century. Uden in the Netherlands was the only survivor at the early 20th century.

* The destruction of Windesheim itself began in 1572, when the altars in the church were destroyed by the people of Zwolle; the suppression of that priory came in 1581. There are practically no remains of the buildings. The last prior of Windesheim, Marcellus Lentius (d. 1603), never obtained possession of this monastery.
* **The canons of Windesheim numbered many writers, besides copyists and illuminators. Their most famous author was Thomas a' Kempis**. An emendation of the Vulgate Bible text and of the text of various Church Fathers was also undertaken. Gabriel Biel, "the last German scholastic", was a member of the congregation, as was the Renaissance scholar Erasmus.

### **Gerald Zerbolt of Zutphen**

(a city on the eastern bank of the river IJssel at the point where it is joined by the Berkel River)

* Born in Zutphen in 1367, probably went to University of Prague, he would arise early to hear the words of the Masters. “His ingenious mind was far removed from the sloth of dullards and the idle wandering of the wanton”…who run about the streets taking delight in foolish plays, hating school, and seldom visiting a church.
* **Zerbolt pondered why there were schools and the purpose for which he was alive**…and by Providence he came to Deventer to the House of the Brethren of the Common Life: he then left the teachings of Scholasticism (summarizing of theology in terms of Aristotelian logic), aligned himself with Florentius Radewijns and pursued God’s wisdom, abandoning pursuits in this world to know Christ and to seek His salvation.
* 1384, we find him at Deventer, Radewijns persuaded him to become a member of the Brotherhood at Deventer. Staunch student spending most all of his time studying in the “House of Florentius” reading sacred writings, the Church Fathers (Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux)
* Zerbolt, who was ordained a priest, was, as were the Brethren, zealous for the Law of God, very studious in Holy Scripture, inclined toward learning, quick of genius, eager toward the liberal arts, heartily averse from worldly business and from everything that might hinder the pursuit of wisdom. At dinner, he continued his meditations, as the Bible was read, he was all attention.
* **The Brethren appointed Zerbolt the librarian of their house**…he was in charge of Groote’s books, together with learned discourses, which would become rapiere (little rivers, short spiritual works, key spiritual truths or briefs) and key to books themselves. HE was the Brethren’s foremost scholar. He loved books and reading them was more sumptuous to him than a well produced banquet. He had mastered his appetites. He said that “they that give themselves over to holy things shall be fileld with wisdom and earn to be admitted to the secret things of heaven.”
* Zerbolt passed through the streets without noticing other men, and gave himself to his work of devotion to Christ, along with his writing, reading, and prayer. Thomas a’ **Kempis** was a member of the brethren at that time. **Thomas wrote, “ Many clerics used to come to him for advice, ask him to solve difficult problems…Radewijns came to him for advice on business as well as canon law…if problems were to difficult for him, he’d document the problem and await a suitable scholar for an answer. (humility).**
* He accounted the praise of men as nothing, maintained a good conscience, relied on the Holy Spirit for guidance and submitted himself to discipleship. To the end of purity of heart, he taught his disciples to fear God (imprinting it within the newly converted), he chided the sluggish, and exhorted them to make progress in virtue and to mortify their vices. **“if, said he, we neglect to strive against vices, our passions will prevail and we shall fall into the snares of the devil who doth ever lie in wait on the road of our progress; wherefore we must labor with all diligence so as to fight manfully, for a crown of eternal glory hath been promised to him that overcomes.”**
* **This activity prepared Zerbolt for the brethren’s struggles from 1384 to 1419 when he would solicit the protection of the Church in the form of a treatise called, “On the Common Life.”** This work was instrumental in the Pope’s approval of the houses of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life, which helped the brothers avoid trouble from the monks who dislike them. This is why the Windesheim monastery was a place of refuge for the
* **Considered one of the founders of the New Devotion,** **Thomas A’ Kempis wrote a brief biography of Zerbolt** **that one sees placed in the beginning of Zerbolt’s The Spiritual Ascent: A Devotional Treatise.** Thomas called it, Blessed is the Man, which are the first words of The Spiritual Ascent. “Blessed is the man whose help is from Thee; in the valley of tears he hath set in his heart steps upward to the place that he hath before him.” This begins the first chapter of the devotional treatise concerning the five things needful for them that order themselves for progress in Religious Life.
* He dedicated himself to spiritual devotion, and **toward the end of his life, Zerbolt re-read Mirror for Monks and Progress of the Religious as though he were newly converted**. He was a learned and zealous Catholic, and on his last night due to a sickness he took his last breath and lapsed into a gentle sleep on the night of the feast of St. Barbara, the virgin, in the Year of Our Lord 1398. There was great lamentation among the houses of the Brethren of the Common Life due to the death of such a pillar of the house…Thomas writes, “But blessed be God, Who lent us such a man.”

### **Thomas A Kempis**

* Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380–1471) born Thomas Hermerken of Kempen in the Diocese of Cologne. Father’s name was John Hermerken (the little hammer), his trade was working with a hammer.
* The fame of Deventer’s cathedral school reached Kempen, and many parents were anxious to have their boys trained there. Thomas’ brother John was already studying at Florentius Radewijns’ vicarage in Deventer, and was living at Windesheim. Thomas traveled to Deventer to connect with his brother, who told him to make an appointment to see Radewijns, who seeing that Thomas had no money for board or tuition, had compassion on him and accepted him as a student, gave him books and tuition money to enter the school at St. Lebwin’s.
* Thomas’ parents were very happy and spoke of the kindnesses of the Brethren at Deventer, and the fame of the Brethren of the Common Life spread beyond the Netherlands. **Thomas learned to read and write the Scriptures and spiritual books,** he took pleasure in the godly behavior of the brethren, who were so devout and fervent in their faith. Thomas learned of Groote’s works and books within Groote’s library.
* Thomas then became a German-Dutch priest, monk, and spiritual writer after the examples of Gerard Groote and Florentius Radewijns. Thomas was best known for his work The Imitation of Christ, **probably written in 1416-1420,** one of the most widely read Christian spiritual books after the Bible. He was associated with the Devotio Moderna, a religious movement that emphasized personal devotion, humility, and a simple, Christ-centered life. Here are key points about him:
* **Thomas couldn’t have picked a better place to learn the Sacred Scriptures**. In the Summer of 1398 in June, pestilence hit the Brethren houses in the vicarage of Radewijns and the House of Florentius taking the lives of most all of the experienced members, however, **Thomas jealously guarded the books and the writings of the brethren**.
* **He gathered all of the rapiaria from the houses and the brethren: “Thy task shall be to labor to uproot thy vices and to gain virtue.”**
* Thomas à Kempis spent most of his life in the quiet and contemplative atmosphere of Mount St. Agnes, devoted to prayer, manuscript copying, and writing. He was known for his humility, ascetic lifestyle, and deep piety. While at Mt St. Agnes, Tolensis, a fellow there wrote of Kempis, **“In the church and in the performance of ecclesiastical ceremonies, it is difficult to describe his rapt intention, and I might say inspiration. While he chanted the psalms, his eyes were ever raised toward heaven, and he appeared to be filled with a divine enthusiasm, captivated and carried away by the unutterable sweetness of the holy psalmody: so that he never stood with his heels resting upon the ground; that is to say, as he meditated, the tips of his toes alone touched the floor, the rest of his body was lifted heavenwards, where his soul tended with all its desires.”**

Thomas A’ Kempis edited, compiled, and wrote the **Imitation of Christ**, which contained the words of the Brethren of the Common Life. Zerbolt probably wrote the first book of the four of the Imitation, Florentius Radewijns also contributed, with Thomas compiling and editing the rest. It seems the FIRST COPIES of the Imitation of Christ with all 4 books within were found in 1429/30 called the Codex of Gaesdonck in an Augustinian monastery that became part of the Windesheim Congregation. The first German version was found in Cologne around 1434.

* Thomas à Kempis died in 1471, leaving a lasting legacy as a guiding figure for Christian contemplation and personal piety. His teachings emphasize the importance of humility, self-denial, and an intimate relationship with God.

# **The Book, The Imitation of Christ**

## **A Devotional**

**THE IMITATION OF CHRIST** is a Christian devotional book of 4 books of writings of the Brethren of the Common Life collected by member Thomas Haemmerlein, who came from the city of Kempen near the Rhine River in the lowlands of the Netherlands. The Brethren of the Common Life were part of God’s revival in 14th Century lowlands of Northern Europe called the Modern Devotion, or the Devotio Moderna movement, as part of the Christian Renaissance.

\*The Imitation of Christ\*, attributed to Thomas à Kempis, is one of the most influential devotional works in Christian history having formulated from the devotional revival in the Netherlands among the Brethren of the Common Life. Written in the 15th century, it emphasizes the inner spiritual life over outward rituals, advocating humility, simplicity, and the imitation of Christ's life and virtues.

**The book has profoundly impacted Christian spirituality, influencing figures such as St. Ignatius of Loyola and John Wesley.** Its teachings on personal piety, self-denial, and the pursuit of divine love continue to resonate with readers seeking a deeper spiritual connection as well as interior, or spiritual perfection unto the Lord.

The book can be accessed online free…**it is in the public domain** since it was published about 600 years ago.

## **The Book’s Characteristic Teachings**

* The necessity to imitate Christ, study Him if man seeks truth, illumination and deliverance from all blindness
	+ He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness,(1) saith the Lord. These are the words of Christ; and they teach us how far we must imitate His life and character, if we seek true illumination, and deliverance from all blindness of heart. Let it be our most earnest study, therefore, to dwell upon the life of Jesus Christ. His teaching surpasseth all teaching of holy men, and such as have His Spirit find therein the hidden manna.(2) But there are many who, though they frequently hear the Gospel, yet feel but little longing after it, because they have not the mind of Christ. He, therefore, that will fully and with true wisdom understand the words of Christ, let him strive to conform his whole life to that mind of Christ.
* **Man is a pilgrim** here on earth, an exile, and has to cleanse his blood from poison, his mind from sin, and his heart from vice. First vice must be extinguished so that virtue and love can find room in the human heart.
* **The depravity of human nature**, yet the spark of God within that is energized by grace
* **Hope in the Lord as man’s consolation** for departure from vice and embrace of virtue.
* **Know Christ through true Humility and overcoming trials and the world through Faith and Perseverance**
* **Embrace the greatest consolation from God through the Sacrament of the Altar: the Eucharist.**

The Imitation of Christ is the most widely read Christian devotional work after the Bible, and is regarded as a devotional and religious classic. Apart from the Bible no Christian book has been translated into more languages than the Imitation of Christ.

* Father Garrigou-Lagrange asserted that the true mysticism of which **The Imitation of Christ speaks is accessible to all, if they are willing to follow the way of humility, the cross, continual prayer, and docility to the Holy Ghost.**

**The book was written anonymously** in Latin in the Netherlands c. 1418–1427. Its popularity was immediate, and after the first printed edition in 1471–1472, **it was printed in 745 editions before 1650.** Apart from the Bible, no book had been translated into more languages than the Imitation of Christ at the time.

**Although attributed to Thomas A Kempis**, the author of the Imitation writes in the work that **one should "love to be unknown**" (Book 1, Ch. 2), which is a maxim of the Brethren of the Common Life: **Humility and detachment from vanity and self-exaltation**.

**The four books of detailed spiritual instructions:**

* **Helpful Counsels of the Spiritual Life**
* **Directives for the Interior Life**
* **On Interior Consolation**
* **On the Blessed Sacrament**

## **Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me.**

**I’m teaching this so that learning of this devotional w**ill orient you to the Work. It will break up the fallow ground of the soul to prepare you to approach such a devotional, so that one can know and then do…the goal of the Brethren who wrote this is that you Imitate Christ for your own salvation, and those around you, as well as your being a blessing to the world in this life, and then receive eternal life. To know the consolation God provides for you so that you can exercise faith and perseverance unto the END, with joy, righteousness, peace, and prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance while exercising faith, hope and abounding love.

**The Imitation of Christ is about hearing Christ’s Words, taking up one’s cross of dying to self (self-absorption, self-interests, selfishness, obsession with self, love of this life above that of the Kingdom of God, also including at the baser levels lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life.** We seek the truth by following and obeying the TRUTH, Christ Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

* Just as the Didache of the 1st Century starts with the words, there are two ways, the way of life and the way of death…the Imitation of Christ starts with the words of Christ in John 8:12, “He that followeth Me, shall not walk in darkness.
* **Not about practicing Catholicism**, its about Hearing and obeying Christ and following Him daily to be Christ’s disciple:
* **Must have a lessor love for all earthly things, and one’s self so as to follow and imitate Christ. This requires a Detachment from anything affecting negatively the attachment to Christ.
Luke 14: 26** “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate (detach from) his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.
* **One must recognize oneself as dead to self and alive in Christ.** Luke 14:27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.
* **One must count the cost of following Christ, not just going to Church** Luke 14:28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— 29 lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’? 31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.

***When one hears the Word of God, one must receive it, obey it, and continue to do so regardless of trials, traumas, set-backs, calamity, death of those loved, humiliation, dismissal, being cast out…for it is right and just in every way and in every place to give God glory who brought you out of darkness and into His marvelous light…YOU CAN NEVER REPAY THAT DEBT of LOVE, SO YOU ARE OBLIGATED TO FOLLOW NO MATTER WHAT…as did Job, as did Paul, as did Jesus.***The Brethren of the Common Life knew the teachings of the Ancient Philosophers also, such as **Seneca**, who said, **“A gem cannot be polished without friction, nor a man perfected without trials.”**

* **Must forsake all to follow Christ, be so detached that nothing causes one to turn away or to turn back…though He slay me, yet will I serve Him.** Luke 14:33 So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.
* **Must serve Christ as Lord:** John 12: 20 Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. 21 Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”…23 But Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. 24 Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. 25 He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.
* **Must Continue in Christ’s Words, His Ways:** John 8: 31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”
Matthew 7: 21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ 24 “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”
* **One must LOVE the brethren, Christ’s people, the Church:** John 13: 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
* **One must bear fruit in Christ:** John 15: 5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

The devotional approach of **The Imitation of Christ** emphasizes the interior life and withdrawal from the mundanities of the world. One gets the sense of “detachment” from this world and anything else that would prohibit one from following Christ. The perfection of the soul would be the grace-filled action of putting off vice by engaging in crucifixion of self, and putting on virtue as habit of perfection.

**BUT, the men who lived this life and wrote that which would become the 4 books of the Imitation of Christ PAID THE PRICE to FOLLOW CHRIST and Seek to Imitate Him…and this is their story:**

* **J.R.R. Tolkein: Lord of the Rings:**Frodo: 'It's a pity Bilbo didn't kill Gollum when he had the chance.'

Gandalf: 'Pity? It's a pity that stayed Bilbo's hand. Many that live deserve death. Some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them, Frodo? Do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. Even the very wise cannot see all ends. My heart tells me that Gollum has some part to play in it, for good or evil, before this is over. The pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many.'

Frodo: **'I wish the Ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened.'**

Gandalf: 'So do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us. There are other forces at work in this world, Frodo, besides that of evil. Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, in which case you were also meant to have it. And that is an encouraging thought.

**Saint Augustine viewed the imitation of Christ (the concept, not the book) as the fundamental purpose of Christian life, and as a remedy for the imitation of the sins of Adam**. Saint Francis of Assisi believed in the physical as well as the spiritual imitation of Christ, and advocated a path of poverty and preaching like Jesus who was poor at birth in the manger and died naked on the cross.[12][13] The theme of imitation of Christ existed in all phases of Byzantine theology, and in the 14th-century book Life in Christ, Nicholas Cabasilas viewed "living one's own personal life" in Christ as the fundamental Christian virtue.

**Against this backdrop, the Devotio Moderna movement embraced by Geert Groote, included those who were highly dissatisfied with the state of the Church and what they perceived as the gradual loss of monastic traditions and the lack of moral values among the clergy**. Groote worked for REFORM. The initial focus of Devotio Moderna was the **rediscovery of genuine pious practices and conversion and re-conversion of the lukewarm clergy**. Groote and his brothers wanted reform.

**The Imitation was written within the Devotio Moderna community**, as it was flourishing in Northern Europe, but grew far beyond that movement which came to an end with the Protestant Reformation.

The number of counted editions exceeds 2,000; 1,000 different editions are preserved in the British Museum; 770 in the Biblioteca de Catalunya Kempis Collection;[29] the Bullingen collection, donated to the city of Cologne in 1838, contained at the time 400 different editions. De Backer[30] enumerates 545 Latin and about 900 French editions. A critical edition was published in 1982.[31]

## **The Critics of the Imitation**

* The Imitation of Christ comes forth from the fellowship and teaching of the Brethren of the Common Life who affirmed life in this world, but perfected their interior lives to put off vice and to put on virtue as they followed Christ, whether regulated canon clerics, canon clerics, priests, deacons, religious, and all types of laymen and women. **A Kempis’ focus was on the interior life and the devotional renewing of the mind to prove the perfect will of God so as to see and experience the Kingdom of God coming in the disciple’s life as he imitated Christ.**
* 1 John 2: 15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not from the Father but from the world. 17The world is passing away, along with its desires; but whoever does the will of God remains forever.
* **It is a mystical devotional, not a theological text**. It is austere and exhorts one to wrestle with and beat one’s soul into submission so as to attain the prize, Christ Himself and life abundant here and in the next life.
* **Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote**: **It rejects and eliminates every speculative element not only of scholasticism but also of mysticism**, and yet, at the same time, it abstracts from the colorful multiplicity of the Bible and—since it is written for those who have turned from the world—disregards the world, in all its richness, as a field for Christian activity... In place of the openhearted readiness of a Catherine of Siena, a subdued and melancholy resignation runs through the book.... **[T]here is an excess of warnings about the world, the illusions of egoism, the dangers of speculation and of the active apostolate**. In this way, even the idea of the imitation of Christ does not become the dominant perspective. There is no mention of the mediation of the God-man, of access through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, to the Father. The mystery of the Church, therefore, does not come into view either. The individual is unaware that his love of God can only be fulfilled if it expands into love of neighbor and into the apostolate. All [that] remains is a flight from the world, a world that has not been brought home in Christ. **Rebuttal**: the Brethren produced position papers to persuade the Bishop of Ultrecht and the Pope to allow them to assemble as a fraternity with all things in common, including finances, yet not require monastery order approval. This act was essentially the same as that of Catherine of Siena, so, the scope of the devotional does not deal with confronting the world for the sake of the Kingdom of God.
* **René Girard** wrote: **"Neither does Jesus propose an ascetic rule of life** in the sense of Thomas à Kempis and his celebrated Imitation of Christ, as admirable as that work may be". **Rebut:** Jesus did exhort His disciples to take up their cross daily and follow him and pursue holiness without which no man will see God, so the exhortations of the Imitation of Christ are indeed profitable toward that end, especially if one were a celibate or eunuch for the Kingdom of God.
* **Friedrich Nietzsche** stated that this was "one of those books which I cannot hold in my hand without a physiological reaction: it exudes a perfume of the Eternal-Feminine which is strictly for Frenchmen—or Wagnerians". **Rebuttal:** One can see that position only if one were not to have known a Gerard Groote or a Zerbolt and the powerful works and confrontation of the world executed by the brethren, reforming the Church and monasteries, setting the course for religious and academic education of children, and blessing the culture around them, not to mention being formator to notable men, for example, Thomas as he wrote an enduring work that has assisted more toward the Kingdom of God than that of Nietzsche (in Jerry’s humble opinion).

# **The Imitation of Christ: Book One: Admonitions Profitable for the Spiritual Life**

**The first book, probably written by Gerard Zerbolt**, confronts the disciple of Christ with admonishments that are profitable for turning from the world’s lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life, its vices and materialism and determinism, and turning one’s heart to Christ **Jesus as the Devine Word so as to imitate Him and to put off all that is NOT HIM, to become detached from this world and to take up one’s cross, one’s self crucifixion, and make a habit of putting on virtue and imitating Jesus while meditating on Him and Following Him DAILY**.

The detachment comes when hearing these admonitions, strong suggestions, warnings, so as to Know Thyself, who you are, and what binds you, and to meditate on Christ Jesus’ perfections and embrace them to your own hurt, so as to gain Him and eternal life.

Romans 12 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Again, the Brethren of the Common Life and the movement of the Devotio Moderna affirmed this world and considered it good. **If one senses the austerity of a vow-ladened friar or monk in these four books it is due to the tone and convictions of Thomas A Kempis, known for his deep devotion of Christ and his exhortations to detach from this world and its accoutrements, and perfect oneself as an imitator of Christ in preparation for entrance into the heavenly kingdom. Yet one must balance this devotion to the ideals of bearing fruit in this life, working, building the Kingdom as well as one’s estate, while fearing God and keeping His Commands, thus showing forth an imitation of Christ in this life.** The Brethren would have every disciple of Christ, whether a layman merchant, banker, farmer, cleric, religious, religious cleric, monk, friar, or hermit to imitate Christ in their respective callings.

* Thomas A Kempis as final editor, was a priest and monk, his was to die to self completely as a monk…and one senses the austerity he followed as a monk, whereas Gerard Zerbolt in his The Spiritual Ascent spoke more broadly about imitating Christ in this current world as one sees in many portions of the Imitation…so do not mistake the austerity of A Kempis with hating life in this world…remember this as you read Book 1.
* One gets the sense that Thomas A. Kempis is writing so that all readers become monks or mendicants, however, the Brethren of the Common Life were made up of laymen and young men and women who would become merchants, Burgermeisters or magistrates, farmers, as well as celibate priests and religious. **The principle focus is on detaching oneself from the things of this life that would detract or even stop us from pursuing interior perfection in holiness and love. Yet, the words are austere to the human 21st century soul.**
* Just as Groote wanted reform of the Church and its monasteries, so Kempis is collecting the writings and editing them for the reform of the soul.
* Remember, we’re praying daily in Mass that Thy Kingdom Come and Thy Will be done ON EARTH as it is in heaven.

**Book 1 from The Imitation of Christ, "Helpful Counsels of the Spiritual Life" or Admonitions Helpful for the Spiritual Life:** contains 25 short chapters

* **The Imitation derives its title from the first chapter of Book I,** "The Imitation of Christ and contempt for the vanities of the world" Sometimes referred to as Following of the Christ, which comes from the opening words of the first chapter**—"Whoever follows Me will not walk into darkness."**
* The Imitation of Christ **flows from devotion to Him, flows from adoring Him, and humbling oneself to Him**, learning from Him, for He is meek and lowly in heart and will provide rest for the soul. Flows from talking to God, obeying Him and receiving wisdom and strength and consolation from him during trials and tough times, weathering traumatic experiences, taking up Christ’s cross in their lives daily.
* **To imitate Christ, one must conform their mind and will to that of Christ and have a contempt for this world**. Requiring a humility, a submission, an obedience before God, not an outward ceremonial ritual, not practicing ritual, not going through motions but having no heart associated with the actions…True Religion IS NOT an intellectual exercise alone…Devotion is obedience from a heart of love toward God. “Why do you call you me, Lord, but DO NOT DO THE THINGS I SAY?

**This requires humility**:

* To think humbly of oneself and **pursue the knowledge of the truth** (Studiocitas—tied to the Cardinal virtue of Temperance—a harmony of all things in the heart of a man with a priority on his inner perfection) Seeking first the Kingdom of God.

Phil 2: 2 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness.8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

* The Pharisees loved preeminence and honor, **Thomas writes He only is great who has great love, gives all, and who deems himself small and all height and honor as nothing, or fleeting.** Eccl 12: Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. 14For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.
* A humble man is more obedient to God and has a soul at peace, a good life, which makes a man wise toward God…he pursues imitating Christ and seeking the Kingdom of God first, not only, and seeking to hear AND to do God’s will always.
* Lowliness…that is the highest and most profitable lesson, when a man truly knows and judges lowly of himself. “All of us are weak and frail; hold thou no man more frail than thyself. Live in obedience and subjection. Yield to those bringing the truth regardless of the source when truth is in question and present. As St. James says, receive with meekness the Word of God which is able to save the soul.
* Flee inordinate affections, pride, and too much familiarity with men and women, there is a danger in superfluity with words.
* Seeking truth and being prudent in action is designed to cause a man to pause and think about the brevity of his life and to rethink his life in terms of pursuing a holy and upright life, one that is a good life that makes a man dear to God. (Studiositas, as opposed to Curiositas), including thinking on the heavenly Kingdom itself. Studiositas is aligned with Temperance, the virtue that is realized when the man is in harmony regarding his interior life as it manifests outwardly.
* **Seeking to know himself, and perfecting himself in God, he lives harmoniously in every way in the world: as Goethe wrote the personification of Truth saying, "Know thyself, live with the world in peace**."
* Teach me to number my days aright, that I may gain a heart of wisdom (Ps. 90:12). Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things in Thy Word (Ps. 119:18).
* These admonitions and prayers in Book 1 are designed to cause a man, woman, and child to look up to God and perfect one’s inner self to contemplate eternal truths. Be a man skilled in righteousness, compunction (inner sorrow for sins committed or due to omission), contemplation, holiness, and love toward God and neighbor.
* Book One deals with the withdrawal from the world, or COSMOS (outward adorning in this life)—so far as positive duty allows and emphasizes advancement in an interior life by renouncing all that is vain and illusory, **resisting temptations and distractions of life, giving up the pride of learning**, but never coming to a knowledge of truth (a focus of Thomas A Kempis, but the learning here is that which is worthless to spiritual advancement—scholasticism as opposed to the educated Groote and Zerbolt), defined at that time as Curiositas (a vice)—always learning but never coming to the knowledge of truth…**curiosity the killed the cat**), and to be humble, forsaking the disputations of theologians and patiently enduring the world's contempt and contradiction to strive to conform his whole life to that mind of Christ. The Characteristics of those always learning in this world but not coming to truth itself or to Christ Himself…the Truth…namely STUDIOCITAS.
* 1 John 2:16 For everything in the world (cosmos)—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.
* The Brethren affirmed the world, all of which is God’s, and wanted to see it transformed, the Kingdom of God come in it.
* **Not to be like the world: 2 Ti. 3:7** …lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3unloving, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, without love of good, 4traitorous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5having a form of godliness but denying its power. Turn away from such as these! 6They are the kind who worm their way into households and captivate vulnerable women who are weighed down with sins and led astray by various passions, 7who are always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. 8Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, and so also these men oppose the truth. They are depraved in mind and disqualified from the faith. 9But they will not advance much further. For just like Jannes and Jambres, their folly will be plain to everyone.

## **To Know Oneself; To Master Oneself**

* **Foundational to one’s perfection of one’s soul is knowing oneself**. “The more a man hath unity (having integrity) and simplicity in himself, the more things and the deeper things he understands, and that without labor, because he receives the light of understanding from above.” Book 1 Chap 3 Learn, obey by doing the truth.
* Of a surety, at the Day of Judgement it will be demanded of us, not what we have read, but what we have done; not how well we have spoken, but how holy we have lived. Be ye holy as I am holy.
* Pursuing perfection requires striving for self-mastery, Who has a harder battle to fight than he who strives for self-mastery? Uncontrolled man is vulnerable to self-destruction.
* **Know Thyself**: a philosophical maxim which was inscribed upon the Temple of Apollo in the ancient Greek precinct of Delphi. "know your limitations" “know your faults,” "know your place" Rom 12: 3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. The salutation in the Temple: “Be Temperate” Harmonious within.
* This is why we contemplate ourselves with regard to our spiritual estate (are we rich toward God in being good and doing good), are we contemplating, learning of, and obeying Christ’s commands as we follow and imitate Him.
* Knowing oneself says Thomas and Zerbolt enables one to see the vileness within…knowing that…*Are we putting off vices and putting on virtuous habits, and guarding ourselves, guarding our HEARTS, against the triggers of VICE?*
* **Thomas’ admonitions assume that the reader is seeking to assess himself, to, as the ancient philosophers would say is the most important self-analytical act, TO KNOW THYSELF.**
* As St. Paul spoke in 2 Cor 13: 5 **Examine yourselves** as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. 6But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified. From Socrates: The principal meaning of the phrase in its original application was "know your limits" – either in the sense of knowing the extent of one's abilities, knowing one’s faults, knowing one's place in the social scale, or knowing oneself to be mortal. In the 4th century BC, however, the maxim was drastically re-interpreted by Plato, who understood it to mean, broadly speaking, "know your soul".
* **Middle Ages: Know Thyself**: Calvin: With good reason the ancient proverb strongly recommended knowledge of self to man ... *Knowledge of ourselves lies first in considering what we were given at creation and how generously God continues his favor toward us, in order to know how great our natural excellence would be if only it had remained unblemished ... Secondly, to call to mind our miserable condition after Adam's fall; the awareness of which, when all our boasting and self-assurance are laid low, should truly humble us and overwhelm us with shame ... and thence is kindled a new zeal to seek God, in whom each of us may recover those good things which we have utterly and completely lost.*
* This is why we have friends, spouses, formators, priests, etc. to assist us in knowing ourselves so we can pursue perfection of the soul that affects our behavior practically:
* THEN Add to your faith as Peter speaks: 2 Peter 1:5-11… giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

### **Father Basil W. Maturin: Christian Self-Mastery**

* + **Advance in the Knowledge of God and self**: (with help of formators, friends, and bishops): consider you could be completely mistaken in your judgment of yourself.
	+ **Pursue holiness, a life of love and keeping His Commands**. Those who shut God altogether out of their lives are able to live in stupid if not happy ignorance of what failure their lives are. You may consider yourself gifted, when, in fact, no one else who knows you believes that.
	+ **Ask God what are the hidden things that keep us from imitating Christ, and commit them to Him**. The Lord knows us…and as he reveals that one or two things…Confess sins, fears, weaknesses, temptations, and ask for prayers from a priest/friend
	+ Oswald Chambers…**Get to know God as one meditates on His perfections and one’s imperfections**…and then commit this to God and wait upon Him…don’t seek to work or do ministry for Him, await his Word for your perfection…Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
* *"I believe we shall never learn to know ourselves except by endeavoring to know God, for, beholding His greatness we are struck by our own baseness, His purity shows our foulness, and by meditating on His humility we find how very far we are from being humble. Two advantages are gained by this practice. First, it is clear that white looks far whiter when placed near something black, and on the contrary, black never looks so dark as when seen beside something white. Secondly, our understanding and will become more noble and capable of good in every way when we turn from ourselves to God: it is very injurious never to raise our minds above the mire of our own faults." —****St. Teresa of Avila****, Interior Castle p. 17*
* **Must calm the soul to do this**…go through St. John of the Cross’ Dark Night
	+ - A man catches a glimpse of his interior soul and its estate, and can never go back again. He is enlightened and knows what he is to do NEXT…and Next only.
		- Ask God to reveal that one thing, or sin that pollutes my entire life…or makes be repugnant to all of mankind.
	+ **When the sun of prosperity sank behind the dark night of suffering, all this brood of evil awakened into active life…a man changes, yet it is the Seed of the Word of God, not the trial that causes the spiritual growth in love and perfection.** “You’re the man,” Nathan said to David when confronting his blindness to the sins of adultery and murder. The trial brings the soul to a halt to hear the Word of the Lord.

		- The Seed of the Word comes forth…the Devil may steal it, persecution and offense may snuff it, trials and the love of this life may take away the seed’s growth, or one receives it humbly and nurtures it and it grows to save the soul through one’s perseverance
		- As in the story of Mary and Martha …Martha busied herself with care, Mary gave herself to that which was the good and perfect. These revelations of God to a man’s soul reveals dispositions, defects, habits of which he was TOTALLY UNCONSCIOUS. THIS IS THE WALK of PERFECTION from Original Sin to Holiness, without which NO MAN WILL SEE GOD.
	+ **ONE MUST BE HONEST and MUST SEEK AUTHENTICITY** to be authentic before men and before God in identifying those aspects of one’s interior life that must go and that which must be put on. God will chasten the sons He receives and loves. **DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEART, BEAR and Endure the chastening…do NOT despise, faint, but ENDURE**.
	+ And then comes the **acts leading to new habits and virtues and perfections**, AND THEN COMES to light and life new faults, old temptations that are met with new virtues and enhanced spiritual strength, grace, and belief in God’s mercy and love.
* **As Thomas says, Read the Holy Scriptures.** *Men pass away, but the truth of the Lord endures forever…read humbly, simply, honestly, and not desiring to win a character by learning.* We know Christ by learning of Him in the Sacred Scriptures, all of them. Read them, think on them, and let them by the Spirit of God change you…like flashes of light piercing the fog of self-deception or misunderstanding. In Thy Light, I have seen Light…which we obey like a light shining in a dark place until the day dawn and the Morning Star arises in your heart.
* Men pass away, but the truth of the Lord endures forever…Read the Holy Scriptures. Jesus said, Thy Word is Truth (Jn 17:17) Sadly, this is not the norm among Catholics, who perceive this as a Protestant exercise
* **Let us conduct our self-examination in the presence of our Lord**, with an ever-deepening knowledge of His personal life…poor, lowly, humble, courageous…God kills and makes alive, He brings low and lifts up, and in His presence, no lurking remnant of pride can remain, no hopelessness…we get this in Adoration, Prayer (vocal and mental), Silence, Rituals (rosary)
* **And God would see your perfection NOT IN LIPS or in ritual, but in action** “The surface of our life gets somehow broken through, and we see the throbbing pulsation of that mysterious source of action…the SELF.
* **As one builds character, examine the effects of our actions. Set your course upon knowing and doing the truth, for it is no good to know the truth and to deliberately set one’s will against doing it.** The goal is to do the truth, the Law of God as it has been shown to you.
* **STOP the RIVER of Vice**  “I tried that once and did well for a day”…one warm day in October is not going to stop the onslaught of Winter….As you seek to imitate Christ, Ask God for grace to replace vices and old habits with new habits. AND WALK YOUR FAITH AND WORK IT OUT AS IF YOU BELIEVE HE IS WITH YOU HELPING YOU.
Focus on the perfections of Christ. Confess your sins to one another and ask your priest, formator, or other trusted source superior to you…never refer to an equal or to one lower than you…a subordinate. **Counting it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations and trials James 1**
* **Choose the Good in Small Matters…**build habits as you seek virtues…controlling thoughts produces prudence…adding to your faith (2 Pet 1)…**and control your thoughts.** Your mind can grow habituated to choosing certain thoughts: **Sow an act, reap a habit; Sow a habit, reap a character; Sow a character, reap a destiny…Imitating Christ…Following and Obeying Him**
* **Pursue Temperance** while relying on God who is at work in you to will and do His good pleasure. You need dependence on Him, and dependance upon others; you need to have a **harmonious balance** among human relationships and building knowing their affect on you, assimilate responsibilities and skills to work, and give all to your public worship and learning of Christ. Pursue MEEKNESS, RIGHTEOUS ANGER, JUSTICE.
* **Don’t crush the Spirit or the Body. Goven your mind and body,** Give your early days of leisure to learning of Christ and following Him, Know and Obey His Word as recorded in the Bible—Old and New Testaments. Read the Saints, pray breviaries and the rosary, and novenas.
* **Be Self-Disciplined in body and soul. Sacrifice**, **Deny THYSELF the Good for the BETTER**. Romans 12:1-2 Mortification is NOT an end in and of itself, for the next step is TO ARISE TO NEWNESS OF LIFE…RESURRECTION…not perpetual morbid introspection…these are ends to self-mastery that we bear fruit unto God.
* **Let Christ Impart Divine Life to You.** Apart from Him, you can do nothing, but believe in His grace, lean hard into it and believe you receive it as you continually work to overcome sin and weaknesses of the flesh and character.
* **Persevere**! There is ALWAYS a sense of loss when one begins this journey of self-denial to follow, imitate, and put on Christ. It is through faith and patience that we inherit the promises of God like those saints of old (Heb 11). **Let us not rest until we have penetrated through** the many chambers and corridors, thronged with those strange forms that hurry hither and thither bringing news from without or carrying our orders from within, filling all with the noise and tumult of their activity. **Maturin**: “Let us discipline all our powers of mind and body and allow no voice of inclination or passion ever to issue a command or assert authority until order has been restored throughout the whole kingdom of the soul, and there is but one ruler whose lightest word is law, and that ruler receives his commands from God.
* **Root out the inordinate affections and flee from pride:** Rooting out vice and planting virtue…ALWAYS, EVERYDAY. God’s mercies are new everyday. Believe this and act on it…lean hard into His mercy for yourself and the whole world. Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet…for the sake of His sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world. **As in Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,** in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, 32and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. 5 1Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
* Do not yield to inordinate affections, and do not yield to sinful inclinations or thoughts, and watch those things that trigger yielding to sinful inclinations as Zerbolt wrote concerning the seven deadly vices and how to overcome them (Spiritual Ascensions). Pursue the life of the Spirit:
* **Watch your heart in your relationships with others**
	+ Keep conversation simple, without flattery, be authentic. Remember that devout conversation is profitable toward spiritual progress vs. gossip and conversation only about temporal things: Men of old spoke of religion, politics, family, and heritage primarily, and were judicious in the amount of conversation they had. Sin is not lacking in a multitude of words and the Brethren of the Common Life knew this.
* **The imitator of Christ appreciates and welcomes obedience to authority and subjection**
	+ To be under authority is safe and the way of peace. A humility before God, before governors and magistrates, before spiritual authority in the Church, before domestic authority in the home: husbands in submission to Christ as head, wives in submission to husbands, children in submission to parents, and all seeing themselves as coming under all…humility before all for the sake of God and peace.
* **To make progress in the Spiritual life, we mind our own business, refrain from busying ourselves with the sayings and doings of others,** we detach ourselves from those worldly interests that we may possess our souls in peace.

	+ **Focus on breaking through a bad or vice-ladened habit.** By God’s grace through the sacraments, prayer, and fasting, break through the little habits and then little by little dispose of the greater habits keeping one from imitating Christ. Then you will see your progress in time…persevere and don’t turn back.

### **Gerard Zerbolt in Spiritual Ascension**

**An Example of what Gerard Zerbolt wrote in his Spiritual Ascension:** To overcome vice, there are three necessary ascents: 1. For beginners, one must pursue purity of heart by nurturing the fear of God; 2. For those making progress in the spiritual ascent to partake of the Divine nature, one must nurture hope…it is faith that is the substance of things hoped for…and faith added to patience and perseverance is how one overcomes; and 3. For those finishing their course, continue their walk toward purity.

**Wrath**: The ascent to overcome wrath…a deadly or cardinal sin that takes away saving grace.

* One should target and purge the vice of wrath by overcoming the power of being irascible, or easily provoked to anger, very irritable
* Must occur through a threefold ascent of progress through the virtue of gentleness. What is desired in a man is lovingkindness as it is written (Prov 19:22)
* Determinately replacing vices with virtues, committing your way to God, and making progress: Begin by replacing bad habits leading to wrath with virtuous habits…over time you create new virtuous habits (science would say we’re retraining the mind, will, and emotions…thus, we have to know ourselves…right?
* **3 Steps to ascend to perfection over wrath:**1. Repress and smother the flame of wrath and its impulses (be aware of the triggers and circumstances that trigger) Nip this in the bud, the start, lest it progress into the rage of murder.
Daughters of wrath: Occasions of wrath: strife, riot of mind, contumely, clamour, indignation, and blasphemy. Also, **Put off fear of opposition**, and **rejoice in tribulation**…perfect this virtue to take up your cross and bear tribulation as did Christ
* 2. Put on COMPUNCTION, a poison to wrath…true sorrow and grief for your wrath…this slays and puts out the fire of rage
* 3. Put on an earnest meditation about death…the end of your days, which nurtures the blessed fear of God. This action curbs the propensity to wrath, think on “blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

**Pride**: How do we go upward against vainglory?

* Zerbolt names the daughters of pride: disobedience, sullenness (moody, ill-tempered, sourness, sullen, resentful), boasting, hypocrisy, obstinacy, strife, and the presumption of strange behavior.
* 1. A man must begin every thought, word, and deed with a guard over his mouth that the intention not be toward vain glory…or cease speaking and acting when one sees unintentional or perhaps intentional pride.
* 2. A man must not seek to do his deeds before men to be seen by them, as Jesus said regarding doing good, giving tithes and charity, or praying.
* 3. The third step if achieved after having blown out the lamp of vanity and having overthrown it, then nurture a great love of lowliness and contempt for this world that sometimes even in the face of the multitude **one would do or undertake something whose fulfillment would bring abject ignominy**, and that for love of lowliness, humility, subordination, with a desire to be held in light esteem…
	+ As did Thomas in summarizing and writing the Imitation of Christ: "**Do not be concerned about who is with you or who is against you, but take care that God is with you in everything you do.** Keep a clear conscience and God will defend you. For whoever trusts in God will not be harmed by the words of man. If you know how to suffer in silence, you will undoubtedly receive God's help. He knows when and how to deliver you, so place yourself in His hands. God is powerful enough to help you and to free you from confusion." "It is often good for us to have others know our faults and rebuke them, for this keeps us humble. When a man humbles himself because of his faults, he easily placates others and quickly satisfies those who are angry with him." This passage speaks to humility and the importance of being known to God rather than seeking human recognition. The idea is that one should strive for inner virtue and trust in God's will, rather than seeking external validation or fame.
	+ This is why **Thomas A’ Kempis was not known early as the compiler and editor/writer of the Imitation, as he writes in it: "Do not seek to be known or to be loved particularly, for that belongs to God alone, who has no equal. Do not desire that anyone should occupy himself with you, nor that you should be in the hearts of men; but let God be your whole hope and desire."** Book 1 Chap 2
* In Chapter 12 of Book 1, **we learn that adversity is ever with us**, and remembering that all who desire to live in a godly manner in this life will suffer persecution, as well as adversity
	+ **“it is good for us that we sometimes have adversity and sorrows**.
	+ **It is good for us to endure contradictions**…we do good, and we are besmirched because of it…or they speak evil of you, or falsely, or judged unfairly, or get NO CREDIT FOR DOING GOOD. Reputation molestation…Remember Jesus Christ?
	+ **This adversity helps us to be humble and to rest wholly in God who will exalt you in due time.**
* So, we **RESIST temptation**, there is no position so sacred, no place so secret, that is without temptation and adversities. Jerome couldn’t get the dancing ladies out of his mind while translating the Hebrew text of the Bible into Latin while in the Jerusalem.

	+ Since we were born in concupiscence, we have the root of any temptation within, and this is why we pursue interior perfection.
	+ Hebrews 6:12 **That you become not slothful**, but followers of them, who through faith and patience shall inherit the promises. WHEN Christians were tempted to turn back from following Christ due to persecution and ostracism
	+ **By endurance and true humility** we are made stronger than all our enemies
	+ During temptation **watch instability of temper and want of trust in God**
	+ As fire tests iron, **temptation tests the upright man** Seek to nip the temptation to sin in the beginning prior to the heat of the fight.
	+ **Some men are tried at conversion, others at the end of their life, and some all the way through.**
	+ Cry out to God, He will save us in all our tribulation…and then we can comfort others who have suffered the same trials.
	+ **If a man behaves patiently in time of adversity, and is devout and zealous in faith during trial and temptation, there is great hope of progress**.
	+ Resist the devil and he will flee from you…and as St. Teresa of Avilla would say, **focus your attention on the perfections of God Himself in your devotion and trial and not on your own inability to overcome sin, and God’s grace will be sufficient to assist you.**
* **Avoid Rash Judgment upon yourself as well as about others, for you do not know all that God is doing in you or in others.**
* Turn your attention upon yourself and beware of judging the deeds of other men, for in judging others a man labors vainly, often makes mistakes, and easily sins; whereas, in judging and taking stock of himself he does something that is always profitable. Continue to Know Yourself
* Thomas says: But often some secret thought lurking within us, or even some outward circumstance, turns us aside. Many are secretly seeking their own ends in what they do, yet know it not. They seem to live in good peace of mind so so long as things go well with them, and according to their desires, but if their desires be frustrated and broken, immediately they are shaken and displeased.
* Persevere in the faith through trials and pray for wisdom to know the difference between what is right and what is easy.
* Charity is profitable for the spiritual life…**Love from a pure heart**…without charity no work profits, but whatever is done in charity, however small and of no reputation it be, brings forth good fruit, for God verily considers what a man is able to do, more than the greatness of what he does.

	+ He does much who loves much, and let grace support your love so that nothing is done for vain glory, carnality, natural inclination, self-will, hope of repayment, desire of gain.
* **The Brethren knew what it was to bear with the faults of others and they exhorted the fraternity to do the same as did St. Paul**
	+ If, after being admonished once or twice, a person does not amend, do not argue with him but commit the whole matter to God that His will and honor may be furthered in all His servants, for God knows well how to turn evil to good. Try to bear patiently with the defects and infirmities of others, whatever they may be, because you also have many a fault which others must endure.
	+ **Galatians 6:1** Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. 5 For each one shall bear his own load.
* **Of the call to Religious Life** When one enters the monastery or convent, **one enters to die to self.**
	+ The Brethren and Thomas, who was called to this life and lived at Windesheim, said that If you would persevere in seeking perfection, you must consider yourself a pilgrim, an exile on earth. If you would become a religious, you must be content to seem a fool for the sake of Christ**. Habit and tonsure change a man but little; it is the change of life, the complete mortification of passions that endow a true religious. He who seeks anything but God alone and the salvation of his soul will find only trouble and grief, and he who does not try to become the least, the servant of all, cannot remain at peace for long.** You have come to serve, not to rule. You must understand, too, that you have been called to suffer and to work, not to idle and gossip away your time. Here men are tried as gold in a furnace. Here no man can remain unless he desires with all his heart to humble himself before God.
	+ You become a eunuch for the Kingdom’s sake, God will give you grace, but you must discern this life and consult your priest and a vocational director…this may be the call of God on your life.
* Thomas and the Brethren want to bring to our attention the faith and courageous perseverance of the Fathers of the Church…of the Old Testament and of the New
* As is written in Hebrews 11: These OT saints walked in faith believing the Word of God and its promises, while pursuing virtue, and persevering under persecution, Abel, Abraham, Moses…
* Heb 11: 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.
* **Do not you, who have seen so many examples of the devout, fall asleep in the pursuit of virtue!**

## **Compunction**

* The Religious Man ought to be Exercising himself in godliness, calming his soul in some solitude and silence, and being a man of **COMPUNCTION**
* The life of a good religious, or a layman seeking virtue, ought to abound in every virtue **so that he is interiorly** what to others **he appears to be**. With good reason there ought to be much more within than appears on the outside, for He who sees within is God (God sees the heart—Heb 4:12), Whom we ought to reverence most highly wherever we are and in Whose sight we ought to walk pure as the angels.
* **Exercises like praying the breviary during the morning and at night, or the rosary periodically, the Divine Mercy Chaplet**…make the time to exercise yourself, to consider and contemplate your interior progress or estate…morning and at night.

**A Night Prayer**: Jesus Christ, my God, I adore You and thank You for all the graces You have given me this day. I offer You my sleep and all the moments of this night. I place myself and all my loved ones, wherever they may be, in Your sacred side and under the mantle of Our Blessed Mother. Let Your holy angels stand watch and keep us in peace. Amen.

* Renew these exercises like one renews themselves during Church feast days…like at Lent or Advent.
* Don’t be idle, be busy in meditation on Scripture, reading spiritual works from the Saints, writing, praying, serving or blessing others.
1. **Introduction to the Devout Life: St Francis of Sale**
2. **Saint Ignatius Loyola, The Spiritual Writings: practical mysticism: this is why he was affected by Gerard Zerbolt’s The Spiritual Ascent as Ignatius was a member of the Brethren houses, as was St Teresa of Avilla inspired by Zerbolt**
3. **Jacques Philippe, Interior Freedom**
4. **Spiritual Guidelines for Souls Seeking God by Fr Basil Maturin**

**REMEMBER**: we’re not trying to work for God, we’re laboring to perfect ourselves to be God with God, to know Him and walk with Him in perfection

* Many if not most fill their soul with frivolity at the expense of renewing their mind with the Word of God and contemplating the Kingdom of God or the Will of God. This is a sort of psuche souffle. Even men 200 years ago spoke much of religion and politics; today, these are taboo subjects no doubt because folks know little of either.
* Thomas: Seek a suitable time for leisure and meditate often on the favors of God. Leave **curiosities** alone. [as opposed to seeking the truth—studiocitas]

If you withdraw yourself from unnecessary talking and idle running about, from listening to gossip and rumors, you will find enough time that is suitable for holy meditation.
* Very many great saints avoided the company of men wherever possible and chose to serve God in retirement. “As often as I have been among men,” said one writer, “I have returned less a man.” We often find this to be true when we take part in long conversations. It is easier to be silent altogether than not to speak too much. To stay at home is easier than to be sufficiently on guard while away. Anyone, then, who aims to live the inner and spiritual life must go apart, with Jesus, from the crowd.
	+ But one has to follow Christ and not the promptings of peers who think it strange that you don’t run with them in dissipation or debauchery, or endless gaming, entertainment, travel, and the like that consume time…when no time is given to perfection of the soul…
	+ See The Way of A Pilgrim, and And the Pilgrim Continues His Way: Helen Bacovich

**Psalm 90: 8** You have set our iniquities before You, Our secret sins in the light of Your countenance. 9 For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; We finish our years like a sigh. 10 The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away. 11 Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. 12 So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.

## **Think on the End of Your Days**

* **Chap XXIII: How happy and prudent is he who tries now in life to be what he wants to be found in death**. Perfect contempt of the world, a lively desire to advance in virtue, a love for discipline, the works of penance, readiness to obey, self-denial, and the endurance of every hardship for the love of Christ, these will give a man great expectations of a happy death.

**You can do many good works when in good health; what can you do when you are ill? Few are made better by sickness. Likewise they who undertake many pilgrimages seldom become holy.**

See, then, dearly beloved, the great danger from which you can free yourself and the great fear from which you can be saved, if only you will always be wary and mindful of death. Try to live now in such a manner that at the moment of death you may be glad rather than fearful. Learn to die to the world now, that then you may begin to live with Christ. Learn to spurn all things now, that then you may freely go to Him. Chastise your body in penance now, that then you may have the confidence born of certainty. Ah, foolish man, why do you plan to live long when you are not sure of living even a day? How many have been deceived and suddenly snatched away! How often have you heard of persons being killed by drownings, by fatal falls from high places, of persons dying at meals, at play, in fires, by the sword, in pestilence, or at the hands of robbers! Death is the end of everyone and the life of man quickly passes away like a shadow. Who will remember you when you are dead? Who will pray for you? Do now, beloved, what you can, because you do not know when you will die, nor what your fate will be after death. Gather for yourself the riches of immortality while you have time. Think of nothing but your salvation. Care only for the things of God. Make friends for yourself now by honoring the saints of God, by imitating their actions, so that when you depart this life they may receive you into everlasting dwellings.

* Never promise yourself security in this life, even though you seem to be a good religious, or a devout hermit. It happens very often that those whom men esteem highly are **more seriously endangered by their own excessive confidence**…No man deserves the consolation of heaven unless he persistently arouses himself to holy contrition [also known in the 13th century as COMPUNCTION—Sincere sorrow for sin and failings to overcome]. If you desire true sorrow of heart, seek the privacy of your cell and shut out the uproar of the world, as it is written: “In your chamber bewail your sins.” There you will find what too often you lose abroad…**In silence and quiet** the devout soul advances in virtue and learns the hidden truths of Scripture. There she finds a flood of tears with which to bathe and cleanse herself nightly, that she may become the more intimate with her Creator the farther she withdraws from all the tumult of the world. For God and His holy angels will draw near to him who withdraws from friends and acquaintances.
**Quiet the soul and wean it from noise**
* **An anonymous Carthusian Monk once said**, “Suppress Interior Noise - God created your soul silent and keeps it inviolate at baptism. He filled it with Himself, nothing other than Himself. It is later, little by little that the world bursts in. Noise invades, covering the soft voice of God. Since then, the racket amplifies itself. Return to your baptismal silence, my brother! Noise has three generators: memories, curiosity, and worries. Paralyze their action."

**It is better for a man to be obscure and to attend to his salvation than to neglect it and work miracles. It is praiseworthy for a religious seldom to go abroad, to flee the sight of men and have no wish to see them.**
* **Kempis stresses the importance of solitude and silence**, "how undisturbed a conscience we would have if we never went searching after ephemeral joys nor concerned ourselves with affairs of the world..." Kempis writes that the "World and all its allurements pass away" and following sensual desires leads to a "dissipated conscience" and a "distracted heart" (Chap. 20).
* **If you will make any progress…Keep yourself in the fear of God…Restrain all of your senses under discipline, master yourself…mind, will, body, emotions, passions. DON’T allow your soul to enjoy mirth, distraction, deflection, or a multitude of time fillers.**
* Walk in obedience to the Word of God, confidently relying on the grace and mercy of God, persevering whether you feel God’s presence, and ESPECIALLY if you don’t. ESPECIALLY IF YOU FEEL NOTHING, OBSCURITY, …LOWLINESS and EXTINCTION OF SOUL STRENGTH and NOTABLE PRESENCE.

## **Walking in Obscurity**

“The reason why the soul not only travels securely when in obscurity, but also makes greater progress, is this: In general the soul makes greater progress in the spiritual life when it least thinks so, yea, when it rather imagines that it is losing everything …There is another reason also why the soul has traveled safely in this obscurity; it has suffered: for the way of suffering is safer, and also more profitable, than that of rejoicing and of action. In suffering God gives strength, but in action and in joy the soul does but show its own weakness and imperfections. And in suffering, the soul practices and acquires virtue, and becomes pure, wiser, and more cautious.”

—**St. John of the Cross, p.149. Dark Night**

* Kempis writes that one should meditate on death and "live as becomes a pilgrim and a stranger on earth...for this earth of ours is no lasting city" (Chap. 23). Eccl: Go into the House of God NOT CACKLING with laughter, but soberly. Your times are in His loving, yet SOVEREIGN HANDS.
* We don’t feel the truth of the situation or estate of our lives during times of mirth, prosperity, or when our souls are occupied with the world and its cares
* Perception IS NOT reality…TRUTH is REALITY.
* Thomas says when it comes to Perfection and acquiescing to COMPUNCTION, TRIALS, and TAKING UP ONE’s CROSS to FOLLOW and IMITATE Christ,
**Fight like a man**. Habit is overcome by habit. If you leave men alone, they will leave you alone to do what you have to do. Do not busy yourself about the affairs of others and do not become entangled in the business of your superiors. Keep an eye primarily on yourself and admonish yourself instead of your friends.
* **If you do not enjoy the favor of men, do not let it sadden** you; but consider it a serious matter if you do not conduct yourself as well or as carefully as is becoming for a servant of God and a devout religious. It is often better and safer for us to have few consolations in this life, especially comforts of the body.
Yet if we do not have divine consolation or experience it rarely, it is our own fault because we seek no sorrow of heart and do not forsake vain outward satisfaction.

**Do not lose heart, then, my brother, in pursuing your spiritual life.** There is yet time, and your hour is not past. Why delay your purpose? Arise! Begin at once and say: “Now is the time to act, now is the time to fight, now is the proper time to amend.” When you are troubled and afflicted, that is the time to gain merit. You must pass through water and fire before coming to rest. Unless you do violence to yourself you will not overcome vice. So long as we live in this fragile body, we can neither be free from sin nor live without weariness and sorrow. Gladly would we rest from all misery, but in losing innocence through sin we also lost true blessedness. Therefore, we must have patience and await the mercy of God until this iniquity passes, until mortality is swallowed up in life.

* **On the Day of Judgement: Kempis tells us to contemplate the estate of mankind’s misery**:
* a good and pure conscience will give more joy than all the philosophy one has ever learned,
* fervent prayer will bring more happiness than a "multi-course banquet",
* the silence will be more "exhilarating" than long tales, holy deeds will be of greater value than nice-sounding words (Chap. 24).

In all things consider the end; how you shall stand before the strict Judge from Whom nothing is hidden and Who will pronounce judgment in all justice, accepting neither bribes nor excuses. And you, miserable and wretched sinner, who fear even the countenance of an angry man, what answer will you make to the God Who knows all your sins? Why do you not provide for yourself against the day of judgment when no man can be excused or defended by another because each will have enough to do to answer for himself? In this life your work is profitable, your tears acceptable, your sighs audible, your sorrow satisfying and purifying.

**BE AUTHENTIC AND PROGRESS SPIRITUALLY**: The patient man goes through a great and salutary purgatory when he grieves more over the malice of one who harms him than for his own injury; when he prays readily for his enemies and forgives offenses from his heart; when he does not hesitate to ask pardon of others; when he is more easily moved to pity than to anger; when he does frequent violence to himself and tries to bring the body into complete subjection to the spirit.

* Are you rich toward God…good works flowing from devotion and imitation of Christ?
* I do not doubt that you would correct yourself more earnestly if you would think more of an early death than of a long life. And if you pondered in your heart the future pains of hell or of purgatory, I believe you would willingly endure labor and trouble and would fear no hardship. But since these thoughts never pierce the heart and since we are enamored of flattering pleasure, we remain very cold and indifferent. Our wretched body complains so easily because our soul is altogether too lifeless.
* Pray humbly to the Lord, therefore, that He may give you the spirit of contrition and say with the Prophet: “Feed me, Lord, with the bread of mourning and give me to drink of tears in full measure.”
* **BUT I HAVE NO ASSURANCE, YOU SAY. St. John writes: 1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.**
* **Kempis writes about the words of an anxious man, perhaps a new brother in the house, an anxious man** who, oscillating between fear and hope and with grief went to the altar and said: "Oh, if only I knew that I shall persevere to the end." Immediately he heard the divine answer, "What if you knew this? What would you do? Do now what you would do then, and you will be very safe." After this the man gave himself to God's will, and his anxiety and fear of the future disappeared (Chap. 25).
* The Brethren had learned and Zerbolt leaves his disciples in Book 1 with the imprint on the heart of the fear of God, yet the motivating exhortation to get up, walk on and persevere, AS the writer to the Hebrews exhorted the Jewish converts in Jerusalem:

Hebews 12 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the [a]author and [b]finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,

Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens,

And scourges every son whom He receives.”

7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. 11 Now no [e]chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. **12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. 14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:**

Always remember your end and do not forget that lost time never returns. Without care and diligence you will never acquire virtue. When you begin to grow lukewarm, you are falling into the beginning of evil; but if you give yourself to fervor, you will find peace and will experience less hardship because of God's grace and the love of virtue.

**A fervent and diligent man is ready for all things. It is greater work to resist vices and passions than to sweat in physical toil. He who does not overcome small faults, shall fall little by little into greater ones.**

If you have spent the day profitably, you will always be happy at eventide. Watch over yourself, arouse yourself, warn yourself, and regardless of what becomes of others, do not neglect yourself. The more violence you do to yourself, the more progress you will make.

 **END OF BOOK 1**

# **Book Two: Admonitions Concerning the Inner Life, or "Directives for the Interior Life."**

Intro: Knowing those things that make for peace and that are profitable for walking with Christ, as a life walking in the Spirit after Jesus Christ, **Thomas takes a deeper plunge into Interiority…Devotion to Christ, so as to imitate Him**.

This book begins with Jesus’ words that the Kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:21) You are a partaker of the divine nature, so why wouldn’t you turn from a love of this world and its ways to follow Christ, to imitate Him, to perfect your inner man, which is a new creation in Christ and that by grace is renewed day by day as you follow Him. **What will my friends say, What will my family say, I don’t want to be considered a religious fanatic or kook.** Well, if you’re bearing fruit at all due to the grace of God offered to you and within you, you can bear 30fold, 60fold, or 100fold…this devotional is for those who desire to go all the way with God.

* **Thomas A Kempis says in Chapter 1, If you do not know how to meditate on heavenly things, direct your thoughts to Christ’s passion and willingly behold His sacred wounds**. If you turn devoutly to the wounds and precious stigmata of Christ, you will find great comfort in suffering, you will mind but little the scorn of men, and you will easily bear their slanderous talk. When Christ was in the world, He was despised by men; in the hour of need He was forsaken by acquaintances and left by friends to the depths of scorn. He was willing to suffer and to be despised;
* **do you dare to complain of anything**? He had enemies and defamers; do you want everyone to be your friend, your benefactor? **[woe unto you when all men speak well of you, for so likewise did they speak of the false prophets]** How can your patience be rewarded if no adversity tests it? How can you be a friend of Christ if you are not willing to suffer any hardship? Suffer with Christ and for Christ if you wish to reign with Him.

**GIVE PLACE TO CHRIST**…**Had you but once entered into perfect communion with Jesus or tasted a little of His ardent love, you would care nothing at all for your own comfort or discomfort but would rejoice in the reproach you suffer; for love of Him makes a man despise himself.**

* A man who is a lover of Jesus and of truth, a truly interior man who is free from uncontrolled affections, **can turn to God at will and rise above himself to enjoy spiritual peace.**

Acts 17 Paul being at Lystra and making disciples of the Lord. One day everyone wanted to sacrifice to him as if he were a God, and the next day…19 … Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. 20 However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, **“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”** 23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

* A man must cleave to Christ and consider Him who endured hostilities and kept His eyes toward His heavenly Father. A man is hindered and distracted so far as he is moved by outward things…walking by sight and not by faith…For we walk by faith, not by sight.
**What are you going to do…God called you…you can’t run away…Don’t run away!**
* One must not be attached and encumbered by the things of this world and certainly by nothing emanating from an unformed, underformed, or malformed interior life. "inward peace, purity of heart, a good conscience—for moderating our longings and desires, for patience, for submission to the will of God, for the love of Jesus, for enduring the loss of comfort, and for taking up the Cross."
* **God will help a man devoted to Him and to His Christ**…(chapter 2) and for whom God would help, no man’s perverseness shall be a able to hurt. Kempis writes that if we have a clear conscience, God will defend us, and whomever God chooses to help no man's malice can harm. **Its like the faith required for the Chaplet of Divine Mercy: O Blood and Water, which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fountain of Mercy for us, I trust in You!**

	+ Kempis writes that when a man humbles himself, "God protects and defends him...God favors the humble man... and after he has been brought low raises him up to glory" (Chap. 2).
	+ A man must humble himself before God and He will lift him up. When a man humbles himself for his defects (being honest with himself before God and man), he pacified those who are against him. RECKON NOT THYSELF TO HAVE PROFITED UNLESS YOU FEEL YOURSELF TO BE INFERIOR TO ALL.
* Kempis then writes **to keep oneself in peace and one shall be able to be a peacemaker**, a son of God to others. “a peaceable man does more good than a well learned man” A discontented and restless man is tossed with many suspicions…and is not at peace and can bring peace to no one. To be able to live peaceably with the hard and perverse, or with the disorderly, or with those who oppose us, this is a great grace and a thing much to be commended and most worthy of a man. Of course, it is naturally pleasing to dwell with those who always agree with us. What reward is there for that? He who best knows how to suffer shall possess the most peace; that man is a conqueror of himself and lord of the world, the friend of Christ, and the inheritor of heaven.
* Regarding how a man lives his life, as the life of Christ, the Word, grace and Spirit within, flows from him, he is lifted from earthly attachments by two wings: **Simplicity and purity**.
If you were good and pure within, then you would look upon all things without hurt and understand them aright. As iron cast into the fire loses rust and is made altogether glowing, so the man who turns himself altogether unto God is freed from slothfulness and changed into a new man…if any man be in Christ he is a NEW CREATION, Behold all things have become NEW.
* The Brethren as Thomas writes warned the disciples that **WE CANNOT PLACE TOO LITTLE CONFIDENCE IN OURSELVES, BECAUSE GRACE AND UNDERSTANDING ARE OFTEN LACKING TO US.**  We must humble ourselves to instruction, correction, reproof, and rebuke and receive our Lord’s chastening as He does to the sons he receives…DO NOT Despise this chastening or Faint because of it…but endure. All of this as you pursue perfection in the Imitation of Christ and the perfection of the soul…to be holy and pure as He is holy:
* Thomas in Chapter 5 and 6 of Book 2 stresses **the importance of a good conscience**, in fact we started this discipleship with the purpose of the Commands of God is LOVE from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Thomas writes**—"The man whose conscience is pure easily finds peace and contentment…Blessed are the pure in heart…labor for purity of heart, in thought, in word, and in deed... Men only see your face, but it is God who sees your heart.** Men judge according to external deeds, but only God can weigh the motives behind them" (Chap. 6).
* **Christianity is the true religion that bids the man to be pure and to do good FROM THE HEART**…from a heart filled with devotion to God and to His Christ. This would affect relations with others, too…Thomas says, If a man would weigh his own deeds fully and rightly, he would find little cause to pass severe judgment on others.
* We take an interesting move into the love of Christ Himself to the hatred of all else, even one’s own life as we’ve spoken early.

In Book 2, Chapter 7, Of loving Jesus above all things, we read: **Blessed is he who appreciates what it is to love Jesus and who despises himself for the sake of Jesus**. Give up all other love for His, since He wishes to be loved alone above all things. Affection for creatures is deceitful and inconstant, but the love of Jesus is true and enduring. He who clings to a creature will fall with its frailty, but he who gives himself to Jesus will ever be strengthened. **Love Him, then; keep Him as a friend. He will not leave you as others do, or let you suffer lasting death**. Sometime, whether you will or not, you will have to part with everything. Cling, therefore, to Jesus in life and death; trust yourself to the glory of Him who alone can help you when all others fail.
* **Kempis writes we must place our faith in Jesus rather than in men and "...Do not trust nor lean on a reed that is shaken** ...All flesh is grass, and all its glory shall fade like the flower in the field" (Chap. 7)."Grace will always be given to the truly grateful, and what is given to the humble is taken away from the proud"
* Those who seek God’s Kingdom, all things needed and desired will be given unto them (Matthew 6:33). The Brethren write: **If…you seek Jesus in all things, you will surely find Him. Likewise, if you seek yourself, you will find yourself– to your own ruin. For the man who does not seek Jesus does himself much greater harm than the whole world and all his enemies could ever do.**
* Jesus said, If you love me, Keep My Commandments, and in the next chapter 8, It is a great art/skill to know how to converse with Jesus, and great wisdom to know how to keep Him. **Be humble and peaceful**, and Jesus will be with you. **Be devout and calm**, and He will remain with you. **You may quickly drive Him away and lose His grace, if you turn back to the outside world.** And, **if you drive Him away and lose Him, to whom will you go and whom will you then seek as a friend?** You cannot live well without a friend, and if Jesus be not your friend above all else, you will be very sad and desolate.
* Thus, you are acting foolishly if you trust or rejoice in any other. Choose the opposition of the whole world rather than offend Jesus. Of all those who are dear to you, **let Him be your special love. Let all things be loved for the sake of Jesus, but Jesus for His own sake**.

**This is especially helpful counsel in the dark times, the times of obscurity and trial.** **Thomas writes**: When the grace of God comes to a man he can do all things, but when it leaves him he becomes poor and weak, abandoned, as it were, to affliction. Yet, in this condition he should not become dejected or despair. On the contrary, he should calmly await the will of God and bear whatever befalls him in praise of Jesus Christ, for after winter comes summer, after night, the day, and after the storm, a great calm.

**St. John of the Cross** “The reason why the soul not only travels securely when in obscurity, but also makes greater progress, is this: In general the soul makes greater progress in the spiritual life when it least thinks so, yea, when it rather imagines that it is losing everything …There is another reason also why the soul has traveled safely in this obscurity; it has suffered: for the way of suffering is safer, and also more profitable, than that of rejoicing and of action. In suffering God gives strength, but in action and in joy the soul does but show its own weakness and imperfections. And in suffering, the soul practices and acquires virtue, and becomes pure, wiser, and more cautious.”—, p.149. Dark Night
* **To deny yourself comforts and immediate consolation is difficult, and the Brethren knew difficulty, trials, persecution, disease, death, betrayal, rejection…loss of comforts, yet Thomas summarizes their discipleship to the world as follows regarding the lack of all comfort in Imitating Christ:** It is not hard to spurn human consolation when we have the divine. It is, however, a very great thing indeed to be able to live without either divine or human comforting and for the honor of God willingly to endure this exile of heart, not to seek oneself in anything, and to think nothing of one’s own merit.
* **Does it matter much, if at the coming of grace, you are cheerful and devout**? This is an hour desired by all, for he whom the grace of God sustains travels easily enough. What wonder if he feel no burden when borne up by the Almighty and led on by the Supreme Guide! For we are always glad to have something to comfort us, and only with difficulty does a man divest himself of self.
* The holy martyr, Lawrence, (St. Lawrence of Rome, a deacon and one of the most revered early Christian martyrs, who was closely associated with Pope Sixtus II) with his friend, conquered the world because he despised everything in it that seemed pleasing to him, and for love of Christ patiently suffered the great high priest of God, Sixtus, whom he loved dearly, to be taken from him. **Thus, by his love for the Creator he overcame the love of man, and chose instead of human consolation the good pleasure of God**. So you, too, must learn to part with an intimate and much-needed friend for the love of God. **Do not take it to heart when you are deserted by a friend, knowing that in the end we must all be parted from one another**

 **Ps 30:6 “In my prosperity I said: “˜ I shall never be moved.’” But when grace was taken away, he adds what he experienced in himself: “Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled.”** Meanwhile he does not despair; rather he prays more earnestly to the Lord, saying: “To Thee, O Lord, will I cry; and I will make supplication to my God.” At length, he receives the fruit of his prayer, and testifying that he was heard, says “The Lord hath heard, and hath had mercy on me: the Lord became my helper.” And how was he helped? “Thou hast turned,” he says, “my mourning into joy, and hast surrounded me with gladness.”

**I have never met a man so religious and devout that he has not experienced at some time a withdrawal of grace and felt a lessening of fervor**. No saint was so sublimely rapt and enlightened as not to be tempted before and after. He, indeed, is not worthy of the sublime contemplation of God who has not been tried by some tribulation for the sake of God. **For temptation is usually the sign preceding the consolation that is to follow, and heavenly consolation is promised to all those proved by temptation**. “To him that overcometh,” says Christ, “I will give to eat of the Tree of Life.”17 Divine consolation, then, is given in order to make a man braver in enduring adversity, and temptation follows in order that he may not pride himself on the good he has done.

**And we comfort the brethren with that same comfort that we’ve been given by God
2 Cor 1: 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. 6 Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. 7 And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

* Thomas concludes this particular section by writing: **The devil does not sleep, nor is the flesh yet dead; therefore, you must never cease your preparation for battle, because on the right and on the left are enemies who never rest.**So, we look up, to Christ’s perfection, we stand strong in His victory and perseverance, and we place no trust in ourselves or in anything earthy, for we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us.
* Book 2 winds down and concludes with admonitions for the perfection of the inner life, so as to Imitate Christ with regard to **GRATITUDE** for the grace of God, and concluding with an admonition to love the cross of Christ and see it as the royal way of Jesus, the way of following and imitating Him, the way of partaking of the divine nature and the heavenly kingdom
* No one wants to be born into adversity or to experience the vexing estate of life under the sun, yet **we are called to bear hardship like good soldiers of Jesus Christ**.

**Why do you look for rest when you were born to work? Resign yourself to patience rather than to comfort, to carrying your cross rather than to enjoyment. God does well in giving the grace of consolation, but man does evil in not returning everything gratefully to God. Grace is always given to him who is duly grateful, and what is wont to be given the humble will be taken away from the proud. The man who has been taught by the gift of grace, and who learns by the lash of its withdrawal, will never dare to attribute any good to himself, but will rather admit his poverty and emptiness. Give to God what is God’s and ascribe to yourself what is yours. Give Him thanks, then, for His grace, but place upon yourself alone the blame and the punishment your fault deserves**.
* Thomas writes: Always take the lowest place and the highest will be given you, for the highest cannot exist apart from the lowest. The saints who are greatest before God are those who consider themselves the least, and the more humble they are within themselves, so much the more glorious they are….Be grateful, therefore, for the least gift and you will be worthy to receive a greater. He who desires to keep the grace of God ought to be grateful when it is given and patient when it is withdrawn. Let him pray that it return; let him be cautious and humble lest he lose it.
* **We come now to a very popular quote from the Imitation concerning the way of Christ’s Cross:**

**Jesus has always many who love His heavenly kingdom, but few who bear His cross. He has many who desire consolation, but few who care for trial. He finds many to share His table, but few to take part in His fasting. All desire to be happy with Him; few wish to suffer anything for Him. Many follow Him to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the chalice of His passion.**

* **The saints enduring the Great Tribulation** of the First Century were nearly snuffed by their enemies, the apostate Jews and the Roman Emperor and his armies, both empowered by the Devil…Yet, John in the Revelation writes in **Rev 12:**

**And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb** and by **the word of their testimony**, and they **did not love their lives to the death**.

* **If a man give all his wealth, it is nothing**; if he do great penance, it is little; if he gain all knowledge, he is still far afield; if he have great virtue and much ardent devotion, he still lacks a great deal, and especially, the one thing that is most necessary to him. What is this one thing? **That leaving all, he forsake himself, completely renounce himself, and give up all private affections**.

Then, when he has done all that he knows ought to be done, let him consider it as nothing, let him make little of what may be considered great; let him in all honesty call himself an unprofitable servant. **For truth itself has said: “When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: “˜ we are unprofitable servants.’”** Then he will be truly poor and stripped in spirit, and with the prophet may say: “I am alone and poor.”19 No one, however, is more wealthy than such a man; no one is more powerful, no one freer than he who knows how to leave all things and think of himself as the least of all**. IMITATING CHRIST—THIS IS THE WAY…THIS MAKES DEAD RITUAL WITHOUT DEVOTION WEAK AND IMPOTENT BY COMPARISON.**
* I’m beginning to feel extinct, and what about my contributions to the world, to my ministry, I have a voice…**but what if Christ says, leave your voice behind, and come follow me…you’ll then be God with God and have my voice and spirit**.

**We conclude Book 2 with one of the longest chapters…it is the climax of this message on perfection of the interior life of the disciple…it is regarding the Way of the Holy Cross.** To many the saying, “Deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow Me,”20 **seems hard, but it will be much harder to hear that final word:** “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.”
* **Those who hear the word of the cross and follow it willingly now, need not fear that they will hear of eternal damnation on the day of judgment.** This sign of the cross will be in the heavens when the Lord comes to judge. Then all the servants of the cross, who during life made themselves one with the Crucified, will draw near with great trust to Christ, the judge.
* Why, then, do you fear to take up the cross when through it you can win a kingdom? In the cross is **salvation**, in the cross is **life**, in the cross is **protection from enemies**, in the cross is **infusion of heavenly sweetness**, in the cross is **strength of mind**, in the cross is **joy of spirit**, in the cross is **highest virtue**, in the cross is **perfect holiness**. There is no salvation of soul nor hope of everlasting life but in the cross.
	+ Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so wasn’t Christ lifted up before men on the cross…all men then and now are to look at the lifted up one, AND LIVE. **Jesus said, He that believes in me though he may die, yet shall he live, and he that lives and believes in me, shall never die…do you believe this?**
* Take up your cross, therefore, and follow Jesus, and you shall enter eternal life. **Either you will experience bodily pain or you will undergo tribulation of spirit in your soul. At times you will be forsaken by God, at times troubled by those about you and, what is worse, you will often grow weary of yourself**. You cannot escape, you cannot be relieved by any remedy or comfort but must bear with it as long as God wills. For He wishes you to learn to bear trial without consolation, to submit yourself wholly to Him that you may become more humble through suffering. No one understands the passion of Christ so thoroughly or heartily as the man whose lot it is to suffer the like himself.
* If you carry the cross willingly, it will carry and lead you to the desired goal where indeed there shall be no more suffering, but here there shall be. If you carry it unwillingly, you create a burden for yourself and increase the load, though still you have to bear it. **If you cast away one cross, you will find another and perhaps a heavier one**. Do you expect to escape what no mortal man can ever avoid? Which of the saints was without a cross or trial on this earth? Not even Jesus Christ, our Lord, Whose every hour on earth knew the pain of His passion. **“It behooveth Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead, . . . and so enter into his glory.”22 How is it that you look for another way than this, the royal way of the holy cross?**
* Kempis writes that by ourselves we cannot bear the cross, but if we put our trust in the Lord, He will send us strength from heaven.
* Set yourself, then, like a good and faithful servant of Christ, to bear bravely the cross of your Lord, Who out of love was crucified for you. Be ready to suffer many adversities and many kinds of trouble in this miserable life, for troublesome and miserable life will always be, no matter where you are; and so you will find it wherever you may hide. Thus it must be; and there is no way to evade the trials and sorrows of life but to bear them.
* Realize that you must lead a dying life; the more a man dies to himself, the more he begins to live unto God. **Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ**; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.
* When, therefore, we have read and searched all that has been written, let this be the final conclusion–**that through much suffering we must enter into the kingdom of God**.

# **Book Three, entitled "On Interior Consolation"**

**Book Three of the Imitation of Christ takes us into the world of the contemplative**. He quiets his soul and talks to God…and the contemplative, the mystic, listens to his heart, and hears what the Spirit of God brings forth…perhaps not audibly hearing God, but being quickened by the Word of God he or she knows. The disciples who has quieted his soul will hear, and this type of dialogue with God is very common among the mystics, like

## **Maria Faustyna Kowalska**

Order of Our Lady of Mercy (OLM) (born Helena Kowalska; 25 August 1905 – 5 October 1938[1]), also known as Maria Faustyna Kowalska of the Blessed Sacrament, was a Polish Catholic religious sister and mystic. **Faustyna**, popularly spelled "Faustina", had apparitions of Jesus Christ which inspired the Catholic devotion to the Divine Mercy, therefore she is sometimes called the "secretary" of Divine Mercy. Throughout her life, Kowalska reported having visions of Jesus and conversations with him, which she noted in her diary, later published as **The Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul.** Her biography, submitted to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, quoted some of the conversations with Jesus regarding the Divine Mercy devotion.

**“Love endures everything, love is stronger than death, love fears nothing.”**

“The Holy Spirit does not speak to a soul that is distracted and garrulous (excessively talkative, especially on trivial matters). He speaks by His quiet inspirations to a soul that is recollected, to a soul that knows how to keep silence.”

**You read the dialogue between her Beloved and her:**

“O my Lord, inflame my heart with love for You, that my spirit may not grow weary amidst the storms, the sufferings and the trials. You see how weak I am. Love can do all.

**The Beloved Lord replies to her,** “When you reflect upon what I tell you in the depths of your heart, you profit more than if you had read many books. Oh, if souls would only want to listen to My voice when I am speaking in the depths of their hearts, they would reach the peak of holiness in a short time.”

**Hear God speaking to Catherine of Siena** “Know, dearest daughter, how, by humble, continual, and faithful prayer, the soul acquires, with time and perseverance, every virtue. Wherefore should she persevere and never abandon prayer… The soul should advance by degrees, and I know well that, just as the soul is at first imperfect and afterwards perfect, so also is it with her prayer. She should nevertheless continue in vocal prayer, while she is yet imperfect, so as not to fall into idleness. But she should not say her vocal prayers without joining them to mental prayer, that is to say, that while she is reciting, she should endeavor to elevate her mind in My love, with the consideration of her own defects and of the Blood of My only-begotten Son, wherein she finds the breadth of My charity and the remission of her sins.”

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**Book 3 of the Imitation of Christ** brings the devoted disciple into communion with God…in the perfecting estate…**being god with God**. Book 1 spoke of things profitable for the spiritual life certainly warning against the love of the world. Book 2 presented one with admonitions and warnings associated with perfecting the Interior life. Now, Book 3, the longest among the four books presents the dialogue between the Lord and you, His follower, His disciple, His Imitator. This book is in the form of a dialogue between Jesus and the disciple. The disciple pouring out his heart to God and our Lord quietly speaking back to the devoted one. It is quite prayerful and edifying to work through as a devotional as one is on their way to perfection.

Immediately, the one devoted to Christ brings God’s Word, the Sacred Scripture, back to God in prayer…and God speaks to the humble and devoted disciple who is taking up his cross and following Christ. **Isaiah 55:11** So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

* **The disciple humbling himself is the one with whom God speaks…the disciple speaks the Psalms unto God, such as Psalm 119: Speak Lord, for thy servant hears…thy word is a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path.**
* Jesus says that very few turn to God and spirituality, since they are more eager to listen to the world and desires of their flesh than to God. Jesus says that the world promises things that are passing and of little value, which are served with great enthusiasm; while He promises things that are most excellent and eternal and men's hearts remain indifferent (Chap. 3). **Jesus says that the "man who trusts in Me I never send away empty. When I make a promise I keep it, and I fulfill whatever I have pledged—if only you remain faithful...unto the end" (Chap. 3).**

 **“Consider these things, my soul, and close the door of your senses, so that you can hear what the Lord your God speaks within you**. "I am your salvation," says your Beloved. "I am your peace and your life. Remain with Me and you will find peace. Dismiss all passing things and seek the eternal. What are all temporal things but snares? And what help will all creatures be able to give you if you are deserted by the Creator?" Leave all these things, therefore, and make yourself pleasing and faithful to your Creator so that you may attain to true happiness.”

We wean the soul from distraction and the world. We come away with Jesus, and calm the soul…meditating on the Word, praying the Rosary, praying the Psalms, and then we wait quietly before the Lord…we then allow the Spirit of God to form us within, to perfect from within since we are meditating on the Perfect One, Christ, and then when we arise, we walk in the ways of our heart, with all of our might, imitating Him, following Him.

* **One allows the Spirit of God to bring forth the truth that you’ve placed into your heart**. The disciple says, “SPEAK, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."[25] "I am Thy servant. Give me understanding that I may know Thine ordinances[26] . . . Incline my heart to Thine ordinances[27] . . . Let Thy speech distil as the dew."
* **Listen to the Dialogue**: **NOTE THE LORD’s CONSOLATIONS FOR TAKING UP YOUR CROSS**
**THE VOICE OF CHRIST**: MY CHILD, hear My words, words of greatest sweetness surpassing all the knowledge of the philosophers and wise men of earth. My words are spirit and life, and they are not to be weighed by man's understanding. They are not to be invoked in vanity but are to be heard in silence, and accepted with all humility and with great affection.

**THE DISCIPLE**: "Happy is the man whom Thou admonishes, O Lord, and teachest out of Thy law, to give him peace from the days of evil,"[31] and that he be not desolate on earth.

**THE VOICE OF CHRIST**: Write My words in your heart and meditate on them earnestly, for in time of temptation they will be very necessary. What you do not understand when you read, you will learn in the day of visitation. I am wont to visit My elect in two ways -- by temptation and by consolation. To them I read two lessons daily -- one reproving their vices, the other exhorting them to progress in virtue. He who has My words and despises them has that which shall condemn him on the last day.

* **Our Lord, the Living Word of God, has taught the saints from of old His words and His wisdom, and we accounted them all blessed although many gave their lives for the faith.** These humble saints were devoted to the Christ, put off the vices of the world and flesh, and put on the virtues of Christ, the cardinal of which are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance—they persevered in their faith as they carried their crosses to the end while manifesting in a determined manner, relying on the **NEVERENDING FLOW OF GOD’S GRACE, FAITH, HOPE, and LOVE…and the greatest, most powerful of these is LOVE. And Thomas A Kempis records this:

Prayer for the Grace of Devotion:** O Lord my God, You are all my good. And who am I that I should dare to speak to You? I am Your poorest and meanest servant, a vile worm, much more poor and contemptible than I know or dare to say. Yet remember me, Lord, because I am nothing, I have nothing, and I can do nothing. You alone are good, just, and holy. You can do all things, You give all things, You fill all things: only the sinner do You leave empty-handed. Remember Your tender mercies and fill my heart with Your grace, You Who will not allow Your works to be in vain. How can I bear this life of misery unless You comfort me with Your mercy and grace? Do not turn Your face from me. Do not delay Your visitation. Do not withdraw Your consolation, lest in Your sight my soul become as desert land. Teach me, Lord, to do Your will. Teach me to live worthily and humbly in Your sight, for You are my wisdom Who know me truly, and Who knew me even before the world was made and before I was born into it.
* The self-indulged soul balks at such a prayer…he’s full…full of the world, his own worldly knowledge, his success, his religion. But these are the heart-filled words of the imitator of Christ.
* Again, the consolation of the Lord comes when the devoted one CONTINUES to walk in the humility of God, regardless of trial and tribulation. He says YES to the Wisdom that cries out daily to him…and YES to the Lord’s Words that he reads and on which he meditates.

We now hear the exhortations of the Brethren, perhaps of Gerard Zerbolt here wanting to imprint the fear of God into the soul of the disciple. The point is to teach the disciple devotion, so that they can live in the world, eating, drinking, and making merry while obeying and imitating the Lord…doing His Words from the heart, and not simply practicing the rituals of religion…but ensuring Christ is deeply in the heart…with the disciple being fully aware of His presence there.
* **CHRIST**: I shall teach you those things which are right and pleasing to Me. Consider your sins with great displeasure and sorrow, and never think yourself to be someone because of your good works. You are truly a sinner. You are subject to many passions and entangled in them. Of yourself you always tend to nothing. You fall quickly, are quickly overcome, quickly troubled, and quickly undone. You have nothing in which you can glory, but you have many things for which you should think yourself vile, for you are much weaker than you can comprehend. Hence, let none of the things you do seem great to you. Let nothing seem important or precious or desirable except that which is everlasting. Let the eternal truth please you above all things, and let your extreme unworthiness always displease you. Fear nothing, abhor nothing, and fly nothing as you do your own vices and sins; these should be more unpleasant for you than any material losses.
* **Some men walk before Me without sincerity.** Led on by a certain curiosity and arrogance, they wish to know My secrets and to understand the high things of God, to the neglect of themselves and their own salvation. Through their own pride and curiosity, and because I am against them, such men often fall into great temptations and sins. Fear the judgments of God! Dread the wrath of the Almighty! Do not discuss the works of the Most High, but examine your sins -- in what serious things you have offended and how many good things you have neglected.

AND beware of hypocrisy and the trappings of religion when the heart is far away:

* **Some carry their devotion only in books, some in pictures, some in outward signs and figures. Some have Me on their lips when there is little of Me in their hearts. Others, indeed, with enlightened understanding and purified affections, constantly long for everlasting things; they are unwilling to hear of earthly affairs and only with reluctance do they serve the necessities of nature. These sense what the Spirit of truth speaks within them: for He teaches them to despise earthly things and to love those of heaven, to neglect the world, and each day and night to desire heaven.**

Thomas then expounds upon the **divine love of God that brings consolation** to the disciple who is denying himself and taking up his cross daily.

## **Love is the Principal Thing**

* **Chapter 5: Love is an excellent thing,** a very great blessing, indeed. It makes every difficulty easy, and bears all wrongs with equanimity. For it bears a burden without being weighted and renders sweet all that is bitter. The noble love of Jesus spurs to great deeds and excites longing for that which is more perfect. Love tends upward; it will not be held down by anything low. Love wishes to be free and estranged from all worldly affections, lest its inward sight be obstructed, lest it be entangled in any temporal interest and overcome by adversity.
* **Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger or higher or wider; nothing is more pleasant, nothing fuller, and nothing better in heaven or on earth, for love is born of God and cannot rest except in God, Who is above all created things.** One who is in love flies, runs, and rejoices; he is free, not bound. He gives all for all and possesses all in all, because he rests in the one sovereign Good, Who is above all things, and from Whom every good flows and proceeds. He does not look to the gift but turns himself above all gifts to the Giver.
* If a man loves, he will know the sound of this voice. For this warm affection of soul is a loud voice crying in the ears of God, and it says: "My God, my love, You are all mine and I am all Yours. Give me an increase of love, that I may learn to taste with the inward lips of my heart how sweet it is to love, how sweet to be dissolved in love and bathe in it. Let me be rapt in love. Let me rise above self in great fervor and wonder. Let me sing the hymn of love, and let me follow You, my Love, to the heights. Let my soul exhaust itself in praising You, rejoicing out of love. Let me love You more than myself, and let me not love myself except for Your sake. In You let me love all those who truly love You, as the law of love, which shines forth from You, commands."
* **These devotional words inspired St. Francis of Sales, Ignatius Loyola, Teresa of Avilla as you note very similar words regarding the freeing, powerful, and burning love of God.**
* **And the Lord instructs and consoles:**

**THE VOICE OF CHRIST**: MY CHILD, you are not yet a brave and wise lover.

 **THE DISCIPLE**: Why, Lord?

**THE VOICE OF CHRIST**: Because, on account of a slight difficulty you give up what you have undertaken and are too eager to seek consolation. The brave lover stands firm in temptations and pays no heed to the crafty persuasions of the enemy. As I please him in prosperity, so in adversity I am not displeasing to him. The wise lover regards not so much the gift of Him Who loves as the love of Him Who gives. He regards the affection of the Giver rather than the value of the gift, and sets his Beloved above all gifts. The noble lover does not rest in the gift but in Me Who am above every gift.

## **Don’t Walk By Feelings, But By Faith**

* **All is not lost, then, if you sometimes feel less devout than you wish toward Me or My saints.** That good and sweet feeling which you sometimes have is the effect of present grace and a certain foretaste of your heavenly home. You must not lean upon it too much, because it comes and goes. **But to fight against evil thoughts which attack you is a sign of virtue and great merit. Do not, therefore, let strange fantasies disturb you, no matter what they concern. Hold strongly to your resolution, keep a right intention toward God. YOU’RE IN A FIGHT AGAINST SPIRTUAL WICKEDNESS WHO WOULD SEE YOUR DOOM.**
* **It is not an illusion that you are sometimes rapt in ecstasy and then quickly returned to the usual follies of your heart.** For these are evils which you suffer rather than commit; and so long as they displease you and you struggle against them, it is a matter of merit and not a loss.
* **Christ tells the disciple to standfast, rebuke the devil in times of temptation, to quiet the soul, and wait on the Lord when you don’t feel His presence…wait, wean your soul to wait and not act presumptuously…praying for wisdom and to:**

Fight like a good soldier and if you sometimes fall through weakness, rise again with greater strength than before, trusting in My most abundant grace. But beware of vain complacency and pride. For many are led into error through these faults and sometimes fall into almost perpetual blindness. Let the fall of these, who proudly presume on self, be a warning to you and a constant incentive to humility.
* **Thomas tells the novice not to trust in his own abilities, BUT to overcome and to walk victoriously, but to trust in formators, those seasoned men and women who can assist you and pray for you.**

If you were wise enough to remain always humble and small in your own eyes, and to restrain and rule your spirit well, you would not fall so quickly into danger and offense.

**Stay Humble**

—that is meritorious while loving God with all of the heart and loving one’s neighbor:

**CHRIST SAYS**: When a spirit of fervor is enkindled within you, you may well meditate on how you will feel when the fervor leaves. Then, when this happens, remember that the light which I have withdrawn for a time as a warning to you and for My own glory may again return. Such trials are often more beneficial than if you had things always as you wish. For a man's merits are not measured by many visions or consolations, or by knowledge of the Scriptures, or by his being in a higher position than others, but by the truth of his humility, by his capacity for divine charity, by his constancy in seeking purely and entirely the honor of God, by his disregard and positive contempt of self, and more, by preferring to be despised and humiliated rather than honored by others.

* **Humility Before God and His Christ SAVES and Cures Worldliness**  **James 4:** Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” 7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Chap 11: **Hence you ought not to attribute any good to yourself or ascribe virtue to any man, but give all to God without Whom man has nothing**. I have given all things. I will that all be returned to Me again, and I exact most strictly a return of thanks. This is the truth by which vainglory is put to flight. Where heavenly grace and true charity enter in, there neither envy nor narrowness of heart nor self-love will have place. Divine love conquers all and enlarges the powers of the soul. If you are truly wise, you will rejoice only in Me, because no one is good except God alone, Who is to be praised above all things and above all to be blessed.
* We keep in mind that **Thomas was a priest and a religious.** He had by God’s grace made himself a eunuch for the Kingdom of God, dedicated to prayer and fasting. However, EVERY MAN, WOMAN, and CHILD is BOUND to love God and serve him…their Creator, whether a religious nor not…it is RIGHT and JUST…whether a magistrate, farmer, businessman, student, a man, a woman, a child.

**Thomas writes:** What return shall I make to You for this grace? For it is not given every man to forsake all things, to renounce the world, and undertake the religious life. Is it anything great that **I should serve You Whom every creature is bound to serve**? It should not seem much to me; instead it should appear great and wonderful that You condescend to receive into Your service one who is so poor and unworthy.

**It is a great honor, a great glory to serve You and to despise all things for Your sake.** They who give themselves gladly to Your most holy service will possess great grace. They who cast aside all carnal delights for Your love will find the most sweet consolation of the Holy Ghost. They who enter upon the narrow way for Your name and cast aside all worldly care will attain great freedom of mind.
* As did the brethren, **the disciple is to turn from concupiscence and nurture virtue**:

**THE VOICE OF CHRIST**: MY CHILD, it is necessary for you to learn many things which you have not yet learned well.

**THE DISCIPLE**: What are they, Lord?

**THE VOICE OF CHRIST**: That you conform your desires entirely according to My good pleasure, and be not a lover of self but an earnest doer of My will. Desires very often inflame you and drive you madly on, but consider whether you act for My honor, or for your own advantage.

**The consolation that the Brethren have found and Thomas has recorded:
PATIENCE, O Lord God, is very necessary for me, I see, because there are many adversities in this life. No matter what plans I make for my own peace, my life cannot be free from struggle and sorrow.**

**Therefore, My child, do not pursue your lusts, but turn away from your own will. "Seek thy pleasure in the Lord and He will give thee thy heart's desires.**"[33] If you wish to be truly delighted and more abundantly comforted by Me, behold, in contempt of all worldly things and in the cutting off of all base pleasures shall your blessing be, and great consolation shall be given you. Further, the more you withdraw yourself from any solace of creatures, the sweeter and stronger comfort will you find in Me.

At first you will not gain these blessings without sadness and toil and conflict. Habit already formed will resist you, but it shall be overcome by a better habit. The flesh will murmur against you, but it will be bridled by fervor of spirit. The old serpent will sting and trouble you, but prayer will put him to flight and by steadfast, useful toil the way will be closed to him.

* **One MUST guard their heart with all diligence to deny oneself and continue following the Christ unto the end:** As it is written, it is through faith and patience (perseverance) that one inherits the promises…as the saints have known since the beginning.

**There is no holiness, then, if You withdraw Your hand, Lord**. There is no wisdom if You cease to guide, no courage if You cease to defend. No chastity is secure if You do not guard it. Our vigilance avails nothing if Your holy watchfulness does not protect us. Left to ourselves we sink and perish, but visited by You we are lifted up and live. We are truly unstable, but You make us strong. We grow lukewarm, but You inflame us. Oh, how humbly and lowly should I consider myself! How very little should I esteem anything that seems good in me! How profoundly should I submit to Your unfathomable judgments, Lord, where I find myself to be but nothing!
* **Always committing our way unto God, asking that His will be done** (Lord’s Prayer), and not presuming to always knowing the end of a matter. ROMANS 12 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. 3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

MY CHILD, this is the way you must speak on every occasion: "Lord, if it be pleasing to You, so be it. If it be to Your honor, Lord, be it done in Your name. Lord, if You see that it is expedient and profitable for me, then grant that I may use it to Your honor. But if You know that it will be harmful to me, and of no good benefit to the welfare of my soul, then take this desire away from me."

**The PRAYER in Chap 15**: Grant me Your grace, O most merciful Jesus, that it may be with me, and work with me, and remain with me to the very end. Grant that I may always desire and will that which is most acceptable and pleasing to You. Let Your will be mine. Let my will always follow Yours and agree perfectly with it. Let my will be one with Yours in willing and in not willing, and let me be unable to will or not will anything but what You will or do not will. Grant that I may die to all things in this world, and for Your sake love to be despised and unknown in this life. Give me above all desires the desire to rest in You, and in You let my heart have peace. You are true peace of heart. You alone are its rest. Without You all things are difficult and troubled. In this peace, the selfsame that is in You, the Most High, the everlasting Good, I will sleep and take my rest. Amen.

## **Casting Your Care Upon God with Faith in His Consolation**

* And ALL CARE is to be placed upon God in Christ, for God cares for YOU! Let this be YOUR SOLACE in quieting your soul, praying, desiring and doing God’s will, in faith, knowing that He who called you into His Kingdom will continue the sanctifying and perfecting work in you…daily.

**MY CHILD, allow me to do what I will with you. I know what is best for you. You think as a man; you feel in many things as human affection persuades. If You wish me to be in darkness, I shall bless You. And if You wish me to be in light, again I shall bless You. If You stoop down to comfort me, I shall bless You, and if You wish me to be afflicted, I shall bless You forever.**
As said Job, **though He slay me, yet shall I trust Him. Job 13:15**

**LET THE SEED OF GOD within you bear fruit over the long-run, some 30fold, 60fold, and 100fold:** Let not the Devil take away the seed of the Word, nor trials or tribulation, nor love of this world quench the Word and make it of no effect.
* O Lord, I shall suffer willingly for Your sake whatever You wish to send me. I am ready to accept from Your hand both good and evil alike, the sweet and the bitter together, sorrow with joy; and for all that happens to me I am grateful. Keep me from all sin and I will fear neither death nor hell. Do not cast me out forever nor blot me out of the Book of Life, and whatever tribulation befalls will not harm me.
* **We come to the place that the Brethren knew best…How to bear miseries with the virtue of temperance, patience, perseverance.** Chap 18

This consolation from our Lord entering the soul of the lover of God brings the peace of God…**and what does the inspired apostle Paul say**: Phil 2: 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. **Hear it, Believe it, and Doing, and walk like God is with you and will sustain you in peace. Don’t be selective in deciding which offenses or crosses you bear…there is reward in bearing them all with patience.**
* **One has to be trained and one has to train their own soul…Be still my soul and see the salvation of God…to endure the miseries and vexing frustrations of life under the sun:
Even Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered (Heb 5**).

**The VOICE of Christ in Chap 19: Do not say:** "I cannot bear this from such a man, nor should I suffer things of this kind, for he has done me a great wrong. He has accused me of many things of which I never thought. However, from someone else I will gladly suffer as much as I think I should." Such a thought is foolish, for it does not consider the virtue of patience or the One Who will reward it, but rather weighs the person and the offense committed. The man who will suffer only as much as seems good to him, who will accept suffering only from those from whom he is pleased to accept it, is not truly patient. For the truly patient man does not consider from whom the suffering comes, whether from a superior, an equal, or an inferior, whether from a good and holy person or from a perverse and unworthy one; but no matter how great an adversity befalls him, no matter how often it comes or from whom it comes, he accepts it gratefully from the hand of God, and counts it a great gain. For with God nothing that is suffered for His sake, no matter how small, can pass without reward. Be prepared for the fight, then, if you wish to gain the victory. Without struggle you cannot obtain the crown of patience, and if you refuse to suffer you are refusing the crown. But if you desire to be crowned, fight bravely and bear up patiently. **Without labor there is no rest, and without fighting, no victory**.

**THE DISCIPLE:** O Lord, let that which seems naturally impossible to me become possible through Your grace. You know that I can suffer very little, and that I am quickly discouraged when any small adversity arises. Let the torment of tribulation suffered for Your name be pleasant and desirable to me, since to suffer and be troubled for Your sake is very beneficial for my soul.

* The disciple of Jesus Christ confesses his weakness to overcome the world, and confesses his propensity to sin, in a world filled with trials and tribulations

**Look, therefore, Lord, at my lowliness and frailty which You know so well. Have mercy on me and snatch me out of the mire that I may not be caught in it and may not remain forever utterly despondent.** That I am so prone to fall and so weak in resisting my passions oppresses me frequently and confounds me in Your sight. While I do not fully consent to them, still their assault is very troublesome and grievous to me, and it wearies me exceedingly thus to live in daily strife. Yet from the fact that abominable fancies rush in upon me much more easily than they leave, my weakness becomes clear to me. **The outcry for God’s Grace and the necessity to cleave to the public assembly of the Church, the Mass, where through the preaching of the Word of God and the reception of the grace through the Eucharist, and the steadfast pursuit of perfection of the soul of the disciple…he overcomes the world,**

as it is written, **1 John 5: Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**
* **PRAYER**: OPEN my heart, O Lord, to Your law and teach me to walk in the way of Your commandments. Let me understand Your will. Let me remember Your blessings -- all of them and each single one of them -- with great reverence and care so that henceforth I may return worthy thanks for them. I know that I am unable to give due thanks for even the least of Your gifts. I am unworthy of the benefits You have given me, and when I consider Your generosity my spirit faints away before its greatness. All that we have of soul and body, whatever we possess interiorly or exteriorly, by nature or by grace, are Your gifts and they proclaim Your goodness and mercy from which we have received all good things.

**Psalm 103**Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name!
**2**Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits:**3**Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases,**4**Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,**5**Who satisfies your mouth with good *things, So that* your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.
* **This is the way of peace while walking in this world. In the Imitation of Christ Book 3 Chap 23, since the Brethren of the Common Life were very practical in their theology and had thrown off speculative theology, and head theology, theological and philosophical propositions, they went to the Scriptures**…and they say through Thomas A Kempis that there are **4 things that bring great peace**.

	+ **Strive to do another’s will more than your own**
	+ **Choose always to have less rather than more**
	+ **Seek always the lowest place**
	+ **Wish always and pray that the will of God will be fulfilled in you**
* **And what about bad or evil thoughts:

Disciple**: O Lord my God, be not far from me. O my God, hasten to help me, for varied thoughts and great fears have risen up within me, afflicting my soul. How shall I escape them unharmed? How shall I dispel them?

**Christ: "I will go before you," says the Lord,** "and will humble the great ones of earth. I will open the doors of the prison, and will reveal to you hidden secrets."

**Disciple: Do as You say, Lord,** and let all evil thoughts fly from Your face. This is my hope and my only comfort -- to fly to You in all tribulation, to confide in You, and to call on You from the depths of my heart and to await patiently for Your consolation.

* **Additional practical counsel from the Brethren:**
Avoid curiosity…a vice…the desire to continue knowing, but never desiring to seek truth and know truth, and do truth…this is why curiosity killed the cat.
**Thomas records the Lord saying:** **Behold, I know all men. I see everything that is done under the sun, and I know how matters stand with each -- what is in his mind and what in his heart and the end to which his intention is directed.** **Commit all things to Me**, therefore, and keep yourself in good peace. Let him who is disturbed be as restless as he will. Whatever he has said or done will fall upon himself, for he cannot deceive Me.
* **Proverbs 19:21 There are many plans in a man’s heart, Nevertheless the Lord’s counsel—that will stand.**

**Fear Not the FACE OF MEN DURING TRIAL**
**Christ**: Do not be anxious for the shadow of a great name, for the close friendship of many, or for the particular affection of men. These things cause distraction and cast great darkness about the heart. I would willingly speak My word and reveal My secrets to you, if you would watch diligently for My coming and open your heart to Me. Be prudent, then. Watch in prayer, and in all things humble yourself.

* Offer yourself with all of your heart to the divine will. Whatever your hands find to do, then do it with all of thy might! AND FIND JOY in the eating, drinking, and being merry while Fearing God and Keeping His Commandments (Eccl 12).

**The Brethren’s Prayer**: Keep me, I beg You, most merciful God, from the cares of this life, lest I be too much entangled in them. Keep me from many necessities of the body, lest I be ensnared by pleasure. Keep me from all darkness of mind, lest I be broken by troubles and overcome. My God, Sweetness beyond words, make bitter all the carnal comfort that draws me from love of the eternal and lures me to its evil self by the sight of some delightful good in the present. Let it not overcome me, my God. Let not flesh and blood conquer me. Let not the world and its brief glory deceive me, nor the devil trip me by his craftiness. Give me courage to resist, patience to endure, and constancy to persevere. Give me the soothing unction of Your spirit rather than all the consolations of the world, and in place of carnal love, infuse into me the love of Your name. I beg, let Your hand guide and direct me, so that I may not overstep the law in any way.

* Do not be overcome with grief or anxiety when men speak falsely of you…they did so of Christ. St. James has written: in times of trial, be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath…and **Thomas A Kempis writes**: It is no small prudence to remain silent in evil times, to turn inwardly to Me, and not to be disturbed by human opinions. Do not let your peace depend on the words of men. Their thinking well or badly of you does not make you different from what you are. Where are true peace and glory? Are they not in Me? He who neither cares to please men nor fears to displease them will enjoy great peace, for all unrest and distraction of the senses arise out of disorderly love and vain fear.
* **Don’t fear abandonment**, Thomas writes in Chap 30: **All is not lost when things go contrary to your wishes. You ought not judge according to present feelings, nor give in to any trouble whenever it comes, or take it as though all hope of escape were lost. And do not consider yourself forsaken if I send some temporary hardship, or withdraw the consolation you desire. For this is the way to the kingdom of heaven, and without doubt it is better for you and the rest of My servants to be tried in adversities than to have all things as you wish. I know your secret thoughts, and I know that it is profitable for your salvation to be left sometimes in despondency lest perhaps you be puffed up by success and fancy yourself to be what you are not.**
**as it is written (Amplified Bible) Heb 13:5**: He [God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down relax My hold on you)! Assuredly not!
* Trust in the Lord with all of your heart during times of the Dark Night of the feeling of abandonment:
MY CHILD, in this life you are never safe, and as long as you live the weapons of the spirit will ever be necessary to you. You dwell among enemies. You are subject to attack from the right and the left. If, therefore, you do not guard yourself from every quarter with the shield of patience, you will not remain long unscathed.

**TRUST NOT YOUR FEELINGS AND LET TRIBULATION AND THE WAIT WITH PATIENCE PERFECT YOUR SOUL:** MY CHILD, do not trust in your present feeling, for it will soon give way to another. As long as you live you will be subject to changeableness in spite of yourself. You will become merry at one time and sad at another, now peaceful but again disturbed, at one moment devout and the next indevout, sometimes diligent while at other times lazy, now grave and again flippant.
* **Christ says: But the man who is wise and whose spirit is well instructed stands superior to these changes.** He pays no attention to what he feels in himself or from what quarter the wind of fickleness blows, so long as the whole intention of his mind is conducive to his proper and desired end. For thus he can stand undivided, unchanged, and unshaken, with the singleness of his intention directed unwaveringly toward Me, even in the midst of so many changing events. And the purer this singleness of intention is, with so much the more constancy does he pass through many storms. But in many ways the eye of pure intention grows dim, because it is attracted to any delightful thing that it meets. Indeed, it is rare to find one who is entirely free from all taint of self-seeking. The Jews of old, for example, came to Bethany to Martha and Mary, not for Jesus' sake alone, but in order to see Lazarus. The eye of your intention, therefore, must be cleansed so that it is single and right. It must be directed toward Me, despite all the objects which may interfere.

**St. John of the Cross**: “The reason why the soul not only travels securely when in obscurity, but also makes greater progress, is this: In general the soul makes greater progress in the spiritual life when it least thinks so, yea, when it rather imagines that it is losing everything …There is another reason also why the soul has traveled safely in this obscurity; it has suffered: for the way of suffering is safer, and also more profitable, than that of rejoicing and of action. In suffering God gives strength, but in action and in joy the soul does but show its own weakness and imperfections. And in suffering, the soul practices and acquires virtue, and becomes pure, wiser, and more cautious.”
p.149. Dark Night
* **Commit your soul to God during the fire as did St. Peter and the Brethren:
1 Pet 4: 18** Now “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” 19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

**In the midst of spiritual indifference, persecution, clerical ignorance and ridicule, Church schism, plague, and wars…the Brethren resolved and wrote:**

**Chapt 35: If you look for rest in this life, how will you attain to everlasting rest?** Dispose yourself, then, not for much rest but for great patience. Seek true peace, not on earth but in heaven; not in men or in other creatures but in God alone. For love of God you should undergo all things cheerfully, all labors and sorrows, temptations and trials, anxieties, weaknesses, necessities, injuries, slanders, rebukes, humiliations, confusions, corrections, and contempt. For these are helps to virtue. These are the trials of Christ's recruit. These form the heavenly crown. For a little brief labor I will give an everlasting crown, and for passing confusion, glory that is eternal. Do you think that you will always have spiritual consolations as you desire? My saints did not always have them. Instead, they had many afflictions, temptations of various kinds, and great desolation. Yet they bore them all patiently. They placed their confidence in God rather than in themselves, knowing that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to come. And you -- do you wish to have at once that which others have scarcely obtained after many tears and great labors?

**Wait for the Lord, act bravely, and have courage. Do not lose trust. Do not turn back but devote your body and soul constantly to God's glory. I will reward you most plentifully. I will be with you in every tribulation.**
* **Remember that the perfection of the soul is about** denying oneself, taking up one’s cross daily and following Jesus the Messiah…this is about **transformation, mortification, detachment, obedience, and long-run perseverance until the end…NOT ritual and form, and outward appearance as the Pharisees displayed.**

**Chap 31: Many there are who desire contemplation**, **but** who do not care to do the things which contemplation requires. It is also a great obstacle to be satisfied with externals and sensible things, and to have so little of perfect mortification. I know not what it is, or by what spirit we are led, or to what we pretend -- we who wish to be called spiritual -- that we spend so much labor and even more anxiety on things that are transitory and mean, while we seldom or never advert with full consciousness to our interior concerns. Alas, after very little recollection we falter, not weighing our deeds by strict examination. We pay no attention to where our affections lie, nor do we deplore the fact that our actions are impure.

* **God’s consolation comes in knowing yourself and pursuing holiness and perfection as one follows Christ:** A man's true progress consists in denying himself, and the man who has denied himself is truly free and secure. The old enemy, however, setting himself against all good, never ceases to tempt them, but day and night plots dangerous snares to cast the unwary into the net of deceit. "Watch ye and pray," says the Lord, "that ye enter not into temptation.
* **Avoid vain glory, temporal honor, and the praise of men**…don’t trust in it for it is fleeting. Trust in God and learn to lean hard into His grace and believe you receive His grace for overcoming and pursuing holiness

Seek to know God’s ever abiding truth. Detach yourself from the curiosity of all earthly things if you pursue knowledge at the expense of truth

**PERCEPTION IS NOT REALITY, as the world says, but TRUTH IS REALITY**…give yourself to knowing, understanding, and doing the truth…as Moses strictly said to all of the Children of Israel each year during the Feast of Tabernacles:

**Duet 4:** 5 “Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. 6 Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ 7 “For what great nation is there that has God[b] so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? 8 And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? 9 Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren…

**Deut 6: 4** “Hear, O Israel: [b]The Lord our God, the Lord is one! 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

## **The Reward of the Heavenly Garden**

* Chap 47:2 What you do, do well. Work faithfully in My vineyard. I will be your reward. Write, read, sing, mourn, keep silence, pray, and bear hardships like a man. Eternal life is worth all these and greater battles. Peace will come on a day which is known to the Lord, and then there shall be no day or night as at present but perpetual light, infinite brightness, lasting peace, and safe repose. Then you will not say: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" nor will you cry: "Woe is me, because my sojourn is prolonged." For then death will be banished, and there will be health unfailing. There will be no anxiety then, but blessed joy and sweet, noble companionship.

**Thomas speaks much of the heavenly reward.** As a religious priest within the Augustinian order, his was a fully contemplative life, praying, perfecting, overcoming, and awaiting the final reward in heaven.

**Jesus did say that one could also enjoy a portion of the good things of this life, telling us that we all need not be members of a religious order except those who were called to it and could bear the call and execution of the call.** **To others, Jesus said**:

Matthew 19: 23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” 25 When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” 26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” 27 Then Peter answered and said to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” **28 So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.**
* **The disciple imitating Christ and following Him must deal with persevering unto the end:
I am left poor and exiled in a hostile land, where every day sees wars and very great misfortunes. Console my banishment, assuage my sorrow.** My whole desire is for You. Whatever solace this world offers is a burden to me. I desire to enjoy You intimately, but I cannot attain to it. I wish to cling fast to heavenly things, but temporal affairs and unmortified passions bear me down. I wish in mind to be above all things, but I am forced by the flesh to be unwillingly subject to them. Thus, I fight with myself, unhappy that I am, and am become a burden to myself, while my spirit seeks to rise upward and my flesh to sink downward. Oh, what inward suffering I undergo when I consider heavenly things; when I pray, a multitude of carnal thoughts rush upon me!

We see a great desire for eternal life, as St. Paul who had a desire to depart this life and be with Christ, however, St. Paul realized the higher call to remain and to disciple the nations…to care for the Church a while longer.

To imitate Christ, this is how a desolate man, in whom no good dwells, should commit himself to God unto the end.

**the Disciple’s Prayer:** Grant me, O Lord, the grace to know what should be known, to praise what is most pleasing to You, to esteem that which appears most precious to You, and to abhor what is unclean in Your sight. Do not allow me to judge according to the light of my bodily eyes, nor to give sentence according to the hearing of ignorant men's ears. But let me distinguish with true judgment between things visible and spiritual, and always seek above all things Your good pleasure. The senses of men often err in their judgments, and the lovers of this world also err in loving only visible things. How is a man the better for being thought greater by men? The deceiver deceives the deceitful, the vain man deceives the vain, the blind deceives the blind, the weak deceives the weak as often as he extols them, and in truth his foolish praise shames them the more. **For, as the humble St. Francis says, whatever anyone is in Your sight, that he is and nothing more**.

* **The humble disciple thinks not on things to high for himself**…as it is written:
**Psalm 131:** Lord, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me.

**Chap 52: What do you especially demand of a guilty and wretched sinner, except that he be contrite and humble himself for his sins?** In true sorrow and humility of heart hope of forgiveness is born, the troubled conscience is reconciled, grace is found, man is preserved from the wrath to come, and God and the penitent meet with a holy kiss. To You, O Lord, humble sorrow for sins is an acceptable sacrifice, a sacrifice far sweeter than the perfume of incense. This is also the pleasing ointment which You would have poured upon Your sacred feet, for a contrite and humble heart You have never despised. Here is a place of refuge from the force of the enemy's anger. Here is amended and washed away whatever defilement has been contracted elsewhere.

**Thomas** records Jesus saying: **If you completely conquer yourself, you will more easily subdue all other things. The perfect victory is to triumph over self. For he who holds himself in such subjection that sensuality obeys reason and reason obeys Me in all matters, is truly his own conqueror and master of the world.**

**Now, if you wish to climb to this high position you must begin like a man, and lay the ax to the root, in order to tear out and destroy any hidden unruly love of self or of earthly goods.** From this vice of too much self-love comes almost every other vice that must be uprooted. And when this evil is vanquished, and brought under control, great peace and quiet will follow at once.

**But because few labor to die entirely to self, or tend completely away from self, therefore they remain entangled in self, and cannot be lifted in spirit above themselves**. But he who desires to walk freely with Me must mortify all his low and inordinate affections, and must not cling with selfish love or desire to any creature.

* **Before closing Book 3, Thomas directs the disciple to the diverse notions of Nature and Grace,** an **exhortation to not be so morbidly and continually and critically introspective that one cannot pull out of defeat and depression, and then finally, another and a final exhortation to place your trust in God alone in this journey.**
* Remember, the Kingdom of God is RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE, AND JOY IN THE HOLY SPIRIT…NOT SADNESS AND MORBID AND CONTINUAL INTROSPECTION AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE THAT LEADS TO SELF-ABSORBTION. **ITS ALL ABOUT PURSUING LOVE FROM A PURE HEART, A GOOD CONSCIENCE, AND A SINCERE FAITH.** AND NOW: THE INWARD CONSOLATION CONCERNING THESE AREAS:

## **The Sincere Prayers of the Disciple for Grace and that God’s Will be Done**

* **Jesus said that you as the branch must be connected to the ever lifegiving vine, or you can do nothing.** We, created in God’s image and similitude, fell in Adam’s sin having become corrupt without hope and without God in the world, BUT God, who was rich in mercy toward us condescended to come to us in Christ Jesus to give Himself a ramson for our sins. **All of the BY GOD’s GRACE, so as to save us from our contemptuous nature and the continuing components of concupiscence**

**Thomas writes: Let me find grace in Your sight, I beg, Lord, for Your grace is enough for me, even though I obtain none of the things which nature desires**. If I am tempted and afflicted with many tribulations, I will fear no evils while Your grace is with me. This is my strength. This will give me counsel and help. This is more powerful than all my enemies and wiser than all the wise. This is the mistress of truth, the teacher of discipline, the light of the heart, the consoler in anguish, the banisher of sorrow, the expeller of fear, the nourisher of devotion, the producer of tears. What am I without grace, but dead wood, a useless branch, fit only to be cast away? Let Your grace, therefore, go before me and follow me, O Lord, and make me always intent upon good works, through Jesus Christ, Your Son.

**Joseph Tylenda summarizes the central theme of this third book with the teaching in Chapter 56, "My son, to the degree that you can leave yourself behind, to that degree will you be able to enter into Me. Just as desiring nothing outside you produces internal peace within you, so the internal renunciation of yourself unites you to God."[33]**

* Thomas writes from the treasury of the Brethren, **“A MAN SHOULD NOT BE TOO DOWNCAST WHEN HE FALLS INTO DEFECTS.”**
* **Jesus says as Thomas writes**: **Why are you saddened by some little thing said against you?** Even if it had been more you ought not to have been affected. But now let it pass. It is not the first, nor is it anything new, and if you live long it will not be the last. You are manly enough so long as you meet no opposition. You give good advice to others, and you know how to strengthen them with words, but when unexpected tribulation comes to your door, you fail both in counsel and in strength. Consider your great weakness, then, which you experience so often in small matters. Yet when these and like trials happen, they happen for your good.

**Put it out of your heart as best you know how, and if it has touched you, still do not let it cast you down or confuse you for long. Bear it patiently at least, if you cannot bear it cheerfully.** Even though you bear it unwillingly, and are indignant at it, restrain yourself and let no ill-ordered words pass your lips at which the weak might be scandalized. The storm that is now aroused will soon be quieted and your inward grief will be sweetened by returning grace. "I yet live," says the Lord, "ready to help you and to console you more and more, if you trust in Me and call devoutly upon Me." Remain tranquil and prepare to bear still greater trials. All is not lost even though you be troubled oftener or tempted more grievously. You are a man, not God. You are flesh, not an angel. How can you possibly expect to remain always in the same state of virtue when the angels in heaven and the first man in paradise failed to do so? I am He Who rescues the afflicted and brings to My divinity those who know their own weakness.

*TRUST in the Lord for His perfecting Grace knowing that if you exercise this God-given grace of faith toward God, YOU WILL OVERCOME in due time…it is through faith and patience that you inherit the promises of God.*

**The Imitation of Christ again gives us a warning not to think on things or to curiously wander into things to high for you. Stay humble before God, for His ways and NOT your ways, and the haughty believe God is totally like they are…speaking like God speaks, thinking like God thinks, judging as God judges, YET, God says,**

**Isaiah 55: 6** Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.**7**Let the [[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2055&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-18748b)]wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. **8**“For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, Nor *are* your ways My ways,” says the Lord.**9**“For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. **10**“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater,**11**So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me [[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2055&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-18752c)]void, But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

**Chap 58:9 Many ask who is the greater in the kingdom of heaven when they do not know whether they themselves shall be worthy of being numbered among its least**. It is a great thing to be even the least in heaven where all are great because all shall be called, and shall be, the children of God. The least shall be as a thousand, and the sinner of a hundred years shall die. For when the disciples asked who should be greater in the kingdom of heaven they heard this response: "Unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven."[42] Woe to those, therefore, who disdain to humble themselves willingly with the little children, for the low gate of the heavenly kingdom will not permit them to enter. Woe also to the rich who have their consolations here, for when the poor enter into God's kingdom, they will stand outside lamenting. **Rejoice, you humble, and exult, you poor, for the kingdom of God is yours, if only you walk in the truth**.

**Hebrews 12:** **3**For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. **4**You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. **5**And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the [[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2012&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-30218c)]chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; **6**For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.” **7**If[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2012&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-30220d)] you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? **8**But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. **9**Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us,* and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? **10**For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. **11**Now no [[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2012&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-30224e)]chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

**12Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,** **13**and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

**Christ says, as recorded by Thomas**: **All seek their own interests. You, however, place my salvation and my profit first, and turn all things to my good.** Even though exposing me to various temptations and hardships, You Who are accustomed to prove Your loved ones in a thousand ways, order all this for my good. You ought not to be loved or praised less in this trial than if You had filled me with heavenly consolations.

## **Lord Jesus, I Trust in You.**

**The Disciple says, “My God, the Father of mercies, to You I look, in You I trust. Bless and sanctify my soul with heavenly benediction, so that it may become Your holy dwelling and the seat of Your eternal glory**. And in this temple of Your dignity let nothing be found that might offend Your majesty. In Your great goodness, and in the multitude of Your mercies, look upon me and listen to the prayer of Your poor servant exiled from You in the region of the shadow of death. Protect and preserve the soul of Your poor servant among the many dangers of this corruptible life, and direct him by Your accompanying grace, through the ways of peace, to the land of everlasting light.”

* **Book 1: admonitions profitable for the spiritual life, Book 2: admonitions concerning the inner life, and now Book 3, On Inward Consolation,** concludes with the consummation of the ocean of flowing grace coming from Christ in the Eucharist…the ultimate CONSOLATION for the sanctifying walk in the Spirit, these words leading us into the final book of the devotional, OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR.

COME to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you.[43] The bread which I will give is My Flesh, for the life of the world.[44] Take you and eat: this is My Body, which shall be delivered for you. Do this for the commemoration of Me.[45] He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me, and I in him.[46] The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."[47]

The brethren would have understood St. Francis of Assisi’s words as he wrote: **Furthermore, let us produce worthy fruits of penance. Let us also love our neighbors as ourselves**. Let us have charity and humility. Let us give alms because these cleanse our souls from the stains of sin. Men lose all the material things they leave behind them in this world, but they carry with them the reward of their charity and the alms they give. For these they will receive from the Lord the reward and recompense they deserve. We must not be wise and prudent according to the flesh. Rather we must be simple, humble and pure. We should never desire to be over others. Instead, we ought to be servants who are submissive to every human being for God's sake. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on all who live in this way and persevere in it to the end. He will permanently dwell in them. They will be the Father's children who do his work. They are the spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ." —**St. Francis of Assisi, p. 333**

**An excerpt from Witness of the Saints**
**Joseph Tylenda summarizes the end here: Jesus gives his important teaching, "Follow Me...I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Without the Way, there is no going; without the Truth, there is no knowing; without Life, there is no living. I am the Way you are to follow; I am the Truth you are to believe; I am the Life you are to hope for" (Chap. 56).**

# **Book Four of the Imitation, “Of the Sacrament of the Altar,” or "On the Blessed Sacrament"**

…is also in the form of a dialogue between Jesus and the disciple, with more words seemingly coming from the Disciple.

**The Brethren wholeheartedly practiced what A’ Kempis wrote:**  I feel there are especially necessary for me in this life **two things** without which its miseries would be unbearable. Confined here in this prison of the body I confess I need these two, food and light. Therefore, You have given me in my weakness **Your sacred Flesh** to refresh my soul and body, and You have set **Your word as the guiding light for my feet**. Without them I could not live aright, for the word of God is the light of my soul and Your Sacrament is the Bread of Life.

These also may be called the two tables, one here, one there, in the treasure house of holy Church. One is the table of the holy altar, having the holy Bread that is **the precious Body of Christ.** The other is **the table of divine law**, containing holy doctrine that teaches all the true faith and firmly leads them within the veil, the Holy of holies.

**Thanks to You, Lord Jesus**, Light of eternal light, for the table of Your holy teaching which You have prepared for us by Your servants, the prophets and Apostles and other learned men.

Thanks to You, Creator and Redeemer of men, Who, to declare Your love to all the world, have prepared a great supper in which You have placed before us as food not the lamb, the type of Yourself, but Your own most precious Body and Blood, making all the faithful glad in Your sacred banquet, intoxicating them with the chalice of salvation in which are all the delights of paradise; and the holy angels feast with us but with more happiness and sweetness.

**Kempis writes that *in this Sacrament* spiritual grace is conferred, the soul's strength is replenished, and the recipient's mind is fortified and strength is given to the body debilitated by sin (Chap. 1).[55] By His stripes, we were healed.**

* Christ, **really present in the Eucharist**…the body and blood of Christ, the transfigured elements of bread and wine respectively. We eat His flesh and drink His blood as a sign of our Covenant with God and our oneness with Christ.

**Thomas writes in Book 3, Chapter 1**: **THESE are all Your words**, O Christ, eternal Truth, though they were not all spoken at one time nor written together in one place. And because they are Yours and true, **I must accept them all with faith and gratitude**. They are Yours and You have spoken them; they are mine also because You have spoken them for my salvation. Gladly I accept them from Your lips that they may be the more deeply impressed in my heart. Words of such tenderness, so full of sweetness and love, encourage me; but my sins frighten me and an unclean conscience thunders at me when approaching such great mysteries as these. The sweetness of Your words invites me, but the multitude of my vices oppresses me.

* The presence of God in the Ark of the Covenant was but a type and shadow, and yet David the King danced joyfully before the presence of God…and Jesus Christ, God in the flesh is much more as to God’s presence than an Ark, and David gave his best worship without care for what detractors would think of him. (detachment from the thoughts and words of peers not loving the Lord)

**He’s a fool**, obsessed with religion, on the fringe as to behavior. Jesus told the detractors on Palm Sunday that if those praising God in the streets at his entrance were to be silenced, why the very rocks would cry out in praise to the Lord.

But here in the Sacrament of the altar You are wholly present, my God, the man Christ Jesus, whence is obtained the full realization of eternal salvation, as often as You are worthily and devoutly received. To this, indeed, we are not drawn by levity, or curiosity, or sensuality, **but by firm faith, devout hope, and sincere love**.

**The Disciple praises God:** O God, hidden Creator of the world, how wonderfully You deal with us! How sweetly and graciously You dispose of things with Your elect to whom You offer Yourself to be received in this Sacrament! This, indeed, surpasses all understanding. This in a special manner attracts the hearts of the devout and inflames their love. Your truly faithful servants, who give their whole life to amendment, often receive in Holy Communion the great grace of devotion and love of virtue.

* Yet **many hearts are cold** toward the real presence of God in the Eucharist, or **others partake as a ritual**, sometimes as **St. Paul warned the Corinthians**, to their own hurt or death when those in the Church partake of the Eucharist as **a common thing and not discerning it truthfully as the body and blood** of Christ being partaken of with the elect, the Body of Christ in the public assembly.
* Taking a deeper dive into the grace brought to the one humbling himself before God and consoling his soul with the truth and the Eucharist. **The Disciple is happy and blessed having mother Church’s sacrament available to him, as Thomas writes:** But now there are many priests and Mass is offered in many places, that God's grace and love for men may appear the more clearly as the Sacred Communion is spread more widely through the world. Thanks be to You, Jesus, everlasting Good Shepherd, Who have seen fit to feed us poor exiled people with Your precious Body and Blood, and to invite us with words from Your own lips to partake of these sacred Mysteries: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you."
* **Look around the Church assembly and see the older members, one day you will be like them.** The Brethren of the Common Life spent one day a week thinking on death and using those thoughts to change and tone their lives. This is why when in Europe in the Cathedrals one sees so many images of skeletons…the purpose is for you to shake yourself and note, as did Dickens in his Christmas Carole, that we’re all on a race to the grave. I also noted the paintings in Rome’s Cathedral of skeletons looking at me with the caption worded under them: “As you are, we once were; and as we are, you will be.”
It sobers the mind…St. Paul told Titus to tell the young men to be sober minded…save minded.
* **The Eucharist is the ultimate sign of the grace and mercy of God extended to the son of God, you, the believer and disciple**…who is following, obeying, imitating, and partaking of the Covenant meal of Christ’s body and blood with the Church, as administered by God’s lawful bishops and priests. Partaking with a high view of Christ’s Church.
* As those who are following Christ, we partake of His body and blood often—every day as opportunity is available: **Therefore, you should prepare yourself for it by constantly renewing your heart and pondering deeply the great mystery of salvation.** As often as you celebrate or hear Mass, it should seem as great, as new, as sweet to you as if on that very day Christ became man in the womb of the Virgin, or, hanging on the Cross, suffered and died for the salvation of man.
* For this, the highest and most worthy Sacrament, is the health of soul and body, the cure of every spiritual weakness. In it my defects are remedied, my passions restrained, and temptations overcome or allayed. In it greater grace is infused, growing virtue is nourished, faith confirmed, hope strengthened, and charity fanned into flame.

**"Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."** It is a humble acknowledgment of the faithful's unworthiness to receive Christ in the Eucharist, combined with trust in His power to bring spiritual healing. By His most sorrowful passion, HAVE MERCY on us and on the Whole World. This prayer takes place just before the congregation receives Communion, expressing faith in God's mercy and power to heal the soul. When you say those words, believe you receive what you’re asking for. This is the disciples’ consolation in the inner and outward man
* The follower of Christ knows that God through Christ and His Church has ordained Bishops and Priests to serve His Body and Blood during Mass.

**One sees the dignity of the priesthood associated with the administration of the Eucharist in Chap 5:**HAD you the purity of an angel and the sanctity of St. John the Baptist, you would not be worthy to receive or administer this Sacrament. It is not because of any human meriting that a man consecrates and administers the Sacrament of Christ, and receives the Bread of Angels for his food. Great is the Mystery and great the dignity of priests to whom is given that which has not been granted the angels. For priests alone, rightly ordained in the Church, have power to celebrate Mass and consecrate the Body of Christ.

The priest, indeed, is the minister of God, using the word of God according to His command and appointment. God, moreover, is there -- the chief Author and invisible Worker to Whom all is subject as He wills, to Whom all are obedient as He commands.

In this most excellent Sacrament, therefore, you ought to believe in God rather than in your own senses or in any visible sign, and thus, with fear and reverence draw near to such a work as this. Look to yourself and see whose ministry has been given you through the imposition of the bishop's hands.

**To the Priest, Christ Jesus says:** Behold, you have been made a priest, consecrated to celebrate Mass! See to it now that you offer sacrifice to God faithfully and devoutly at proper times, **and that you conduct yourself blamelessly**. You have not made your burden lighter. Instead, **you are now bound by stricter discipline and held to more perfect sanctity.**

**These words were written by A Kempis and the Brethren in an age of clerical corruption: We see the austerity of the Brethren in this passage of the Imitation:**A priest ought to be adorned with all virtues and show the example of a good life to others. His way lies not among the vulgar and common habits of men but with the angels in heaven and the perfect men on earth. A priest clad in the sacred vestments acts in Christ's place, that he may pray to God both for himself and for all people in a suppliant and humble manner. He has before and behind him the sign of the Lord's cross that he may always remember the Passion of Christ. It is before him, on the chasuble, that he may look closely upon the footsteps of Christ and try to follow them fervently. It is behind him -- he is signed with it -- that he may gladly suffer for God any adversities inflicted by others.

**He wears the cross before him that he may mourn his own sins, behind him, that in pity he may mourn the sins of others,** and know that he is appointed to stand between God and the sinner, never to become weary of prayer and the holy offering until it is granted him to obtain grace and mercy.

**When the priest celebrates Mass, he honors God, gladdens the angels, strengthens the Church, helps the living, brings rest to the departed, and wins for himself a share in all good things.**

* **The disciple**, **ON THE OTHER HAND, YOU!...**the one who knows what it is to quiet his soul, deny himself, confess his sins, and pursue perfection of the inner man, comes humbly before the Eucharist after having examined the conscience…perhaps by working through the Ten Commandments and noting where his failings are…He confesses his faults and sins to be healed.

**One should always assess the soul prior to partaking**

**One should always look around and consider the rightness of one’s relationship with the brethren and sisters before partaking…it is one reason we have the ministry of peace…depicting peace with one another so as not to neglect DISCERNING THE BODY…and receiving the consequences…sickness, even death.**

 **Thomas writes the Lord’s Words to the Disciple:** Carefully examine your conscience, then. Cleanse and purify it to the best of your power by true contrition and humble confession, that you may have no burden, know of no remorse, and thus be free to come near. Let the memory of all your sins grieve you, and especially lament and bewail your daily transgressions. Then if time permits, confess to God in the secret depths of your heart all the miseries your passions have caused. Embrace the sorrow for the sin, the COMPUNCTION, then look up to God for his CONSOLATION through His mercies through Christ Jesus…His compassions do not fail.

When you have confessed and deplored these and other faults with sorrow and great displeasure because of your weakness, be firmly determined to amend your life day by day and to advance in goodness.

Then, with complete resignation and with your entire will offer yourself upon the altar of your heart as an everlasting sacrifice to the honor of My name, by entrusting with faith both body and soul to My care, that thus you may be considered worthy to draw near and offer sacrifice to God and profitably receive the Sacrament of My Body. **For there is no more worthy offering, no greater satisfaction for washing away sin than to offer yourself purely and entirely to God with the offering of the Body of Christ in Mass and Communion.** If a man does what he can and is truly penitent, however often he comes to Me for grace and pardon, **"As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live"; I will no longer remember his sins, but all will be forgiven him.**

* The Disciple must offer his whole self to God, including his sin, his conscience, and talk with God with resolve knowing that God is righteous and just to forgive us as we confess our sins from a sincere heart: **Note this in Psalm 51**
**ALL things in heaven and on earth, O Lord, are Yours. I long to give myself to You as a voluntary offering to remain forever Yours. With a sincere heart I offer myself this day to You, O Lord, to Your eternal service, to Your homage, and as a sacrifice of everlasting praise.**

**Forgive me, O God, forgive me my sins for Your Holy Name. Save my soul which You have redeemed by Your most precious Blood. See, I place myself at Your mercy. I commit myself to Your hands. Deal with me according to Your goodness, not according to my malicious and evil ways.**

*FOR OTHERS:***I offer You also all the holy desires of Your devoted servants, the needs of my parents, friends, brothers, sisters, and all who are dear to me; of all who for Your sake have been kind to me or to others; of all who have wished and asked my prayers and Masses for them and theirs, whether they yet live in the flesh or are now departed from this world, that they may all experience the help of Your grace, the strength of Your consolation, protection from dangers, deliverance from punishment to come, and that, free from all evils, they may gladly give abundant thanks to You.**

**I offer You also these prayers and the Sacrifice of Propitiation for those especially who have in any way injured, saddened, or slandered me, inflicted loss or pain upon me, and also for all those whom I have at any time saddened, disturbed, offended, and abused by word or deed, willfully or in ignorance. May it please You to forgive us all alike our sins and offenses against one another.**

Take away from our hearts, O Lord, all suspicion, anger, wrath, contention, and whatever may injure charity and lessen brotherly love. Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on those who ask Your mercy, give grace to those who need it, and make us such that we may be worthy to enjoy Your favor and gain eternal life.

* Don’t let anything get in the way of the public worship of God, the Mass, and the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Give us this day, our daily bread….

The enemy, knowing the great good and the healing power of Holy Communion, tries as much as he can by every manner and means to hinder and keep away the faithful and the devout. Indeed, there are some who suffer the worst assaults of Satan when disposing themselves to prepare for Holy Communion. As it is written in Job, this wicked spirit comes among the sons of God to trouble them by his wonted malice, to make them unduly fearful and perplexed, that thus he may lessen their devotion or attack their faith to such an extent that they perhaps either forego Communion altogether or receive with little fervor.

Do not remain away from Holy Communion because of a small trouble or vexation but go at once to confession and willingly forgive all others their offenses. If you have offended anyone, humbly seek pardon and God will readily forgive you.

What good is it to delay confession for a long time or to put off Holy Communion? **Cleanse yourself at once, spit out the poison quickly.** Make haste to apply the remedy and you will find it better than if you had waited a long time. If you put it off today because of one thing, perhaps tomorrow a greater will occur to you, and thus you will stay away from Communion for a long time and become even more unfit.

* Prepare to partake of the Altar of the Lord with GREAT DILIGENCE: **The Christ says:** But understand that you cannot by any merit of your own make this preparation well enough, though you spend a year in doing it and think of nothing else. It is only by My goodness and grace that you are allowed to approach My table, as though a beggar were invited to dinner by a rich man and he had nothing to offer in return for the gift but to humble himself and give thanks. Do what you can and do that carefully. Receive the Body of the Lord, your beloved God Who deigns to come to you, not out of habit or necessity, but with fear, with reverence, and with love. I am He that called you. I ordered it done. I will supply what you lack. Come and receive Me.

**NOTE**: **Remember this during your trials and when you don’t feel God’s presence**…”God you’ve done nothing for me” Yes, I’ve done all things for you and my grace is sufficient for you. Have faith, be consoled by My grace in this meal, and persevere, and overcome, as have all of my saints before you, and those coming after you.

* **The disciple’s desire is union with Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist…Being God with God, being one with the brethren and partakers of the divine nature…abundant life now in this life and eternal life to come.**
The **Voice of the Beloved says,** YOU must seek earnestly the grace of devotion, ask for it fervently, await it patiently and hopefully, receive it gratefully, guard it humbly, cooperate with it carefully and leave to God, when it comes, the length and manner of the heavenly visitation. When you feel little or no inward devotion, you should especially humiliate yourself, but do not become too dejected or unreasonably sad. In one short moment God often gives what He has long denied. At times He grants at the end what He has denied from the beginning of prayer. If grace were always given at once, or were present at our beck and call, it would not be well taken by weak humankind. Therefore, with good hope and humble patience await the grace of devotion.

**The Christian mystics** labored to perfect the soul to grow in the intense love of God, ablaze with desire for their Beloved One, Jesus Christ. They realized suffering and bearing the cross in this life was the way…taking stepping stones to perfection…an incremental disposition of grace given at appropriate times as the imitator of Christ walks with His Lord never turning back.

**The Disciple says,** O MOST kind, most loving Lord, Whom I now desire to receive with devotion, You know the weakness and the necessity which I suffer, in what great evils and vices I am involved, how often I am depressed, tempted, defiled, and troubled. To You I come for help, to You I pray for comfort and relief. I speak to Him Who knows all things, to Whom my whole inner life is manifest, and Who alone can perfectly comfort and help me. You know what good things I am most in need of and how poor I am in virtue. Behold I stand before You, poor and naked, asking Your grace and imploring Your mercy.

O my God, everlasting love, my final good, my happiness unending, I long to receive You with as strong a desire and as worthy a reverence as any of the saints ever had or could have felt, and though I am not worthy to have all these sentiments of devotion, still I offer You the full affection of my heart as if I alone had all those most pleasing and ardent desires. Yet, whatever a God-fearing mind can conceive and desire, I offer in its entirety to You with the greatest reverence and inward affection. I wish to keep nothing for self but to offer to You, willingly and most freely, myself and all that is mine.

O Lord God, my Creator and my Redeemer, I long to receive You this day with such reverence, praise, and honor, with such gratitude, worthiness and love, with such faith, hope, and purity as that with which Your most holy Mother, the glorious Virgin Mary, longed for and received You when she humbly and devoutly answered the angel who announced to her the mystery of the Incarnation: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word."

**The Disciple’s final prayer in Book 4 is:** Let all people, races, and tongues praise You and with the greatest joy and most ardent devotion magnify Your sweet and holy name. And let all who reverently and devoutly celebrate this most great Sacrament and receive it in the fullness of faith, find kindness and mercy in You and humbly pray for me, a sinner. And when they have received the longed-for devotion and blissful union, and, well consoled and wonderfully refreshed, have retired from Your holy, Your celestial table, may they deign (agree or consent) to remember my poor soul.

* **Book 4 ends** with **a warning** **from the Beloved Christ** regarding those **who cannot believe** in Christ’s Eucharist, **or who will not believe**, **but launch into a journey of curiosity**, always learning sacramental theories, but never coming to a belief in, which as we learned also means an obedience to the truth.

St. Paul writes in Hebrews 11 that faith is the substance of things we hope for, the evidence of things unseen, and that without faith, one cannot please God. Our faith in the Words of God through Christ regarding the Eucharist is our substance of things hoped for and our evidence of things unseen.

**St. Augustine's words** "unless I had believed, I would not have understood" reflect one of his central ideas about the relationship between faith and reason. In Latin, it is commonly expressed as: "Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis."

This idea is found in his writings in Confessions and On Christian Doctrine. Augustine believed that faith is a necessary foundation for understanding deeper truths about God, the world, and human nature. **He argued that certain spiritual realities could only be fully grasped through the lens of faith, and once faith is embraced, it enables reason to delve deeper into understanding these mysteries**. In Confessions, Augustine wrestles with how human understanding and reason are limited, and how faith serves as a guide to elevate the mind toward divine truth. He teaches that belief in God and the truths of Christianity is not opposed to reason but rather opens the mind to a fuller, more profound understanding that is otherwise inaccessible through reason alone.

This concept is also deeply connected to Augustine’s interpretation of Isaiah 7:9, which says: “If you will not believe, you will not understand.” For Augustine, faith is not a blind leap of faith (a theological phrase that Soren Kirkegaard has coined), but rather an initial trust in and obedience to divine revelation that leads to a clearer intellectual and spiritual understanding.

* **Thomas concludes with the Voice of the Beloved Christ saying: BEWARE of curious and vain examination of this most profound Sacrament,** if you do not wish to be plunged into the depths of doubt. He who scrutinizes its majesty too closely will be overwhelmed by its glory. God can do more than man can understand. A pious and humble search for truth He will allow, a search that is ever ready to learn and that seeks to walk in the reasonable doctrine of the fathers. Blest is the simplicity that leaves the difficult way of dispute and goes forward on the level, firm path of God's commandments. Many have lost devotion because they wished to search into things beyond them. Faith is required of you, and a sincere life, not a lofty intellect nor a delving into the mysteries of God. If you neither know nor understand things beneath you, how can you comprehend what is above you? Submit yourself to God and humble reason to faith, and the light of understanding will be given you so far as it is good and necessary for you.
* **Go forward, then, with sincere and unflinching faith, and with humble reverence approach this Sacrament.** Whatever you cannot understand commit to the security of the all-powerful God, Who does not deceive you. The man, however, who trusts in himself is deceived. God walks with sincere men, reveals Himself to humble men, enlightens the understanding of pure minds, and hides His grace from the curious and the proud. Human reason is weak and can be deceived. True faith, however, cannot be deceived. All reason and natural science ought to come after faith, not go before it, nor oppose it. For in this most holy and supremely excellent Sacrament, faith and love take precedence and work in a hidden manner.

God, eternal, incomprehensible, and infinitely powerful, does great and inscrutable things in heaven and on earth, and there is no searching into His marvelous works. If all the works of God were such that human reason could easily grasp them, they would not be called wonderful or beyond the power of words to tell.

**In Book 4, we can summarize the Beloved Jesus saying that the sooner one resigns wholeheartedly to God, and no longer seeks anything according to one's own will or pleasure, but totally places all in God's hands, the sooner will one be united with God and be at peace. Jesus continues, "Nothing will make you happier or please you as much as being obedient to the divine will" (Chap. 15).[56] Jesus also delivers his "changeless teaching" — "Unless you renounce all that you have, you cannot be my disciple"** (Chap. 8).

To receive the Sacrament, **Jesus says "make clean the mansions of your heart. Shut out the whole world and all its sinful din and sit as a solitary sparrow on a housetop and, in the bitterness of your soul, meditate on your transgressions"** (Chap. 12).

Jesus says that there is no offering more worthy, no satisfaction greater, for the washing away of sins than to offer oneself purely and completely to God at the time the Body of Christ is offered in the Mass and in Communion (Chap. 7).[60]

# **Conclusion**

**If ANY MAN COMES AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY and FOLLOW ME:**

**You**, Matt 19:16 Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” 17So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But **if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments**.” 18He said to Him, “**Which ones**?” Jesus said, “‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ 19‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”20The young man said to Him, **“All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?”** 21Jesus said to him, **“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”** 22But when the young man heard that saying, **he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions**. **ATTACHMENT VS. DETACHMENT**

Philippians 2 **5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus**, 6 who, … humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

John 11 25**“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.** The Beloved Christ says, **"Follow Me...I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”**

Why be devoted to Christ, take on His Yoke and Learn of Him, the Meek and Lowly One WHILE denying yourself, taking up your cross daily and knowing and mastering yourself to imitate Him and follow Him? **WHAT’S THE PURPOSE?** **LOVE from a Pure Heart, a Good Conscience, and a Sincere Faith. AND,** to achieve that estate in this life and that beyond where you may fulfill God’s command to mankind to repent, be transformed by the renewing of your mind, and love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

John of Ruusbroec wrote in his, “Spiritual Espousals,” **The practical mystics like Ruysbroeck knew that God perfects the interior so as to enable us to go out to God** and to ourselves and to our neighbor, and this must be done with charity and righteousness.  Charity constantly strives upward toward the kingdom of God, that is, to God himself, for He is the source from which charity has flowed forth…Righteousness, which arises from charity, desires the perfection of all those virtues and forms of behavior which are honorable and proper to the Kingdom of God…these two, charity and righteousness, lay a foundation in the kingdom of the soul in which God is to dwell; this foundation is humility.

Humility is an interior bowing of the heart and mind before the transcendent majesty of God. The loving, humble heart cannot pay enough homage either to God or to Christ’s noble humanity. Such a person is also humble and reverent toward the holy Church and the sacraments.

Humility gives rise to obedience, for only a humble person can be interiorly obedient.  Obedience leads to the renunciation of one’s own will. Such a person will rather live in accordance with the honor and commandments of God, the will of his superiors, and whatever makes for peace with those with whom he lives—all as discretion requires.

Renunciation of one’s will gives rise to patience, for no one can be perfectly patient in all things except a person who has submitted his own will to the will of God and of all other persons in everything that is useful and proper.  This patience gives rise to meekness and kindness, for only a patient person can be meek in times of adversity. This kindness makes a person present a loving appearance and give affable responses and do all kinds of benevolent deeds for those who are quarrelsome.

Kindness gives rise to compassion and to general sympathy with everyone, for only a kind person can share the sorrows of all others. Compassion makes a person suffer with Christ, and likewise makes a person aware of the way others have erred and done astray; their negligence of God and of their eternal salvation; their ingratitude for all the good that God has done for them and all the sufferings that he endured for them. A compassionate person should observe with pity the bodily needs of his neighbor and the manifold sufferings of human nature…and such a compassionate person suffers most of all because people are so impatient in their sufferings and thereby lose their reward.

This compassion gives rise to generosity, for only a compassionate person can be supernaturally generous with fidelity and affection toward all…generosity is the bountiful flowing forth of a heart which is moved by charity and compassion. This goes for the works of the rich and the will and works of the poor. AND only a person overflowing with generosity can experience this zeal, which is an insistent impulse from within toward the practice of virtue and conformity.  And zeal gives rise to moderation and sobriety.   AND sobriety gives rise to purity of soul and body, for only a person who is sober in body and soul can be perfectly pure in these same respects. A person should therefore be sober and moderate in all things, and in his behavior should avoid all occasions in which purity of soul or body could be defiled.

The devotion to God that the Imitation of Christ proposes is not to spend a life self-absorbed with your own spirituality, but to be used as a devotional to perfect oneself so that they, according to Gerard Groote, would be instructed as to how to be in the world and not of it.

Not to be dejected because one is not perfect, but to be encouraged as God would have you being perfected…getting up when you fall, and continuing in faith and patience.

This is for every man, woman, and child of God in the world now and for the rest of time, for God sent Christ to bring many sons to glory…to give them peace, purity, and holiness, so that they become partakers and perfecters of the divine nature within them by virtue of the Holy Spirit. So, that one sees life beyond one’s own interiority and sees God in all things and be God with God, enjoying God, which the mystics considered the notable aspect of mystical spirituality.

**St. Ignatius wrote in The Spiritual Exercises,** "Consider not only that God your benefactor is present but also that He acts continuously in all His creatures. And for whom is this continual action, this work of God in nature? For you. Thus, He lights you by the light of day; He nourishes you with the productions of the earth; in a word, He serves you by each one of the creatures that you use; so that it is true to say that at every moment the bounty, the wisdom and the power of God are at your service and are exercised in the world for your wants or pleasures. This conduct of God toward man should be the model of your conduct toward God. You see that the presence of God in His creatures is never idle; it acts incessantly, it preserves, it governs. Beware, then, of stopping at a sterile contemplation of God present in yourself. Add action to contemplation; to the sight of the Divine presence add the faithful accomplishment of the Divine will." —p. 182, from The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius

The influence of this work, The Imitation of Christ, is lasting. It is timely, yet timeless. Regarding the Brethren of the Common Life from whom this work originates, their educational and preaching and teaching reforms perfected not only their own lives and those of their followers, but changed the culture and contributed to western culture’s education.

The Imitation of Christ, compiled, edited, written by Thomas A Kempis, was admired by
Saint Thomas More, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Erasmus of Rotterdam; and twentieth-century American Catholic author and monk Thomas Merton. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, listed The Imitation among the works that influenced him at his conversion. General Gordon carried it with him to the battlefield.

José Rizal, the Philippine polymath and national hero, reportedly read the book whilst incarcerated within Fort Santiago in Intramuros, Manila, shortly before the Spanish colonial government executed him by firing squad for sedition on 30 December 1896.

The Imitation of Christ was an early influence on the spirituality of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, who used it in her prayer life, distilled its message and used it in her own writings which then influenced Catholic spirituality as a whole. Thérèse was so attached to the book and read it so many times that she could quote passages from it from memory in her teens. In her own autobiography she claims that she had memorized it in its entirety.

The theologian Shailer Mathews wrote that the Imitation presents an accurate description of the Christ of the Gospels, and gives an unbiased reading of the words of Jesus.[68] He also wrote **"For centuries men have found in it inspiration to sacrifice and humility, and to severest self-examination...He who has never come under its influence has missed something that would have made him more humble and more ambitious for purity of life."**

**Without the Way, there is no going; without the Truth, there is no knowing; without Life, there is no living. I am the Way you are to follow; says Jesus, I am the Truth you are to believe; I am the Life you are to hope for"**

This devotional, the Imitation of Christ, written by those whom God touched 600 years ago in the Lowlands of the Netherlands, are the result of the Spirit of the New Devotion resulting in the devotion to Christ, the good works wherever they were, and the spiritual writings of the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life. Mystics, who desired to partake of the Divine nature…these are their words…the way…leading to the Imitation of Christ.

**The End**