



The Imitation of Christ (Selections)

Thomas à Kempis

1 **BOOK ONE**

THOUGHTS HELPFUL IN THE LIFE OF THE SOUL

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The First Chapter-----

IMITATING CHRIST AND DESPISING ALL VANITIES ON EARTH

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HE WHO follows Me, walks not in darkness," says the Lord. By these words of Christ we are advised to imitate His life and habits, if we wish to be truly enlightened and free from all blindness of heart. Let our chief effort, therefore, be to study the life of Jesus Christ.

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The teaching of Christ is more excellent than all the advice of the saints, and he who has His spirit will find in it a hidden manna. Now, there are many who hear the Gospel often but care little for it because they have not the spirit of Christ. Yet whoever wishes to understand fully the words of Christ must try to pattern his whole life on that of Christ.

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What good does it do to speak learnedly about the Trinity if, lacking humility, you displease the Trinity? Indeed it is not learning that makes a man holy and just, but a virtuous life makes him pleasing to God. I would rather feel contrition than know how to define it. For what would it profit us to know the whole Bible by heart and the principles of all the philosophers if we live without grace and the love of God? Vanity of vanities and all is vanity, except to love God and serve Him alone.

This is the greatest wisdom -- to seek the kingdom of heaven through contempt of the world. It is vanity, therefore, to seek and trust in riches that perish. It is vanity also to court honor

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and to be puffed up with pride. It is vanity to follow the lusts of the body and to desire things for which severe punishment later must come. It is vanity to wish for long life and to care little about a well-spent life. It is vanity to be concerned with the present only and not to make provision for things to come. It is vanity to love what passes quickly and not to look ahead where eternal joy abides.

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Often recall the proverb: "The eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear filled with hearing." Try, moreover, to turn your heart from the love of things visible and bring yourself to things invisible. For they who follow their own evil passions stain their consciences and lose the grace of God.

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The Second Chapter-----

HAVING A HUMBLE OPINION OF SELF

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EVERY man naturally desires knowledge; but what good is knowledge without fear of God? Indeed a humble rustic who serves God is better than a proud intellectual who neglects his soul to study the course of the stars. He who knows himself well becomes mean in his own eyes and is not happy when praised by men.

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If I knew all things in the world and had not charity, what would it profit me before God Who will judge me by my deeds?

25

Shun too great a desire for knowledge, for in it there is much fretting and delusion. Intellectuals like to appear learned and to be called wise. Yet there are many things the knowledge of which does little or no good to the soul, and he who concerns himself about other things than those which lead to salvation is very unwise.

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The more you know and the better you understand, the more severely will you be judged, unless your life is also the more holy. Do not be proud, therefore, because of your learning or skill. Rather, fear because of the talent given you. If you think you know many things and understand them well enough, realize at the same time that there is much you do not know. Hence, do not affect wisdom, but admit your ignorance. Why prefer yourself to anyone else when many are more learned, more cultured than you?

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If you wish to learn and appreciate something worth while, then love to be unknown and considered as nothing. Truly to know and despise self is the best and most perfect counsel. To think of oneself as nothing, and always to think well and highly of others is the best and

1 most perfect wisdom. Wherefore, if you see another sin openly or commit a serious crime, do
not consider yourself better, for you do not know how long you can remain in good estate.
All men are frail, but you must admit that none is more frail than yourself.

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The Third Chapter-----

THE DOCTRINE OF TRUTH

10 HAPPY is he to whom truth manifests itself, not in signs and words that fade, but as it
actually is. Our opinions, our senses often deceive us and we discern very little.

What good is much discussion of involved and obscure matters when our ignorance of them
will not be held against us on Judgment Day? Neglect of things which are profitable and
necessary and undue concern with those which are irrelevant and harmful, are great folly.

15 We have eyes and do not see.

What, therefore, have we to do with questions of philosophy? He to whom the Eternal Word
speaks is free from theorizing. For from this Word are all things and of Him all things speak
-- the Beginning Who also speaks to us. Without this Word no man understands or judges
aright. He to whom it becomes everything, who traces all things to it and who sees all things
20 in it, may ease his heart and remain at peace with God.

O God, You Who are the truth, make me one with You in love everlasting. I am often
wearyed by the many things I hear and read, but in You is all that I long for. Let the learned
be still, let all creatures be silent before You; You alone speak to me.

25 The more recollected a man is, and the more simple of heart he becomes, the easier he
understands sublime things, for he receives the light of knowledge from above. The pure,
simple, and steadfast spirit is not distracted by many labors, for he does them all for the
honor of God. And since he enjoys interior peace he seeks no selfish end in anything. What,
indeed, gives more trouble and affliction than uncontrolled desires of the heart?

30 A good and devout man arranges in his mind the things he has to do, not according to the
whims of evil inclination but according to the dictates of right reason. Who is forced to
struggle more than he who tries to master himself? This ought to be our purpose, then: to
conquer self, to become stronger each day, to advance in virtue.

35 Every perfection in this life has some imperfection mixed with it and no learning of ours is
without some darkness. Humble knowledge of self is a surer path to God than the ardent
pursuit of learning. Not that learning is to be considered evil, or knowledge, which is good in

1 itself and so ordained by God; but a clean conscience and virtuous life ought always to be preferred. Many often err and accomplish little or nothing because they try to become learned rather than to live well.

5 If men used as much care in uprooting vices and implanting virtues as they do in discussing problems, there would not be so much evil and scandal in the world, or such laxity in religious organizations. On the day of judgment, surely, we shall not be asked what we have read but what we have done; not how well we have spoken but how well we have lived.

10 Tell me, where now are all the masters and teachers whom you knew so well in life and who were famous for their learning? Others have already taken their places and I know not whether they ever think of their predecessors. During life they seemed to be something; now they are seldom remembered. How quickly the glory of the world passes away! If only their lives had kept pace with their learning, then their study and reading would have been worth while.

15 How many there are who perish because of vain worldly knowledge and too little care for serving God. They became vain in their own conceits because they chose to be great rather than humble.

20 He is truly great who has great charity. He is truly great who is little in his own eyes and makes nothing of the highest honor. He is truly wise who looks upon all earthly things as folly that he may gain Christ. He who does God's will and renounces his own is truly very learned.

The Fourth Chapter-----

25 PRUDENCE IN ACTION

30 DO NOT yield to every impulse and suggestion but consider things carefully and patiently in the light of God's will. For very often, sad to say, we are so weak that we believe and speak evil of others rather than good. Perfect men, however, do not readily believe every talebearer, because they know that human frailty is prone to evil and is likely to appear in speech.

Not to act rashly or to cling obstinately to one's opinion, not to believe everything people say or to spread abroad the gossip one has heard, is great wisdom.

35 Take counsel with a wise and conscientious man. Seek the advice of your betters in preference to following your own inclinations.

1 A good life makes a man wise according to God and gives him experience in many things, for
the more humble he is and the more subject to God, the wiser and the more at peace he will
be in all things.

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The Fifth Chapter-----

READING THE HOLY SCRIPTURE

10 TRUTH, not eloquence, is to be sought in reading the Holy Scriptures; and every part must
be read in the spirit in which it was written. For in the Scriptures we ought to seek profit
rather than polished diction.

15 Likewise we ought to read simple and devout books as willingly as learned and profound
ones. We ought not to be swayed by the authority of the writer, whether he be a great
literary light or an insignificant person, but by the love of simple truth. We ought not to ask
who is speaking, but mark what is said. Men pass away, but the truth of the Lord remains
forever. God speaks to us in many ways without regard for persons.

Our curiosity often impedes our reading of the Scriptures, when we wish to understand and
mull over what we ought simply to read and pass by.

20 If you would profit from it, therefore, read with humility, simplicity, and faith, and never
seek a reputation for being learned. Seek willingly and listen attentively to the words of the
saints; do not be displeased with the sayings of the ancients, for they were not made without
purpose.

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The Sixth Chapter-----

UNBRIDLED AFFECTIONS

30 WHEN a man desires a thing too much, he at once becomes ill at ease. A proud and
avaricious man never rests, whereas he who is poor and humble of heart lives in a world of
peace. An unmortified man is quickly tempted and overcome in small, trifling evils; his spirit
is weak, in a measure carnal and inclined to sensual things; he can hardly abstain from
earthly desires. Hence it makes him sad to forego them; he is quick to anger if reproved. Yet
if he satisfies his desires, remorse of conscience overwhelms him because he followed his
passions and they did not lead to the peace he sought.

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1 True peace of heart, then, is found in resisting passions, not in satisfying them. There is no
peace in the carnal man, in the man given to vain attractions, but there is peace in the fervent
and spiritual man.

5 **The Seventh Chapter-----**

AVOIDING FALSE HOPE AND PRIDE

VAIN is the man who puts his trust in men, in created things.

10 Do not be ashamed to serve others for the love of Jesus Christ and to seem poor in this
world. Do not be self-sufficient but place your trust in God. Do what lies in your power and
God will aid your good will. Put no trust in your own learning nor in the cunning of any
man, but rather in the grace of God Who helps the humble and humbles the proud.

15 If you have wealth, do not glory in it, nor in friends because they are powerful, but in God
Who gives all things and Who desires above all to give Himself. Do not boast of personal
stature or of physical beauty, qualities which are marred and destroyed by a little sickness.
Do not take pride in your talent or ability, lest you displease God to Whom belongs all the
natural gifts that you have.

20 Do not think yourself better than others lest, perhaps, you be accounted worse before God
Who knows what is in man. Do not take pride in your good deeds, for God's judgments
differ from those of men and what pleases them often displeases Him. If there is good in you,
see more good in others, so that you may remain humble. It does no harm to esteem yourself
less than anyone else, but it is very harmful to think yourself better than even one. The
humble live in continuous peace, while in the hearts of the proud are envy and frequent
25 anger.

The Eighth Chapter-----

30 **SHUNNING OVER-FAMILIARITY**

DO NOT open your heart to every man, but discuss your affairs with one who is wise and
who fears God. Do not keep company with young people and strangers. Do not fawn upon
the rich, and do not be fond of mingling with the great. Associate with the humble and the
simple, with the devout and virtuous, and with them speak of edifying things. Be not
35 intimate with any woman, but generally commend all good women to God. Seek only the
intimacy of God and of His angels, and avoid the notice of men.

1 We ought to have charity for all men but familiarity with all is not expedient. Sometimes it happens that a person enjoys a good reputation among those who do not know him, but at the same time is held in slight regard by those who do. Frequently we think we are pleasing others by our presence and we begin rather to displease them by the faults they find in us.

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The Ninth Chapter-----

OBEDIENCE AND SUBJECTION

10 IT IS a very great thing to obey, to live under a superior and not to be one's own master, for it is much safer to be subject than it is to command. Many live in obedience more from necessity than from love. Such become discontented and dejected on the slightest pretext; they will never gain peace of mind unless they subject themselves wholeheartedly for the love of God.

15 Go where you may, you will find no rest except in humble obedience to the rule of authority. Dreams of happiness expected from change and different places have deceived many.

Everyone, it is true, wishes to do as he pleases and is attracted to those who agree with him. But if God be among us, we must at times give up our opinions for the blessings of peace.

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Furthermore, who is so wise that he can have full knowledge of everything? Do not trust too much in your own opinions, but be willing to listen to those of others. If, though your own be good, you accept another's opinion for love of God, you will gain much more merit; for I have often heard that it is safer to listen to advice and take it than to give it. It may happen, too, that while one's own opinion may be good, refusal to agree with others when reason and occasion demand it, is a sign of pride and obstinacy.

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The Tenth Chapter-----

AVOIDING IDLE TALK

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SHUN the gossip of men as much as possible, for discussion of worldly affairs, even though sincere, is a great distraction inasmuch as we are quickly ensnared and captivated by vanity.

35 Many a time I wish that I had held my peace and had not associated with men. Why, indeed, do we converse and gossip among ourselves when we so seldom part without a troubled conscience? We do so because we seek comfort from one another's conversation and

1 wish to ease the mind wearied by diverse thoughts. Hence, we talk and think quite fondly of things we like very much or of things we dislike intensely. But, sad to say, we often talk vainly and to no purpose; for this external pleasure effectively bars inward and divine consolation.

5 Therefore we must watch and pray lest time pass idly.

When the right and opportune moment comes for speaking, say something that will edify.

10 Bad habits and indifference to spiritual progress do much to remove the guard from the tongue. Devout conversation on spiritual matters, on the contrary, is a great aid to spiritual progress, especially when persons of the same mind and spirit associate together in God.

The Eleventh Chapter-----

15 ACQUIRING PEACE AND ZEAL FOR PERFECTION

WE SHOULD enjoy much peace if we did not concern ourselves with what others say and do, for these are no concern of ours. How can a man who meddles in affairs not his own, who seeks strange distractions, and who is little or seldom inwardly recollected, live long in peace?

20 Blessed are the simple of heart for they shall enjoy peace in abundance.

Why were some of the saints so perfect and so given to contemplation? Because they tried to mortify entirely in themselves all earthly desires, and thus they were able to attach themselves to God with all their heart and freely to concentrate their innermost thoughts.

25 We are too occupied with our own whims and fancies, too taken up with passing things. Rarely do we completely conquer even one vice, and we are not inflamed with the desire to improve ourselves day by day; hence, we remain cold and indifferent. If we mortified our bodies perfectly and allowed no distractions to enter our minds, we could appreciate divine things and experience something of heavenly contemplation.

30 The greatest obstacle, indeed, the only obstacle, is that we are not free from passions and lusts, that we do not try to follow the perfect way of the saints. Thus when we encounter some slight difficulty, we are too easily dejected and turn to human consolations. If we tried, however, to stand as brave men in battle, the help of the Lord from heaven would surely sustain us. For He Who gives us the opportunity of fighting for victory, is ready to help
35 those who carry on and trust in His grace.

1 If we let our progress in religious life depend on the observance of its externals alone, our devotion will quickly come to an end. Let us, then, lay the ax to the root that we may be freed from our passions and thus have peace of mind.

5 If we were to uproot only one vice each year, we should soon become perfect. The contrary, however, is often the case -- we feel that we were better and purer in the first fervor of our conversion than we are after many years in the practice of our faith. Our fervor and progress ought to increase day by day; yet it is now considered noteworthy if a man can retain even a part of his first fervor.

10 If we did a little violence to ourselves at the start, we should afterwards be able to do all things with ease and joy. It is hard to break old habits, but harder still to go against our will.

If you do not overcome small, trifling things, how will you overcome the more difficult? Resist temptations in the beginning, and unlearn the evil habit lest perhaps, little by little, it lead to a more evil one.

15 If you but consider what peace a good life will bring to yourself and what joy it will give to others, I think you will be more concerned about your spiritual progress.

20 The Twelfth Chapter

THE VALUE OF ADVERSITY

25 IT IS good for us to have trials and troubles at times, for they often remind us that we are on probation and ought not to hope in any worldly thing. It is good for us sometimes to suffer contradiction, to be misjudged by men even though we do well and mean well. These things help us to be humble and shield us from vainglory. When to all outward appearances men give us no credit, when they do not think well of us, then we are more inclined to seek God Who sees our hearts. Therefore, a man ought to root himself so firmly in God that he will not need the consolations of men.

30 When a man of good will is afflicted, tempted, and tormented by evil thoughts, he realizes clearly that his greatest need is God, without Whom he can do no good. Saddened by his miseries and sufferings, he laments and prays. He wearies of living longer and wishes for death that he might be dissolved and be with Christ. Then he understands fully that perfect security and complete peace cannot be found on earth.

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1 **The Thirteenth Chapter-----**

RESISTING TEMPTATION

5 SO LONG as we live in this world we cannot escape suffering and temptation. Whence it is written in Job: "The life of man upon earth is a warfare." Everyone, therefore, must guard against temptation and must watch in prayer lest the devil, who never sleeps but goes about seeking whom he may devour, find occasion to deceive him. No one is so perfect or so holy but he is sometimes tempted; man cannot be altogether free from temptation.

10 Yet temptations, though troublesome and severe, are often useful to a man, for in them he is humbled, purified, and instructed. The saints all passed through many temptations and trials to profit by them, while those who could not resist became reprobate and fell away. There is no state so holy, no place so secret that temptations and trials will not come. Man is never safe from them as long as he lives, for they come from within us -- in sin we were born. When one temptation or trial passes, another comes; we shall always have something to suffer because we have lost the state of original blessedness.

15 Many people try to escape temptations, only to fall more deeply. We cannot conquer simply by fleeing, but by patience and true humility we become stronger than all our enemies. The man who only shuns temptations outwardly and does not uproot them will make little progress; indeed they will quickly return, more violent than before.

20 Little by little, in patience and long-suffering you will overcome them, by the help of God rather than by severity and your own rash ways. Often take counsel when tempted; and do not be harsh with others who are tempted, but console them as you yourself would wish to be consoled.

25 The beginning of all temptation lies in a wavering mind and little trust in God, for as a rudderless ship is driven hither and yon by waves, so a careless and irresolute man is tempted in many ways. Fire tempers iron and temptation steels the just. Often we do not know what we can stand, but temptation shows us what we are.

30 Above all, we must be especially alert against the beginnings of temptation, for the enemy is more easily conquered if he is refused admittance to the mind and is met beyond the threshold when he knocks.

35 Someone has said very aptly: "Resist the beginnings; remedies come too late, when by long delay the evil has gained strength." First, a mere thought comes to mind, then strong imagination, followed by pleasure, evil delight, and consent. Thus, because he is not resisted in the beginning, Satan gains full entry. And the longer a man delays in resisting, so much the weaker does he become each day, while the strength of the enemy grows against him.

1 Some suffer great temptations in the beginning of their conversion, others toward the end, while some are troubled almost constantly throughout their life. Others, again, are tempted but lightly according to the wisdom and justice of Divine Providence Who weighs the status and merit of each and prepares all for the salvation of His elect.

5 We should not despair, therefore, when we are tempted, but pray to God the more fervently that He may see fit to help us, for according to the word of Paul, He will make issue with temptation that we may be able to bear it. Let us humble our souls under the hand of God in every trial and temptation for He will save and exalt the humble in spirit.

10 In temptations and trials the progress of a man is measured; in them opportunity for merit and virtue is made more manifest.

When a man is not troubled it is not hard for him to be fervent and devout, but if he bears up patiently in time of adversity, there is hope for great progress.

15 Some, guarded against great temptations, are frequently overcome by small ones in order that, humbled by their weakness in small trials, they may not presume on their own strength in great ones.

20 The Fourteenth Chapter-----

AVOIDING RASH JUDGMENT

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.

25 We frequently judge that things are as we wish them to be, for through personal feeling true perspective is easily lost.

30 If God were the sole object of our desire, we should not be disturbed so easily by opposition to our opinions. But often something lurks within or happens from without to draw us along with it.

Many, unawares, seek themselves in the things they do. They seem even to enjoy peace of mind when things happen according to their wish and liking, but if otherwise than they desire, they are soon disturbed and saddened. Differences of feeling and opinion often divide friends and acquaintances, even those who are religious and devout.

35 An old habit is hard to break, and no one is willing to be led farther than he can see.

1 If you rely more upon your intelligence or industry than upon the virtue of submission to
Jesus Christ, you will hardly, and in any case slowly, become an enlightened man. God wants
us to be completely subject to Him and, through ardent love, to rise above all human
wisdom.

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The Fifteenth Chapter-----

WORKS DONE IN CHARITY

10 NEVER do evil for anything in the world, or for the love of any man. For one who is in
need, however, a good work may at times be purposely left undone or changed for a better
one. This is not the omission of a good deed but rather its improvement.

Without charity external work is of no value, but anything done in charity, be it ever so
small and trivial, is entirely fruitful inasmuch as God weighs the love with which a man acts
15 rather than the deed itself.

He does much who loves much. He does much who does a thing well. He does well who
serves the common good rather than his own interests.

Now, that which seems to be charity is oftentimes really sensuality, for man's own
20 inclination, his own will, his hope of reward, and his self-interest, are motives seldom absent.
On the contrary, he who has true and perfect charity seeks self in nothing, but searches all
things for the glory of God. Moreover, he envies no man, because he desires no personal
pleasure nor does he wish to rejoice in himself; rather he desires the greater glory of God
above all things. He ascribes to man nothing that is good but attributes it wholly to God
from Whom all things proceed as from a fountain, and in Whom all the blessed shall rest as
25 their last end and fruition.

If man had but a spark of true charity he would surely sense that all the things of earth are
full of vanity!

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The Sixteenth Chapter-----

BEARING WITH THE FAULTS OF OTHERS

UNTIL God ordains otherwise, a man ought to bear patiently whatever he cannot correct in
35 himself and in others. Consider it better thus -- perhaps to try your patience and to test you,

1 for without such patience and trial your merits are of little account. Nevertheless, under such difficulties you should pray that God will consent to help you bear them calmly.

5 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.

10 If you cannot make yourself what you would wish to be, how can you bend others to your will? We want them to be perfect, yet we do not correct our own faults. We wish them to be severely corrected, yet we will not correct ourselves. Their great liberty displeases us, yet we would not be denied what we ask. We would have them bound by laws, yet we will allow ourselves to be restrained in nothing. Hence, it is clear how seldom we think of others as we do of ourselves.

15 If all were perfect, what should we have to suffer from others for God's sake? But God has so ordained, that we may learn to bear with one another's burdens, for there is no man without fault, no man without burden, no man sufficient to himself nor wise enough. Hence we must support one another, console one another, mutually help, counsel, and advise, for the measure of every man's virtue is best revealed in time of adversity -- adversity that does not weaken a man but rather shows what he is.

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Book Three. Internal Consolation

25 **The Fifty-Fourth Chapter-----**

THE DIFFERENT MOTIONS OF NATURE AND GRACE

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

30 MY CHILD, pay careful attention to the movements of nature and of grace, for they move in very contrary and subtle ways, and can scarcely be distinguished by anyone except a man who is spiritual and inwardly enlightened. All men, indeed, desire what is good, and strive for what is good in their words and deeds. For this reason the appearance of good deceives many.

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1 Nature is crafty and attracts many, ensnaring and deceiving them while ever seeking itself. But grace walks in simplicity, turns away from all appearance of evil, offers no deceits, and does all purely for God in whom she rests as her last end.

5 Nature is not willing to die, or to be kept down, or to be overcome. Nor will it subdue itself or be made subject. Grace, on the contrary, strives for mortification of self. She resists sensuality, seeks to be in subjection, longs to be conquered, has no wish to use her own liberty, loves to be held under discipline, and does not desire to rule over anyone, but wishes rather to live, to stand, and to be always under God for Whose sake she is willing to bow humbly to every human creature.

10 Nature works for its own interest and looks to the profit it can reap from another. Grace does not consider what is useful and advantageous to herself, but rather what is profitable to many. Nature likes to receive honor and reverence, but grace faithfully attributes all honor and glory to God. Nature fears shame and contempt, but grace is happy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus. Nature loves ease and physical rest. Grace, however, cannot bear to be idle and embraces labor willingly. Nature seeks to possess what is rare and beautiful,
15 abhorring things that are cheap and coarse. Grace, on the contrary, delights in simple, humble things, not despising those that are rough, nor refusing to be clothed in old garments.

20 Nature has regard for temporal wealth and rejoices in earthly gains. It is sad over a loss and irritated by a slight, injurious word. But grace looks to eternal things and does not cling to those which are temporal, being neither disturbed at loss nor angered by hard words, because she has placed her treasure and joy in heaven where nothing is lost.

25 Nature is covetous, and receives more willingly than it gives. It loves to have its own private possessions. Grace, however, is kind and openhearted. Grace shuns private interest, is contented with little, and judges it more blessed to give than to receive.

Nature is inclined toward creatures, toward its own flesh, toward vanities, and toward running about. But grace draws near to God and to virtue, renounces creatures, hates the desires of the flesh, restrains her wanderings and blushes at being seen in public.

30 Nature likes to have some external comfort in which it can take sensual delight, but grace seeks consolation only in God, to find her delight in the highest Good, above all visible things.

35 Nature does everything for its own gain and interest. It can do nothing without pay and hopes for its good deeds to receive their equal or better, or else praise and favor. It is very desirous of having its deeds and gifts highly regarded. Grace, however, seeks nothing

1 temporal, nor does she ask any recompense but God alone. Of temporal necessities she asks no more than will serve to obtain eternity.

5 Nature rejoices in many friends and kinsfolk, glories in noble position and birth, fawns on the powerful, flatters the rich, and applauds those who are like itself. But grace loves even her enemies and is not puffed up at having many friends. She does not think highly of either position or birth unless there is also virtue there. She favors the poor in preference to the rich. She sympathizes with the innocent rather than with the powerful. She rejoices with the true man rather than with the deceitful, and is always exhorting the good to strive for better gifts, to become like the Son of God by practicing the virtues.

10 Nature is quick to complain of need and trouble; grace is stanch in suffering want. Nature turns all things back to self. It fights and argues for self. Grace brings all things back to God in Whom they have their source. To herself she ascribes no good, nor is she arrogant or presumptuous. She is not contentious. She does not prefer her own opinion to the opinion of others, but in every matter of sense and thought submits herself to eternal wisdom and the divine judgment.

15 Nature has a relish for knowing secrets and hearing news. It wishes to appear abroad and to have many sense experiences. It wishes to be known and to do things for which it will be praised and admired. But grace does not care to hear news or curious matters, because all this arises from the old corruption of man, since there is nothing new, nothing lasting on earth. Grace teaches, therefore, restraint of the senses, avoidance of vain self-satisfaction and show, the humble hiding of deeds worthy of praise and admiration, and the seeking in every thing and in every knowledge the fruit of usefulness, the praise and honor of God. She will not have herself or hers exalted, but desires that God Who bestows all simply out of love should be blessed in His gifts.

25 This grace is a supernatural light, a certain special gift of God, the proper mark of the elect and the pledge of everlasting salvation. It raises man up from earthly things to love the things of heaven. It makes a spiritual man of a carnal one. The more, then, nature is held in check and conquered, the more grace is given. Every day the interior man is reformed by new visitations according to the image of God.

30 **The Fifty-Fifth Chapter-----**

THE CORRUPTION OF NATURE AND THE EFFICACY OF DIVINE GRACE

35 **THE DISCIPLE**

1 O LORD, my God, Who created me to Your own image and likeness, grant me this grace
which You have shown to be so great and necessary for salvation, that I may overcome my
very evil nature that is drawing me to sin and perdition. For I feel in my flesh the law of sin
contradicting the law of my mind and leading me captive to serve sensuality in many things.
5 I cannot resist the passions thereof unless Your most holy grace warmly infused into my heart
assist me.

There is need of Your grace, and of great grace, in order to overcome a nature prone to evil
from youth. For through the first man, Adam, nature is fallen and weakened by sin, and the
punishment of that stain has fallen upon all mankind. Thus nature itself, which You created
good and right, is considered a symbol of vice and the weakness of corrupted nature, because
10 when left to itself it tends toward evil and to baser things. The little strength remaining in it
is like a spark hidden in ashes. That strength is natural reason which, surrounded by thick
darkness, still has the power of judging good and evil, of seeing the difference between true
and false, though it is not able to fulfill all that it approves and does not enjoy the full light
of truth or soundness of affection.

15 Hence it is, my God, that according to the inward man I delight in Your law, knowing that
Your command is good, just, and holy, and that it proves the necessity of shunning all evil
and sin. But in the flesh I keep the law of sin, obeying sensuality rather than reason. Hence,
also, it is that the will to good is present in me, but how to accomplish it I know not. Hence,
too, I often propose many good things, but because the grace to help my weakness is lacking,
20 I recoil and give up at the slightest resistance. Thus it is that I know the way of perfection
and see clearly enough how I ought to act, but because I am pressed down by the weight of
my own corruption I do not rise to more perfect things.

How extremely necessary to me, O Lord, Your grace is to begin any good deed, to carry it on
and bring it to completion! For without grace I can do nothing, but with its strength I can
25 do all things in You. O Grace truly heavenly, without which our merits are nothing and no
gifts of nature are to be esteemed!

Before You, O Lord, no arts or riches, no beauty or strength, no wit or intelligence avail
without grace. For the gifts of nature are common to good and bad alike, but the peculiar
gift of Your elect is grace or love, and those who are signed with it are held worthy of
30 everlasting life. So excellent is this grace that without it no gift of prophecy or of miracles, no
meditation be it ever so exalted, can be considered anything. Not even faith or hope or other
virtues are acceptable to You without charity and grace.

O most blessed grace, which makes the poor in spirit rich in virtues, which renders him who
is rich in many good things humble of heart, come, descend upon me, fill me quickly with
35 your consolation lest my soul faint with weariness and dryness of mind.

1 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
5 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?

10 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.

The Fifty-Sixth Chapter-----

15 WE OUGHT TO DENY OURSELVES AND IMITATE CHRIST THROUGH BEARING THE CROSS

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

20 MY CHILD, the more you depart from yourself, the more you will be able to enter into Me.
As the giving up of exterior things brings interior peace, so the forsaking of self unites you to
God. I will have you learn perfect surrender to My will, without contradiction or complaint.

25 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 the Life, there is no living. I am the Way
which you must follow, the Truth which you must believe, the Life for which you must
hope. I am the inviolable Way, the infallible Truth, the unending Life. I am the Way that is
straight, the supreme Truth, the Life that is true, the blessed, the uncreated Life. If you abide
in My Way you shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free, and you shall
attain life everlasting.

30 If you wish to enter into life, keep My commandments. If you will know the truth, believe in
Me. If you will be perfect, sell all. If you will be My disciple, deny yourself. If you will
possess the blessed life, despise this present life. If you will be exalted in heaven, humble
yourself on earth. If you wish to reign with Me, carry the Cross with Me. For only the
servants of the Cross find the life of blessedness and of true light.

THE DISCIPLE

35 Lord Jesus, because Your way is narrow and despised by the world, grant that I may despise
the world and imitate You. For the servant is not greater than his Lord, nor the disciple

1 above the Master. Let Your servant be trained in Your life, for there is my salvation and true holiness. Whatever else I read or hear does not fully refresh or delight me.

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

5 My child, now that you know these things and have read them all, happy will you be if you do them. He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves Me. And I will love him and will show Myself to him, and will bring it about that he will sit down with Me in My Father's Kingdom.

THE DISCIPLE

10 Lord Jesus, as You have said, so be it, and what You have promised, let it be my lot to win. I have received the cross, from Your hand I have received it. I will carry it, carry it even unto death as You have laid it upon me. Truly, the life of a good religious man is a cross, but it leads to paradise. We have begun -- we may not go back, nor may we leave off.

15 Take courage, brethren, let us go forward together and Jesus will be with us. For Jesus' sake we have taken this cross. For Jesus' sake let us persevere with it. He will be our help as He is also our leader and guide. Behold, our King goes before us and will fight for us. Let us follow like men. Let no man fear any terrors. Let us be prepared to meet death valiantly in battle. Let us not suffer our glory to be blemished by fleeing from the Cross.

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The Fifty-Seventh Chapter-----

A MAN SHOULD NOT BE TOO DOWNCAST WHEN HE FALLS INTO DEFECTS

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THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, patience and humility in adversity are more pleasing to Me than much consolation and devotion when things are going well.

30 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,

1 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."

10 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.

15 **THE DISCIPLE**

Blessed be Your words, O Lord, sweeter to my mouth than honey and the honeycomb. What would I do in such great trials and anxieties, if You did not strengthen me with Your holy words? If I may but attain to the haven of salvation, what does it matter what or how much I suffer? Grant me a good end. Grant me a happy passage out of this world. Remember me, my God, and lead me by the right way into Your kingdom.

The Fifty-Eighth Chapter-----

25 **HIGH MATTERS AND THE HIDDEN JUDGMENTS OF GOD ARE NOT TO BE SCRUTINIZED**

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

30 MY CHILD, beware of discussing high matters and God's hidden judgments -- why this person is so forsaken and why that one is favored with so great a grace, or why one man is so afflicted and another so highly exalted. Such things are beyond all human understanding and no reason or disputation can fathom the judgments of God.

When the enemy puts such suggestions in your mind, therefore, or when some curious persons raise questions about them, answer with the prophet: "Thou art just, O Lord, and righteous are Thy judgments" and this: "The judgments of the Lord are true and wholly

35

1 righteous." My judgments are to be feared, not discussed, because they are incomprehensible to the understanding of men.

5 In like manner, do not inquire or dispute about the merits of the saints, as to which is more holy, or which shall be greater in the kingdom of heaven. Such things often breed strife and useless contentions. They nourish pride and vainglory, whence arise envy and quarrels, when one proudly tries to exalt one saint and the other another. A desire to know and pry into such matters brings forth no fruit. On the contrary, it displeases the saints, because I am the God, not of dissension, but of peace -- of that peace which consists in true humility rather than in self-exaltation.

10 Some are drawn by the ardor of their love with greater affection to these saints or to those, but this affection is human and not divine. I am He who made all the saints. I gave them grace: I brought them to glory. I know the merits of each of them. I came before them in the blessings of My sweetness. I knew My beloved ones before the ages. I chose them out of the world -- they did not choose Me. I called them by grace, I drew them on by mercy. I led them safely through various temptations. I poured into them glorious consolations. I gave them perseverance and I crowned their patience. I know the first and the last. I embrace them all with love inestimable. I am to be praised in all My saints. I am to be blessed above all things, and honored in each of those whom I have exalted and predestined so gloriously without any previous merits of their own.

20 He who despises one of the least of mine, therefore, does no honor to the greatest, for both the small and the great I made. And he who disparages one of the saints disparages Me also and all others in the kingdom of heaven. They are all one through the bond of charity. They have the same thought and the same will, and they mutually love one another; but, what is a much greater thing, they love Me more than themselves or their own merits. Rapt above themselves, and drawn beyond love of self, they are entirely absorbed in love of Me, in Whom they rest. There is nothing that can draw them away or depress them, for they who are filled with eternal truth burn with the fire of unquenchable love.

30 Therefore, let carnal and sensual men, who know only how to love their own selfish joys, forbear to dispute about the state of God's saints. Such men take away and add according to their own inclinations and not as it pleases the Eternal Truth. In many this is sheer ignorance, especially in those who are but little enlightened and can rarely love anyone with a purely spiritual love. They are still strongly drawn by natural affection and human friendship to one person or another, and on their behavior in such things here below are based their imaginings of heavenly things. But there is an incomparable distance between the things which the imperfect imagine and those which enlightened men contemplate through revelation from above.

35

1 Be careful, then, My child, of treating matters beyond your knowledge out of curiosity. Let it
rather be your business and aim to be found, even though the least, in the kingdom of God.
For though one were to know who is more holy than another, or who is greater in the
kingdom of heaven, of what value would this knowledge be to him unless out of it he should
5 humble himself before Me and should rise up in greater praise of My name?

The man who thinks of the greatness of his own sins and the littleness of his virtues, and of
the distance between himself and the perfection of the saints, acts much more acceptably to
God than the one who argues about who is greater or who is less. It is better to invoke the
saints with devout prayers and tears, and with a humble mind to beg their glorious aid, than
10 to search with vain inquisitiveness into their secrets.

The saints are well and perfectly contented if men know how to content themselves and
cease their useless discussions. They do not glory in their own merits, for they attribute no
good to themselves but all to Me, because out of My infinite charity I gave all to them. They
are filled with such love of God and with such overflowing joy, that no glory is wanting to
them and they can lack no happiness. All the saints are so much higher in glory as they are
15 more humble in themselves; nearer to Me, and more beloved by Me. Therefore, you find it
written that they cast their crowns before God, and fell down upon their faces before the
Lamb, and adored Him Who lives forever.

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
20 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
25 the kingdom of heaven."

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
30 is yours, if only you walk in the truth.

The Fifty-Ninth Chapter-----

ALL HOPE AND TRUST ARE TO BE FIXED IN GOD ALONE

35

1 THE DISCIPLE

WHAT, Lord, is the trust which I have in this life, or what is my greatest comfort among all the things that appear under heaven? Is it not You, O Lord, my God, Whose mercies are without number? Where have I ever fared well but for You? Or how could things go badly
5 when You were present? I had rather be poor for Your sake than rich without You. I prefer rather to wander on the earth with You than to possess heaven without You. Where You are there is heaven, and where You are not are death and hell. You are my desire and therefore I must cry after You and sigh and pray. In none can I fully trust to help me in my necessities, but in You alone, my God. You are my hope. You are my confidence. You are my consoler,
10 most faithful in every need.

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.
15

In You, therefore, O Lord God, I place all my hope and my refuge. On You I cast all my troubles and anguish, because whatever I have outside of You I find to be weak and unstable. It will not serve me to have many friends, nor will powerful helpers be able to assist me, nor prudent advisers to give useful answers, nor the books of learned men to console, nor any precious substance to win my freedom, nor any place, secret and beautiful though it be, to shelter me, if You Yourself do not assist, comfort, console, instruct, and guard me. For all
20 things which seem to be for our peace and happiness are nothing when You are absent, and truly confer no happiness.

You, indeed, are the fountain of all good, the height of life, the depth of all that can be spoken. To trust in You above all things is the strongest comfort of Your servants.
25

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
30 corruptible life, and direct him by Your accompanying grace, through the ways of peace, to the land of everlasting light.

35 end