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An Introduction to
**FIVE
SPIRITUAL
CLASSICS**

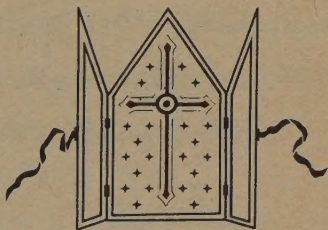


The Confessions of St. Augustine
The Imitation of Christ
The Practice of the Presence of God
A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life
A Testament of Devotion

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An Introduction to

fIVE
SPIRITUAL
CLASSICS



Birth } Vabruccis
Monica
Parentage } Taught Milan
3 yrs,
Land in N. Abbey
Characteristics
Dev. to mother
Cap. for prudence
Independent of mind
Cap. for hard work
Active conscience
Social patterns

Prudence
Dev. to
Prudence
Prudence
Prudence

4818
M4

Methodist Church (U.S.), Women's
Division of Christian Service.

An Introduction to

FIVE SPIRITUAL CLASSICS

The Confessions of St. Augustine, Aurelius Augustine

The Imitation of Christ, Thomas à Kempis

The Practice of the Presence of God, Brother Lawrence

A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, William Law

A Testament of Devotion, Thomas R. Kelly

Chapters by

LOUISE KILLINGSWORTH

FLORENCE HOOPER

LILLIAN WARRICK POPE

PEARLE TIBBETTS

HELEN PATTEN HANSON

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New York, N. Y.

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EDITIONS FOR GIFT AND PERSONAL USE

ST. AUGUSTINE

The Confessions of St. Augustine. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1954. \$1.50.

Confessions. New York: Peter Pauper, 1948. Deluxe Artists' Edition with slip case, \$4.50.

The Confessions of St. Augustine. New York: Liveright, 1954. \$2.98.

THOMAS À KEMPIS

The Imitation of Christ. (With scripture references.) New York: Grossett & Dunlap, 1935. 75 cents.

The Imitation of Christ. (World's Classics Series No. 49.) [With scripture references.] New York: Oxford University Press. \$1.35; morocco binding, \$2.75.

BROTHER LAWRENCE

The Practice of the Presence of God. Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell. Paper cover, 35 cents; gift ed. \$1.00.

The Practice of the Presence of God. London: A. R. Mowbray & Co. 50 cents.

WILLIAM LAW

A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1948. \$2.50.

THOMAS R. KELLY

A Testament of Devotion. New York: Harper & Bros., 1941. \$1.00.

FOREWORD

The word "introduction" in the title of this book is the keyword of these five chapters. If the reader receives sufficient knowledge and inspiration to give her a foretaste of the treasure she will receive from a prayerful reading of the classics themselves, the purpose of the book will have been realized. Doubtless no reader will respond with the same degree of enthusiasm to each of the five devotional classics; however, it is hoped that many persons using this textbook will find in the first chapter such spiritual treasure, at least in St. Augustine's own incomparable expressions of the beauty and goodness of God, that they will be drawn irresistibly to learn what help the second chapter will reveal for the Christian of today trying to imitate the life of Christ; and so on, until the fifth chapter is read.

The committees that planned this book know that many students using it in the 1955-56 study course already will have read at least two of the devotional books presented here; that others, a smaller number than the first, for many years will have been familiar with three, or even four, of the classics; and that still others, fewer in number than the second group, will be renewing spiritual friendships with the five authors and again feasting at tables of imperishable food.

Some persons taking the course may recall that at least one of the classics was a treasured book of a beloved grandfather—perhaps he had a copy of John Wesley's edition of *The Imitation of Christ*! Others may remember "borrowing," when a child, *The Practice of the Presence of God* from a respected bookcase because the small dimensions of the book made it suitable for a dollhouse.

It is hoped that no student using this textbook will feel obligated to read all of each of the five classics during the period allocated for the study, nor even to read most of any of the books to which she does not feel particularly drawn; but that everyone after the study is over will try out each to see if it "speaks to her condition." Great devotional writing which does not meet one's need in 1955 may prove to be invaluable in 1957. Everyone has to "grow up" to understanding even the recounting of certain experiences of the spiritual masters. Let us be patient with ourselves, not forgetting, however, that even as we appraise a masterpiece, so also it sits in judgment upon us, revealing our stage of development. Having learned *where* we are, we can then move in the direction of progress.

"He that followeth me, saith Christ our Saviour, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

The Imitation of Christ

JUANITA BROWN,
Editor of Literature,
Woman's Division of Christian Service

RECOMMENDED EDITIONS of the five classics

For Use With

AN INTRODUCTION TO FIVE SPIRITUAL CLASSICS

All books listed below are available from Literature Headquarters, 7820 Reading Road, Cincinnati 37, Ohio.

1. St. Augustine. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. A Cardinal edition, C-27.. New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1952. 35 cents.
2. Thomas à Kempis. *The Imitation of Christ*. A Cardinal Edition, C-104. New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1952; or, The Pocket Library Edition (PL-5), 1954. Each, 35 cents.
3. Nicholas Herman. *Brother Lawrence: His Letters and Conversations on the Practice of the Presence of God*. Cincinnati: Forward Movement Publications, 1941. 10 cents.
4. William Law. *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. Everyman's Library, No. 91. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1951. \$1.65.
5. Thomas R. Kelly. *A Testament of Devotion*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1947. \$1.00

VIGNETTES

LIVING SELECTIONS FROM THE GREAT DEVOTIONAL CLASSICS.

Nashville: The Upper Room. Order from Literature Headquarters, 7820 Reading Road, Cincinnati 37, Ohio. 15 cents each, or, 10 for \$1.00.

AUGUSTINE, AURELIUS. *Selections from Augustine*. Arr. and ed. William R. Cannon. 1950.

THOMAS À KEMPIS. *The Imitation of Christ*. Arr. and ed. Douglas V. Steere. 1950.

BROTHER LAWRENCE. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Arr. and ed. Douglas V. Steere. 1950.

LAW, WILLIAM. *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. Arr. and ed. Thomas S. Kepler. 1952.

KELLY, THOMAS R. *A Testament of Devotion*. Arr. and ed. Douglas V. Steere. (To be printed June, 1955.)

* * *

LEAFLETS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Kepler, Thomas S. *Finding God With the Saints*. 1955. 15 cents. The Upper Room, 1908 Grand Avenue, Nashville 5, Tenn.

Kepler, Thomas S. *They Loved Their Bible*. 1955. 10 cents. American Bible Society, 450 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Chapter One

THE CONFESSIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Part I

A. Why Study *The Confessions*?

B. Biographical Notes

1. HIS PARENTS AND HIS EARLY YEARS

2. CHANGING TIMES AND SOCIAL PATTERNS

3. DOUBTING AND SEARCHING

a) Manichaeism

b) Neoplatonism

c) The Influence of Ambrose, Monnica, and Others

4. HIS CONVERSION AND BAPTISM

5. AUGUSTINE, BISHOP OF HIPPO

C. Plan and Purpose of *The Confessions*

D. Form and Style

Part II

A. The Influence of Augustine

B. Quotations From *The Confessions*

C. Finding Christ Through God

D. Conclusion

*This [The Confessions of St. Augustine] is
to me the most wonderful record in the world
of the awakening and return of a soul to God.*

EVELYN UNDERHILL

the confessions of saint augustine

PART I

Why Study The Confessions?

"O Lord. . .Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee." In this sentence from the first paragraph of *The Confessions* lies the secret that sends Christians of the twentieth century to this spiritual classic. The sentence has been called the theme of the book because it sums up the great experience of Augustine with which the book deals, his search for God. If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that deep within us there is a spiritual restlessness, the same longing that Augustine had. In laying bare his soul, he touches upon the experience of every person. His words are as true in the twentieth century as they were in the fourth, and this fact makes *The Confessions* a book for all time. Haniel Long, in addressing a letter to St. Augustine, expresses it this way:

Your *Confessions*, from beginning to end, trembles on the chord of the universal. In it we deal only with ourselves, our world, the Great Spirit. The secret passion of the world has swept into your heart.¹

¹ Haniel Long, *A Letter to St. Augustine after re-reading his Confessions* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1950), p. 17. Used by permission.

Sandro Botticelli, according to Long, showed his recognition of this universal quality when, in the fifteenth century, after Augustine's death, he painted the Bishop of Hippo as an old man on bended knee beseeching God for help. Here was a man needing belief, love, encouragement, and self-esteem.² This is a picture that men through the ages have been able to understand. More than anything else, it explains why *The Confessions* has been translated into most Western languages and is loved in each.

Perhaps the book has a special message for us in the atomic age in the midst of our bewilderment and of our consciousness of failures in human relationships. Augustine seems to speak for us as he expresses his sense of shock and guilt at his blunders and shows his longing for help. He also knew a changing era. His seventy-six years were lived in a crumbling Roman Empire. In fact, his city was pillaged by the Vandals when he was on his death bed.

Another important reason we might give for studying *The Confessions* is that Augustine here presents a type of personal religion of which our age has great need and which those of us who are Christians should strive continually to develop. This type stresses, on the one hand, the relationship between the soul and its Creator and, on the other, the true place of man among his fellow men. Because of Augustine's vivid consciousness of the personal relationship of his soul to God, he often has been spoken of as a mystic, even called the father of mysticism. To him God was all in all, the light of his

² *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

heart, the bread of his inmost soul, the Power who gave vigor to his mind (p. 12).³ And yet Augustine himself always was conscious of the true place of the Christian's life among his fellows. He recognized the danger of a person's shrinking from a life of action, seeking shelter in the seclusion of monastic life as a result of acceptance of his view of the soul's resting in God. His own responsiveness and dependence on friends and loved ones made a solitary life of meditation unattractive to him. His discovery of God as the strength of his soul made it impossible for him to refuse when the call of the Church came, and he went forth as a spiritual leader and an interpreter of the Church.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Since *The Confessions* is not primarily an autobiography, a sketch of Augustine's life may be helpful to the reader as background for a study of the book.

Our author was born in 354 in North Africa, at Thagaste, a small town in the province of Numidia, which is now Algeria. His parents, Patricius and Monnica, were both Roman by birth though they may have had some Numidian or Phoenician ancestors.

his parents and his early years

Patricius, whom Augustine described as "but a poor freeman of Thagaste," was an official in the provincial

³All quotations in this chapter from C-27, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, Cardinal Edition, Published by Pocket Books, Inc., are identified only by the number of the page on which they appear in this classic, as in this instance. Used by permission.

administration. His income was small, and he was never free from financial cares. He was ambitious for his son, however, and went beyond his means to give Augustine an education. Patricius was chiefly concerned that the lad should have a successful future as a rhetorician. Augustine pays tribute to Patricius for this in *The Confessions*, while he also notes his father's lack of concern for his relationship to God and for his chastity. Patricius did not become a Christian until shortly before his death; his views of marriage and chastity were probably typical of the average pagan of his day. The fact that there was harmony in his own home evidently was due to Monnica's godliness and strength of character. Augustine refers to her as obeying her husband better because of her obedience to God. It was because of her beautiful life and dependence on God that Patricius became a convert before his death, which came suddenly when Augustine was seventeen.

Thus it is in Monnica that one finds the dominant influence of Augustine's life. He began to learn her faith in his infancy. Very early, he says, he learned about eternal life and began to pray to God as his aid and refuge. One of his early prayers was that he might not be beaten in school, which happened when he was idle. Once while he was a small boy, he became very ill and begged his mother to let him be baptized. Much troubled, she was ready to make preparation for his consecration when suddenly he recovered. The baptism was then deferred because the position of the Church at this time was that if a person should sin after the consecration of baptism the guilt would be greater. The boy must be sure that

THE CONFESSIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE

he was ready to live a changed life before receiving baptism.

Like her husband, Monnica was very ambitious for her son. She was proud of his brilliant mind and his gifts in speech, and she wanted nothing to stand in the way of his success. She even opposed an early marriage for him, fearing a wife might prove "a clog and hindrance" to his hopes of learning. Yet she could not take the light view of his youthful wildness that her husband did. With great anxiety she warned him, says Augustine, "'not to commit fornication; but especially never to defile another man's wife'" (p. 23).

The picture of his early years, which Augustine gives in *The Confessions*, is very black, as is that of himself as a student. Willard L. Sperry is helpful in his interpretation of this period of Augustine's life. He states:

The Confessions as a whole is like a picture gallery, hung with colorful sketches of a man's childhood and youth, uniformly framed in a heavy black moulding of mature condemnation. The frames are so disproportionately deep and sombre that they all but obliterate the pictures which they enclose. To understand Augustine as a boy and a young man, we must take the sketches out of their framework and study them by themselves.⁴

Sperry sees many redeeming lights in the picture of the young Augustine. First there is the pure devotion to his mother and, in addition, the capacity for wholesome

⁴ Willard L. Sperry, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, Studies in Classics of Christian Devotion (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1939), p. 9. Used by permission.

friendship, the independent life of the mind, his capacity for hard work, and a perpetually uneasy conscience.⁵

changing times and social patterns

We need also to keep in mind the social pattern of his time and the high plane he had reached when he was recalling his past. For instance, there seemed to be no sense of shame regarding his son Adeodatus, who was born during his student days at Carthage. Sperry reminds us that the name *Adeodatus* means "'gift of God—' an unlikely name for a child of whom his [Augustine's] conscience could not approve."⁶ Monogamous concubinage was accepted at the time even by some churchmen. The mother of Adeodatus "may well have been someone whom he could not legally marry."

We have already noted that Augustine's father had died suddenly before his son's education was completed. A wealthy citizen of Thagaste offered aid at this time to make it possible for Augustine to go to Carthage for two years of further training in rhetoric and literature in preparation for teaching. In *The Confessions* when describing this period of study, Augustine speaks of "learning" books of eloquence wherein he "desired to be eminent, out of a damnable and vainglorious end, a joy in human vanity" (p. 33). Indeed it was very different from the serious study he did later. In the ordinary course of his reading, however, he came upon a book which, he says, changed all his purposes and desires

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

and inflamed him to love, see, and obtain wisdom. This book was *Hortensius*, a dialogue on philosophy by Marcus Tullius Cicero (frequently called "Tully" by Augustine), whose writings were valued above all other ancient writers in Augustine's day. He had started the book with the idea of sharpening his tongue but was soon fascinated by the contents. Years later as he looked back over his life, he felt that this was the time he began to arise that he might return to his Father.

In his search for wisdom or truth, which followed the reading of *Hortensius*, he first turned to the Scriptures to see what they contained, because his Christian heritage made him recognize that a knowledge of God would be his goal. Two problems now confronted him. The old Latin translation that was current in North Africa offended his literary taste. The Scriptures seemed "unworthy to be compared with the stateliness of Tully" (p. 35). Then, too, he was unwilling at this period to receive as ultimate truth statements that he could not prove by rational processes.

DOUBTING AND SEARCHING manichaeism

This latter difficulty partly explains why Augustine became interested in the Manichees, a sect strong in North Africa in his day. They maintained that they represented the true and original Christianity and promised by pure and simple reason to bring their disciples to God, discarding all arbitrary authority. In other words, the doctrines of the Church need not be accepted. To Augustine this sounded like the truth he had been seek-

ing and a very practical religion. To his mother, Monnica, however, who had long been a Christian, it was a terrifying heresy. When Augustine returned to Thagaste to teach rhetoric, she considered not letting him live in her house. There was, nevertheless, an abiding love between the two, and Monnica never ceased weeping and praying for him during the nine years he was affiliated with the Manichees. Later, Augustine believed that God heard her prayers and sent the dream that comforted her and caused her to let him return home. She was also consoled by the words of a priest whom she was urging to talk to Augustine, "Go thy ways and God bless thee, for it is not possible that the son of these tears should perish" (p. 44).

Augustine did not remain long in Thagaste, for soon after he arrived a very dear friend died. Then he wanted to get away from the place where everything reminded him of his friend. He returned to Carthage, where he taught rhetoric for eight years, and at the same time continued his studies. These covered a wide range of subjects. As he grew intellectually, he came to feel that "much of the boasted wisdom of the Manichaeans was folly and pretense."⁷ Finally, when Faustus, one of their most learned leaders, failed to answer satisfactorily the many questions that were perplexing Augustine, he became skeptical. He did not leave the sect at once but began seeking his answers in other places.

One of the most difficult questions was the origin of evil. As he saw it later, this came from his not knowing

⁷ Arthur C. McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), II, 75. Used by permission.

how to think of God. Any reader of *The Confessions* knows, however, that this problem of evil was not merely an academic question with Augustine. He felt the need of knowing the origin of the good and bad impulses continually warring within him.

In this period of indecision and skepticism, Augustine never gave up his belief in God, though he did have doubts about the immortality of the soul. He even came to feel that the philosophers known as the Academics were wiser than anyone else. They held that "men ought to doubt everything, and laid down that no truth can be comprehended by man" (p. 77).

So then [he tells us] after the manner of the Academics . . . doubting of every thing, and wavering between all, I settled so far, that the Manichees were to be abandoned; judging that, even while doubting, I might not continue in that sect, to which I already preferred some of the philosophers. . . . (pp. 81-82).

neoplatonism

For a man of Augustine's temperament, this skepticism was an unhappy experience and one he could not endure for long. He decided to explore one more philosophical school, Neoplatonism. The writings of Plotinus, the leader of this school, had just been translated into Latin by Victorinus, the most celebrated rhetorician at Rome in Augustine's day.⁸ Augustine found in Neoplatonism much that appealed to him, for instance, the conception of a realm of spiritual being altogether

⁸ Shirley Jackson Case, *Makers of Christianity from Jesus to Charlemagne* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1934), p. 178. Used by permission.

different from the realm of things, a belief in man's possession of a spiritual sense by which he could know God, and the belief in the immortality of the soul. His greatest inspiration from this group, however, was the Neoplatonic solution to the problem of evil. Plotinus' idea of evil as an absence of good was a startling thought to him and encouraged him to continue his search for truth, which he had believed was hopeless.

Augustine accepted Neoplatonism as enthusiastically as he had Manichaeism, but this time he was moving closer to orthodox Christianity rather than away from it.

the influence of ambrose, monnica, and others

Another influence that brought Augustine closer to the Church at this time was the preaching of Ambrose. During his period of skepticism and indecision, Augustine had moved from Carthage to Rome to follow his profession as a teacher of rhetoric. Whereas the students of Carthage had been too boisterous for him, he found those in Rome fickle and dishonest. Therefore in 384, when he was recommended by a Roman prefect to the people of Milan, who wanted a rhetorician, he accepted the new post without hesitation. It was here that he came under the influence of Ambrose, then Bishop of Milan, who, according to Augustine, was known "to the whole world as among the best of men" (p. 80). Augustine was first attracted by Ambrose's kindness to him rather than by his teachings. He listened to Ambrose preaching to the people to see if his eloquence were as great as had been reported to him. Gradually he had to admit how truly Ambrose spoke as well as how eloquent-

ly. The result was that his teachings, particularly the figurative interpretation of the Law and the Prophets, led Augustine to a new regard for the Scriptures.

There were other determining influences upon Augustine at this time. His mother had come to Milan to be with him, and there was a small group of like-minded friends, including Alypius and Nebridius, also from North Africa, with whom he spent much time studying the Scriptures and thinking through common problems. No one can read these happenings, together with the accounts of Augustine's conversations with Simplicianus, who told him about the great rhetorician Victorinus becoming a Christian, and with Pontitianus, an African Christian high in the Emperor's court, without being fully conscious of Augustine's dependence upon people.

his conversion and baptism

The climax of this period, and also, Augustine believed, of his life, was the famous incident in the garden known as his "conversion." After a season of great emotional struggle and seeking, he felt that God spoke directly to him in the words of Paul, "*Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence*" (p. 147; also Rom. 13:13-14). His quest for certainty was ended. Serenity filled his heart, he says, and "all the darkness of doubt vanished away" (p. 148). He knew now that he was ready to give up fame and a worldly career and live a life of monastic simplicity and celibacy. He decided to withdraw quietly from his profes-

sion rather than make a big stir calling attention to himself. A coming vacation period and his ill health—trouble with his lungs—made stepping out easier.

The following spring, in 387, he was baptized in Milan by Ambrose with his friend Alypius and his fifteen-year-old son Adeodatus. Shortly after this he made preparations to return to Africa, believing this was the place in which he could serve God most usefully. When Augustine and his party were in Ostia, the seaport of Rome, ready to begin their voyage, Monnica died. One of the favorite chapters of *The Confessions* is the ninth, which gives a vivid account of Augustine's last conversations with his mother and of her death and burial. She was ready for death because God had answered her prayers that her son should be a Christian. The chapter is a great tribute to her and shows the depth of his affection for her.

Augustine returned to his native town, Thagaste, where he sold his property and gave the money to the poor. He and his companions spent their time in study and writing. Though *The Confessions* does not give the exact date, we know from other sources that Augustine's son Adeodatus died at this time, at the age of seventeen. In *The Confessions* Augustine speaks of finding much that was admirable in him and about being awed by his talents. In *De Vita Beata* he says, "There was also with us, in age the youngest of all, but whose talents, if affection deceives me not, promise something great, my son Adeodatus."⁹

⁹ E. B. Pusey (trans.), St. Augustine's *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Everyman's Library: New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1942), p. 185, note 1. Used by permission.

augustine, bishop of hippo

Coming out of his retirement in 391 A.D., Augustine visited Hippo Regius (the neighboring seaport) "on a mission of mercy, and the aged Bishop Valerius, desiring an efficient helper, ordained him to the priesthood. Four years later, when the bishop died, Augustine was appointed his successor."¹⁰

During his thirty-five years as bishop of this provincial diocese, Augustine became known throughout the Christian world as a defender and interpreter of the Church.

He never lost his zest for meditation and interpretative thinking, but the forces that impinged upon him in those trying times furnished ample incentive for the development of that system of theological thought that has rendered him famous.¹¹

There were the Manichees to be refuted and then the Donatists and the Pelagians. Finally, when the Church was blamed for the fall of Rome, which took place two decades after Christianity was made the state religion, Augustine undertook an explanation of the situation. The result was his famous work, *The City of God*, containing his philosophy of history, which so greatly influenced the later conflict between Church and State.

In 430 (August 28), while Hippo was being attacked by the Vandals, Augustine died of fever at the age of seventy-six. He had been in failing health for some time but had stanchly refused to seek safety in flight.

¹⁰ Case, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

plan and purpose of *The Confessions*

Now that we have the background of Augustine's life, let us briefly investigate the writing and plan of *The Confessions*.

After Augustine became a Christian, he had a habit of making casual references to his earlier life. His friends urged him to tell the whole story, because some of his opponents were passing around harmful rumors about his pre-Christian life, injuring his name as a Christian. Such was the occasion which, in 397, eleven years after his conversion and only one or two after he became Bishop of Hippo, led him to write the best known of all his works.

Yet no reader of *The Confessions* thinks of this as the purpose of the work. Augustine himself says that his object is to praise God for his unmerited goodness and to raise up man's understanding and affection toward God.¹² Since this, rather than writing an autobiography, is his purpose, he makes no attempt to give all the important events of his life. He begins with the goodness and mercy of God in his infancy and uses the first nine books to relate the incidents that show how he was gradually led to dedicate his life wholly to God. After he describes an experience, he passes immediately into the principles behind it. For instance, after recounting the robbing of a pear tree when he was sixteen, he goes into the nature of sin committed without any apparent cause. He does this that he might help others in their struggle against sin. He ends the experience with praise

¹² Pusey, *op. cit.*, p. VIII.

THE CONFESSIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE

to God, who alone can change us and satisfy our longings. The result of this procedure is a work which is unique among the writings of men. R. L. Ottley says that the works that have been compared to it, namely Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, Goethe's *Faust*, serve to emphasize the originality of Augustine's work.¹³

To return to the plan of *The Confessions*, we should note that the ninth book ends the account Augustine started out to give. Again his friends intervened, wanting him to continue it and tell of his life as it was then, ten years after his baptism. Evidently it was easier for him to write of that former self with which he had no relation other than to praise God for his deliverance from it, for in the last four books he gives scarcely any biographical material. In Book X he continues his praise of God, now for the faculty by which he came to know God. This leads him into an extensive discussion of the nature of memory. In Book XI he breaks off an account of the way God led him to holy orders, saying that time is "too precious to him," and then goes into a discussion of time. This takes him into the subject that continues through the last two books, an exposition of the history of creation. He ends Book XIII on a high note of praise and thanksgiving to God for all he has created for us, and most of all for the gift of his spirit which enables us to love him. He expresses the hope that, as God works through us and rests in us, we may find rest in his "great hallowing."

¹³ R. L. Ottley, *Studies in the Confessions of St. Augustine* (London: Robert Scott, Roxburgh House, Paternoster Row, E. C., 1919), p. 118.

These last four books, though not as readable as the earlier ones, will be of interest to those who are accustomed to abstract discussions and who want a better understanding of Augustine's mind. Since boyhood he had had a passion for the world of ideas, and now his mind was turned to the account of Christianity.

Form and Style

From the plan of *The Confessions* let us turn to the form and style of the work. It is primarily a book of devotion and has been aptly described as a dramatic monologue addressed to God. R. L. Ottley says that Augustine's task was "to find diction and imagery appropriate to the high task of sustained converse with God,"¹⁴ and adds that he "instinctively must have felt that eloquence was beside the mark. His language is that of the heart."¹⁵ And yet *The Confessions* is not free from forced antitheses, "extravagance of diction," and other rhetorical devices characteristic of the style of the day.¹⁶ Still the general tone is so high that Augustine stands pre-eminent among religious writers of any age. Willard L. Sperry thinks that the paradoxical sentence pattern running through the entire book "gives it an electric quality which we intuitively sense, though we may not identify its source."¹⁷ For a good example of this paradoxical sentence pattern, see the second passage quoted in Part II of this chapter, pages 30-31.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135 (note).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

¹⁷ Sperry, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

PART II

The Influence of Augustine

Earlier in this chapter reference was made to Augustine as an interpreter of the true faith of the Church and to his fame as a theologian. Certainly many Christians commemorate his conversion as an event hardly less epoch-making than the conversion of the Apostle Paul. In fact, the Bishop of Hippo is recognized as second only to Paul in his influence on the thinking of the early Christian Church. But this is not all. Scholars have traced his influence in the Renaissance and even in the Reformation. In the seventeenth century he was appealed to as a champion of Protestantism. The secular historian also studies Augustine's writings. It is said that no student of history today can claim to understand the Latin mind during the fourth and fifth centuries without reading Augustine, who, it is said, was one of the most powerful intellectuals of his day.

Augustine's contribution as a theologian and historian offers material for further study at a later time. Our purpose here is to consider the message of this book for those of us who today are reaching upward toward God as did Augustine. In an effort to do this, we shall point up certain passages and ideas which through the ages have been found especially meaningful.

Quotations from The Confessions

For Augustine, God became the great reality of life, the all powerful, the unchangeable. Let us listen to the

opening lines of *The Confessions*:

Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power, and Thy wisdom infinite. And Thee would man praise; man, but a particle of Thy creation; man, that bears about him his mortality, the witness of his sin, the witness that Thou resistest the proud: yet would man praise Thee; he, but a particle of Thy creation. Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee (p. 1).

At the same time that Augustine thought of God as the only Reality, as the unchangeable One, and as the Creator of the universe, he was conscious of him as an almighty Being having personality, and therefore One with whom he could hold communion. We also feel this need of communion with the Divine Being and, as we read passages like the following, we may find ourselves drawing nearer to him:

What art Thou then, my God? what, but the Lord God? For who is Lord but the Lord? Or who is God save our God? Most highest, most good, most potent, most omnipotent; most merciful, yet most just; most hidden, yet most present; most beautiful, yet most strong; stable, yet incomprehensible; unchangeable, yet all-changing; never new, never old; all-renewing, and bringing age upon the proud, and they know it not; ever working, ever at rest; still gathering, yet nothing lacking; supporting, filling, and overspreading; creating, nourishing, and maturing; seeking, yet having all things. Thou lovest, without passion; art jealous, without anxiety; repentest, yet grieveest not; art angry, yet serene; changest Thy works, Thy purpose unchanged; receivest again what Thou findest yet

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didst never lose; never in need, yet rejoicing in gains; never covetous, yet exacting usury. Thou receivest over and above, that Thou mayest owe; and Who hath aught that is not Thine? Thou payest debts, owing nothing; remittest debts, losing nothing. And what had I now said, my God, my life, my holy joy? or what saith any man when he speaks of Thee? Yet woe to him that speaketh not, since mute are even the most eloquent.

Oh! that I might repose on Thee! Oh! that thou wouldest enter into my heart, and inebriate it, that I may forget my ills, and embrace Thee, my sole good! What art Thou to me? In Thy pity, teach me to utter it. Or what am I to Thee that Thou demandest my love, and, if I give it not, are wroth with me, and threatenest me with grievous woes? Is it then a slight woe to love Thee not? Oh! for Thy mercies' sake, tell me, O Lord my God, what Thou art unto me. Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. So speak, that I may hear. Behold, Lord, my heart is before Thee; open Thou the ears thereof, and say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. After this voice let me haste, and take hold on Thee. Hide not Thy face from me. Let me die—lest I die—only let me see Thy face (p. 3).

Augustine's long struggle in this quest for God taught him a great truth of which we need continually to be reminded. He came to see that the entire personality—reason, emotion, will—must be consecrated to this quest. Mere intellect, he found, could not lead him to a vital knowledge of the Divine Personality, and certainly not a "maimed and half-divided will" (p. 141). He had found the goodly pearl, and it was only when he could make up his mind to sell all he had to buy it that the light of serenity entered his heart and "all the darkness

of doubt vanished away" (p.148). The inward dualism which had caused him such a long struggle was gone. As Ottley says, "he had learned the lesson that the principle of unity in man is a God-directed, God-centered will."¹⁸ At the beginning of Book IX he bursts forth in praise to God for this revelation and for God's presence with him.

O Lord, I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, and the son of Thy handmaid: Thou hast broken my bonds in sunder. I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of praise. Let my heart and my tongue praise Thee; yea, let all my bones say, O Lord, who is like unto Thee? Let them say, and answer Thou me, and say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. Who am I, and what am I? What evil have not been either my deeds, or if not my deeds, my words, or if not my words, my will? But Thou, O Lord, art good and merciful, and Thy right hand had respect unto the depth of my death, and from the bottom of my heart emptied that abyss of corruption. And this Thy whole gift was, to nill what I willed, and to will what Thou willedst. But where through all those years, and out of what low and deep recess was my free-will called forth in a moment, whereby to submit my neck to Thy easy yoke, and my shoulders unto Thy light burden, O Christ Jesus, my Helper and my Redeemer? How sweet did it at once become to me, to want the sweetnesses of those toys! and what I feared to be parted from, was now a joy to part with. For Thou didst cast them forth from me, Thou true and highest sweetness. Thou castest them forth, and for them enteredst in Thyself, sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood; brighter than all light, but more hidden than all depths, higher than all honour, but not to the high in their

¹⁸ Ottley, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

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own conceits. Now was my soul free from the biting cares of canvassing and getting, and weltering in filth, and scratching off the itch of lust. And my infant tongue spake freely to Thee, my brightness, and my riches, and my health, the Lord my God (pp. 149-150).

It also may be helpful to us to see how Augustine came to realize that this quest for truth demanded the whole of life. He faced the facts of his inner life honestly. When he did this he saw that only one power could bring the conflicting elements of human nature into a state of harmony. In *The Confessions* he had the courage to lay bare his mistakes as well as his successes that others might be helped in their search for God. For instance in Book IV, when he tells of his wretchedness after the death of his friend in Thagaste, he thinks how blessed he would have been if he had loved God then and could have turned toward him at this time. He knows he could have found him by looking into his own heart and could have carried other souls to God with him by saying,

"Him let us love, Him let us love. . . . See there He is, where truth is loved. He is within the very heart, yet hath the heart strayed from Him. Go back into your heart, ye transgressors, and cleave fast to Him that made you. Stand with Him, and ye shall stand fast. Rest in Him, and ye shall be at rest. . . ." (pp. 55-56).

Later, when he was searching diligently for truth, he was able with God's help to enter into his inward self, and then he beheld with the eyes of his soul the "Light Unchangeable." As he thought of this light and its relationship to truth, he was reminded also of God's sending the beams of his light upon him and making him

conscious of how far off from God he was. Then he knew how necessary it was for him to hold fast unto God.

He that knows the Truth, knows what that Light is; and he that knows It, knows eternity. Love knoweth it. O Truth Who art Eternity! and Love Who art Truth! and Eternity Who art Love! Thou art my God, to Thee do I sigh night and day. Thee when I first knew, Thou liftedst me up, that I might see there was what I might see, and that I was not yet such as to see. And Thou didst beat back the weakness of my sight, streaming forth Thy beams of light upon me most strongly, and I trembled with love and awe: and I perceived myself to be far off from Thee, in the region of unlikeness, as if I heard this Thy voice from on high: "I am the food of grown men, grow, and thou shalt feed upon Me; nor shalt thou convert Me, like the food of thy flesh into thee, but thou shalt be converted into Me (pp. 117-118).

It is good then for me to hold fast unto God; for if I remain not in Him, I cannot in myself; but He remaining in Himself, reneweth all things. And Thou art the Lord my God, since Thou standest not in need of my goodness (p. 118).

In connection with Augustine's idea of finding God through searching his own heart, it is of interest to note that in his writing on Psalm 57 he says that the law was first written in men's hearts and the written law was later given because men had strayed from their own hearts.¹⁹ He carries the idea further in *The Confessions* with God's revelation of himself in Jesus.

And He departed from our eyes, that we might return into our heart, and there find Him. For He departed, and

¹⁹ Pusey, *op. cit.*, p. 63 (note 1).

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lo, He is here. He would not be long with us, yet left us not; for He departed thither, whence He never parted, because the world was made by Him. And in this world He was, and into this world He came to save sinners, unto whom my soul confesseth, and He healeth it, for it hath sinned against Him. O ye sons of men, how long so slow of heart? Even now, after the descent of Life to you, will ye not ascend and live? But whither ascend ye, when ye are on high, and set your mouth against the heavens? Descend, that ye may ascend, and ascend to God (p. 56).

This idea of finding God in his heart led Augustine to a thought found often in his writings, the importance of humility. "Descend, that ye may ascend," he says. It is through the lowliness of repentance that the soul recovers her high estate. Knowing the nature of man to be swelled with pride, God humbled himself lest men should disdain to follow a humble man.²⁰ In *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 12, Augustine says:

In humility therefore there is this to be wondered at, that it elevates the heart; and in pride this, that it dejects it. . . . godly humility subjects one to his superior and God is above all; therefore humility exalts one, in making him God's subject.²¹

Again and again in *The Confessions* Augustine refers to the other side of the problem—pride. When he is describing his disillusionment about the Manichees after he had met their leader, Faustus, he cries out against learned men who do not find God because of being puff-

²⁰ Pusey, *op. cit.*, p. 64 (note 2).

²¹ John Healey (trans.), St. Augustine's *The City of God* (2 vols. Everyman's Library: New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1945), I, 43. Used by permission.

ed up by an ungodly pride. This is the explanation he gives:

Thou art great, O Lord, and hast respect unto the humble, but the proud Thou beholdest afar off. Nor dost thou draw near, but to the contrite in heart, nor art found by the proud, no, not though by curious skill they could number the stars and the sand, and measure the starry heavens, and track the courses of the planets (p. 66).

It was in this pride of soul or defect of the will that Augustine saw the origin of sin or evil. Man, the greatest of God's creatures, was given the splendid gift of reason. This made him capable of resisting God's control, of choosing the less instead of the greater, in other words, following his own will rather than God's. He does not let the reader of his confessions forget that evil was a great force in his own life and one that he controlled only with daily watchfulness and prayer. This helps us to understand why there is so much about sin in his writings and why he has been called the most powerful ethical person the West has produced. Our own frailty in resisting temptation makes us appreciate his continual struggle, even after his conversion, of which we catch a glimpse in the tenth book of *The Confessions*.

Too late loved I Thee, O Thou Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! too late I loved Thee! And behold, Thou wert within, and I abroad, and there I searched for Thee; deformed I, plunging amid those fair forms which Thou hadst made. Thou wert with me, but I was not with Thee. Things held me far from Thee, which, unless they were in Thee, were not at all. Thou calledst, and shoutedst, and burstest my deafness. Thou flashedst, shonest, and scat-

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teredst my blindness. Thou breathedst odours, and I drew in breath and pant for Thee. I tasted, and hunger and thirst. Thou touchedst me, and I burned for Thy peace.

When I shall with my whole self cleave to Thee, I shall no where have sorrow or labour; and my life shall wholly live, as wholly full of Thee. But now since whom Thou fillest, Thou liftest up, because I am not full of Thee I am a burden to myself. Lamentable joys strive with joyous sorrows: and on which side is the victory, I know not. Woe is me! Lord, have pity on me. My evil sorrows strive with my good joys; and on which side is the victory, I know not. Woe is me! Lord, have pity on me. Woe is me! lo! I hide not my wounds; Thou art the Physician, I the sick; Thou merciful, I miserable. Is not the life of man upon earth all trial? Who wishes for troubles and difficulties? Thou commandest them to be endured, not to be loved. No man loves what he endures, though he love to endure. For though he rejoices that he endures, he had rather there were nothing for him to endure. In adversity I long for prosperity, in prosperity I fear adversity. What middle place is there betwixt these two, where the life of man is not all trial? Woe to the prosperities of the world, once and again, through fear of adversity, and corruption of joy! Woe to the adversities of the world, once and again, and the third time, from the longing for prosperity, and because adversity itself is a hard thing, and lest it shatter endurance. Is not the life of man upon earth all trial: without any interval? (pp. 195-196).

As personal sin is an important factor in Augustine's life, so also is divine grace. Whatever good there is in us comes from God, says Augustine. Without divine help man cannot turn from his own selfish will to God's will. This divine help is grace. The passage below, which

follows, the one on sin just quoted, shows man's dependence on God's grace.

And all my hope is no where but in Thy exceeding great mercy. Give what Thou enjoimest, and enjoin what Thou wilt. Thou enjoimest us continency; and when I knew, saith one, that no man can be continent, unless God give it, this also was a part of wisdom to know whose gift she is. By continency verily are we bound up and brought back into One, whence we were dissipated into many. For too little doth he love Thee, who loves any thing with Thee, which he loveth not for Thee. O love, who ever burnest and never consumest! O charity, my God, kindle me. Thou enjoimest continency; give me what Thou enjoimest, and enjoin what Thou wilt (pp. 196-197).

The thought of God's grace always filled Augustine's heart to overflowing with love for him. Earlier in Book X, as Augustine was thinking of how he had come to know God and what his life was at the time he was writing, he found it easier to talk about his love for God than about himself. The following passage is a good example of this and one sure to be remembered by readers of *The Confessions*.

What do I love, when I love Thee? not beauty of bodies, nor the fair harmony of time, nor the brightness of the light, so gladsome to our eyes, nor sweet melodies of varied songs, nor the fragrant smell of flowers, and ointments, and spices, not manna and honey, not limbs acceptable to embracements of flesh. None of these I love, when I love my God; and yet I love a kind of light, and melody, and fragrance, and meat, and embracement when I love my God, the light, melody, fragrance, meat, embracement of my inner man: where there shineth unto my

soul what space cannot contain, and there soundeth what time beareth not away, and there smelleth what breathing disperseth not, and there tasteth what eating diminisheth not, and there clingeth what satiety divorceth not. This is it which I love when I love my God (p. 177).

FINDING CHRIST THROUGH GOD

Though a few references have been made to Christ in the passages quoted earlier in the chapter, some readers may have been surprised that there have not been more and even may have wanted to ask, "What does Augustine have to say to us about Christ?" We have already seen that from earliest childhood he had been taught about Christ. And surely the following quotation shows that he came to have a personal relationship with him.

Then I sought a way of obtaining strength sufficient to enjoy Thee; and found it not, until I embraced that Mediator betwixt God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who is over all, God blessed for ever-more, calling unto me, and saying, I am the way, the truth, and the life, and mingling that food which I was unable to receive, with our flesh. For the Word was made flesh, that Thy wisdom, whereby Thou createdst all things, might provide milk for our infant state (p. 122).

We must face the fact, however, that Christ does not have the place in Augustine's religious experience that he does in the experience of most of the early Church fathers. Many primitive Christians began with Christ and then discovered God in him. Augustine began with God, and his faith in Christ grew as he came more and more under the influence of Christian tradition. McGif-

fert says that in Augustine's later works he declared again and again that Christ was the only way to God.²² McGiffert also points out the fact that in the Incarnation

Augustine found the supreme revelation of God's love for men. Christ came mainly, he says, that we might learn how much God loves us, and thus be moved to love him in return and also to love our neighbors at the command and example of him who was made our neighbor.²³

Conclusion

As we close this chapter, let us turn back to Augustine's object in writing *The Confessions*, namely, to praise God for his unmerited goodness and to raise up man's understanding and affection toward God. It is hoped that all of us who take part in this study may find help and inspiration in our own quest for God. Let us remember that Augustine found the Eternal Spirit by praying for guidance and then by having the courage to face himself. We need also to keep in mind something that Haniel Long points out in his letter to St. Augustine:

It is true that because of your great prestige people have thought the truth about you must also be the truth about them. They have thought that what you found expedient for yourself they should imitate; that your ideas about God and the earth and men and women. . . should be their ideas also. They missed the point that your truth can only be regarded as a possible aid to them in finding their truth.²⁴

²² McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁴ Long, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

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In order to progress toward spiritual maturity, each person to some degree must understand himself—his own weaknesses and faults, his true goals and some of the ways of living in order to achieve them.

By St. Augustine's revealing his spiritual experiences, *we* have inspiration to seek more earnestly God's full sway in our lives. It is for this help in finding our own way to God and for the work he did in making the early Church strong enough to withstand the storms that beat upon it that we pay tribute to him.

Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless,
until it repose in Thee.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE TO CHRISTIANITY

In the minds of many Protestants, St. Augustine, as a teacher and formulator of Christian doctrine, stands next to the Apostle Paul. What did this man, who has been placed so near to the writer of the Epistles, contribute to Christian life and thought?

1. His personal life is an outstanding example of the transforming power of the gospel—a great sinner who became a great saint.

2. His *Confessions* is not only the first spiritual autobiography of a Christian preserved since that of the Apostle Paul; it is also a forerunner of modern psychological studies of religious experience.

3. He presented God as the seeker, man as the sought. In his works are poignant, beautiful expressions of divine longing for human love, paramount to human longing for divine love.

4. Though years of deep devotion did not lessen his awe, Augustine's relationship to the living God was closer, more personal, than that of any other described in the writings of the Church prior to his time. The influence of this vital relationship then and now is almost beyond conception.

5. He constructed the first real system of Christian theology. In Augustine, Roman Catholics and Protestants meet. The former consider him the father of orthodoxy; the latter look to him as a great spiritual teacher, guide, and source of inspiration for holy living.

M.D.W.

Chapter Two

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

- A. Having the Spirit of Christ
- B. Authorship
 - 1. THOMAS À KEMPIS
 - 2. GERHARD GROOTE
 - a) Brethren of the Common Life
 - b) His Spiritual Diary
- C. Editions, Translations, Style
- D. Inspiration of This Writing
- E. Purpose of the Author
- F. Synopsis of *The Imitation*
 - 1. THE FIRST BOOK: ADMONITIONS USEFUL FOR A SPIRITUAL LIFE
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 - 4. THE FOURTH BOOK: CONCERNING THE SACRAMENT
- G. Summary of This Introduction
- H. *The Imitation*—A Personal Book
- I. Suggested Uses of *The Imitation*
 - 1. FOR GROUP STUDY
 - 2. IN PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

A person will never be satisfied with The Imitation, though it were read a thousand times over; for those general principles are the seeds of meditation, and the stores they contain are never exhausted.

JOHN WESLEY

(The Christian's Pattern, Wesley's translation and abridgment of The Imitation, is the first of Wesley's major writings and the first book published by the Methodist Book Concern in America.)

the imitation of christ

having the SPIRIT of CHRIST

Some time ago, in a sermon in my home church, the pastor quoted, to illustrate a trenchant point, "What availeth it a man to reason high secret mysteries of the Trinity, if he lack meekness, whereby he displeaseth the Trinity?" (p. 3).¹

That sentence comes bodily from a very old book, with all the timeliness of today's latest pronouncements on the essentials of Christianity. It is to be found at the first of that remarkable fourteenth or fifteenth century writing we know as *The Imitation of Christ*. Immediately preceding it, we read,

It is oftentimes seen that some persons, who often hear the Gospels of Christ, have little sweetness therein: and that is, for that they have not the spirit of Christ.

Wherefore, if we will have the true understanding of Christ's Gospels, we must study to conform our life to His life as nigh as we can (p. 3).

Almost it could be said that the entire meaning of the book is here epitomized.

¹ All quotations from *The Imitation of Christ*, unless otherwise indicated, are from A Cardinal Edition, C-104, and are identified only by the number of the page on which they appear, as in this instance. All are used by permission of the publishers, Pocket Books, Inc.

The quotations at once suggest proof of the fact that this book is miscalled "an imitation." Rather, it describes the following of Christ, the conforming of one's life to his, and the despising of all earthly vanities if he, in his fullness, is to be realized in the individual. One of the author's acute phrases, "from vanity to verity" (in another translation), might be a subtitle. In some manuscripts the work is called *Musica Ecclesiastica* (church music). Willard L. Sperry thinks that it may have been intended to be sung in plain song as a supplement to the Psalter. A revival of such use would be an interesting modern experiment in sacred music and would, I believe, yield large spiritual dividends.

authorship

Many traditions cluster about the authorship of this book, which for five crowded and turbulent centuries has been a dominant factor in the devotional life of Christian men and women. Dr. Sperry writes that the book "makes no direct assertion as to its authorship."² A manuscript, now in the Royal Library at Brussels, concludes: "Finished and completed in the year of our Lord 1441 by the hands of Brother Thomas von Kempen at Mt. St. Agnes near Zwolle."³ However, in other libraries are twenty-two manuscripts of an earlier date, including, it is reported, fragments of a Dutch dialect translation as early as 1423.

² Willard L. Sperry, *Strangers and Pilgrims* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1939), p. 62. Used by permission.

³ Douglas V. Steere, *Doors Into Life* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1948), p. 30. Used by permission.

thomas à kempis

Thomas à Kempis, an Augustinian monk, is known to have been a copyist of manuscripts as well as an author, and it is quite within the range of probability that he acted as such in reproducing the 1441 manuscript. Rufus Jones reminds us that Thomas à Kempis used almost exactly the same words at the conclusion of the copy of the Darmstadt Bible that he made to be read in his monastery at Mount St. Agnes in Holland.

Much evidence, internal and external, but as yet no certainty, points to Gerhard Groote as, at least, the principal author of this great classic of the Christian faith. It may have been a compilation made by Thomas à Kempis of his own writings, Groote's, and those of others of the Brethren of the Common Life. Persons familiar with Thomas' other productions say that they have little of the divine fire which irradiates *The Imitation*.

GERHARD GROOTE

Groote was a Hollander who had won high honors at the universities of Aachen, Paris, Cologne, and Prague. Born in 1340, he lived a brilliantly successful life as a canon lawyer, professor at Cologne, and holder of two or more lucrative benefices in the Church. Douglas Steere, writing of him in *Doors Into Life*, states: "He found himself in his middle thirties . . . with a Midas-like power that turned all that he touched into a personal triumph. . . ." ⁴ Then, suddenly, he came face to face with the fundamental pointlessness of his worldly

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

successes and had to choose between the inward and the outward in Christian living. By some good grace of God, he chose the inward.

In 1376 he entered the Carthusian monastery at Munikhuizen and for three years endured the severe discipline of that order. It soon became evident, however, that Gerhard Groote did not have a monastic vocation. He was a born preacher, in a world where there was much evil to preach against, in the Church and out of it. Leaving the monastery, he flung himself and his great talents into leading his Dutch compatriots back from the ignorance, superstition, and flagrant sin of the fourteenth century to the simplicity and personal compulsion and cleansing power of Christianity as Jesus had exemplified and taught it. In such preaching he was, as always, outstandingly successful. "Given a special license to preach . . . he moved the people of Holland as no preacher has done in their history to repent and to give themselves with a new devotion to Christ."⁵

Such a man inevitably became a target for the hatred and fear of a corrupt clergy and hierarchy, and for the machinations of some of the monastic orders that were powerful and morally decadent. He endangered the status quo of religion; he must be silenced. In 1383, the Bishop of Utrecht summarily revoked his license to preach. One can trace in *The Imitation*, especially in Book Three, the travail of an ardent soul thus stopped in mid-career, repudiated by an authority he considered it his duty to obey. It may be that Gerhard did not actually write the words we read there, but the probability

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

seems very strong. (See also treatment of this matter later in this chapter.)

BRETHREN of the common life

Elton Trueblood, in a slender volume,⁶ has noted as one of the heartening signals of this twentieth difficult century, the springing up of lay religious groups wherein earnest men and women, living and studying together for a week or a month or some longer period, prepare thus to return, with quickened spiritual force and new understanding, to proclaim Christ in their workaday worlds. Similar fellowships developed in Holland as outgrowths of an initial group, the Brethren of the Common Life, which, according to Douglas Steere, was founded by Groote.⁷

These brethren were not mendicants but earned their living as copyists or as school teachers. They were not originally "religious" in any cloistered sense; indeed many of them lived and worked in their own homes.

This brotherhood, under Groote's dynamic leadership, firmly emphasized education with a spiritual basis, and, establishing their own schools, profoundly influenced the course of education in northern Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Breaking the stranglehold of scholasticism, they became in some measure precursors of the new thought world of the sixteenth century. Men who became great educators and religious reformers are believed to have been their pupils, among them Nicholas of Cusa, the great Erasmus, and Alex-

⁶ *Signs of Hope* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1950), pp. 75-96.

⁷ Steere, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

ander Hegius, the classicist. The first fresh, free airs of the Renaissance and the Reformation were just beginning to blow. The learning of ancient Greece, long lost to semibarbarous Europe, was to appear in a great intellectual revival after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Columbus was to discover America in 1492; Luther, to start, a few years later, the freeing of men's spirits from ecclesiastical domination. It is recognized that Erasmus' publication of the New Testament in Greek, one hundred thirty-two years after Groote's death in 1384, started the chain of intellectual and religious reactions on which much of our modern thinking is based. Having been silenced as a preacher by the Bishop of Utrecht in 1383, Gerhard, it would seem, worked an even more amazing miracle in the schools.

HIS SPIRITUAL DIARY

Within recent years the *Nederlandisch* text of Groote's *Spiritual Diary* has been translated and published. It is said that, with a few changes, rearrangements, and omissions or additions, it is the same as *The Imitation*. If this is true, it goes far toward establishing the fact that Groote's brief life may be crowned with yet another laurel, for "his book" has been a major spiritual force ever since his death. F. M. Drake writes of *The Imitation* as "an imperishable mark upon the devotion of the Church for all ages."⁸

Actually, no one knows, for sure, who wrote *The Imitation*. It may have been Gerhard. It may have been

⁸ F. M. Drake, *Masters of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1916), p. 64. Used by permission.

Thomas (born about 1380, died 1471). It may have been a composite production. In any case, it is a result of the work and thought of the Brethren of the Common Life, for Thomas à Kempis (Thomas Hammerken *from the town of Kempen*, near Dusseldorf, Germany) was educated in their schools.

It really matters not at all whose human hand set down the words. From beginning to end, it is clear that the Spirit of God was guiding the writer. Of course, the author unavoidably wrote within what Rufus Jones calls "the framework of his time" and used its religious idiom and ideology. But beneath this surface he wrote fundamental religious truth and, so writing, brings his reader face to face with Christ himself. He accepted as a matter of course many things Protestants can no longer accept: certain dogmas, creeds, monastic customs. Nonetheless Christ is in this book, and we meet him there. Medieval the volume certainly is, yet strangely and forever modern and universal.

If *The Imitation* is, in fact, the outgrowth of Thomas à Kempis' editing of Gerhard Groote's *Spiritual Diary*, it is a remarkable "long-distance" collaboration, for Groote died while Thomas was yet a child. Both men must have undergone a soul-shaking personal religious experience, a phenomenon not too common in the spiritually impoverished age in which they lived. Both knew and revered monastic discipline, but both recognized clearly and emphatically its limitations and placed high above its rules and regulations the immediate demands of God upon man as an individual. Both were practical mystics, with a common-sense attitude surprisingly simi-

lar to that of the great Quaker, Rufus Jones, who has so deeply influenced religious thinking in our own day. Written, it would seem, in cloistered solitude, the book can still meet the needs of all kinds of people, even in the busiest secular surroundings.

EDITIONS, TRANSLATIONS, STYLE

The first printed edition, which was in Latin, is believed to have appeared in 1471, fourteen years after Johann Fust published his Psalter, which is reputedly the first printed book with a complete date.

The Imitation has been translated into fifty different languages and is estimated to have passed through 6,000 editions. The first translation into English was published by Wynkyn de Worde in London in 1504, the first three divisions, or "Books," having been "Englished" from the Latin by William Atkynson, and the fourth, from the French by Princess Margaret, mother of Henry VII of England. In 1556 appeared Richard Whitford's translation, edited by E. J. Klein and republished by Harper and Brothers in 1941. Edward Hake's version appeared in 1567 and T. Rogers' in 1580, both in London. In the seventeenth century, at least four translations into English were made; in the eighteenth, four, one of them by John Wesley. The 1800's produced seven, and the 1900's at least three. The Widener Library at Harvard University is the proud possessor of many hundreds of translations and editions. The Huntington Library, the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University, the British Museum, and the Bodleian, all treasure editions and valuable manuscripts ancient and modern. It would

seem that it has been truly said that no book except the Bible has been so widely distributed or so deeply influential as this simple—at moments childlike—treatise about the ways of God in the soul of man. That *The Imitation* has been for five hundred years a steady, consistent seller, its myriad editions bear conclusive proof.

The style is alive and compelling, even in translation. Sentence after sentence comes bodily from the Bible—it is said that more than six hundred biblical references and quotations are in *The Imitation*. Indeed, entire chapters are but quotations interwoven in quaint and thought-provoking sequences which point a moral and stimulate the reader to new research and clearer understanding.

Thomas De Quincey said:

The enormous popularity of the *De Imitatione Christi* is . . . a vicarious popularity of the Bible. At that time, . . . the Bible was a fountain of inspired truth everywhere sealed up, but a whisper ran through the western nations of Europe that the work of Thomas à Kempis contained some slender rivulets of truth silently stealing into light from that interdicted fountain.⁹

One is fascinated by the likenesses and the subtle differences among the various English versions. I have read, side by side, for example, the 1504 translation and that of Whitford, which came three or four decades later. The former states: "Wherefore let our sovereign study be in the life of Jesus Christ"; the latter: "Let all the study of our heart from henceforth be to have our meditation wholly fixed in the life of Christ" (p. 3). Again,

■ Sperry, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

"I desire rather to know compunction than its definition" as compared with, "I had rather feel compunction of heart for my sins than only to know the definition of compunction" (Whitford, p. 4). I personally prefer the arresting simplicity and bareness of the style of the 1504 translation, yet it is clear that the same underlying meaning is conveyed—and sharply—by the two versions. The abounding virility of the original is such as to re-create, even in translations, the sense intended by the author. In Chapter 5 of Book One, the author wrote that the holy Scripture "should be read with the same spirit that it was first made" (p. 10). Certainly it is almost by a miracle that his translators have accomplished the perpetuation of his spirit.

Whatever the divergences in wording, or in the background of the translator, one inescapable Person dominates all the forms in which this great book comes. It may well be that the author, alone with his manuscript, adopted as his undeviating rule Paul's words: "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). Surely he was inspired to write down that knowledge in meaningful Latin prose that has overcome the barriers of language and still comes straight home to the human heart as it searches for God.

INSPIRATION OF THIS WRITING

Oftentimes the author seems to be setting down, as it occurred, the direct speaking of God to his own soul as, in silence and solitude, he awaited His coming. "Our Lord saith" is a phrase frequently repeated.

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Our Lord Jesus Christ will come to thee. . . If thou wilt make ready for Him in thy heart a dwelling-place. . . . Betwixt Almighty God and a devout soul there are many ghostly [spiritual] visitings, sweet inward speaking, great gifts of grace, many consolations, much heavenly peace, and wondrous familiarity (pp. 66-67).

My Son, saith our Lord, hear My words and follow them, for they be most sweet, far passing the wisdom and cunning of all philosophers and wise men of the world (p. 107).

My Son, saith our Lord Jesus, walk before Me in truth, and seek Me always in simpleness and plainness of heart (p. 111).

Sentences, phrases, even entire chapters are prayers, asking for light, for grace, for correction.

Teach me, Lord, to fulfill Thy will, and to live meekly and worthily before Thee, for Thou art all my wisdom. . . (p. 110).

In such prayers, in direct quotations from Scripture, and in running commentary on the divine word, lie both the surprising force and the enduring charm of Thomas' style. It is not, consciously, a literary style at all. Rather, words and ideas well up like a living spring from the depths of a man's friendship with God. The writer is sturdy-minded and discerning, keenly aware of human foibles and frailties and of the temptations and sins which challenge Christians, whether inside monastery walls or out in the secular world. He is one who, in an experience that he does not describe in this book, has been mastered by love for the Lord Jesus; his constant aim is to renew, strengthen, and amplify this experience

in the daily doings of his own life and in the lives of his readers. With ardent simplicity and with joyous affection for Christ, his beloved, he writes, self-forgetting and hence all the more able vividly to portray his Friend and to communicate a sense of that Friend's transforming power.

purpose of the author

In J. B. Phillips' translation of I Timothy 4:7 occurs the phrase, "Take time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit"¹⁰ or, as Weymouth puts it, "Train yourself for godliness." *The Imitation* is, from beginning to end, a humble man's effort to keep himself spiritually fit and to encourage himself and others to train themselves in the stern disciplines which are essential to attainment of godliness, achieved by no other means. He was fully aware, as was Paul, that the process takes time and long-continued, soul-searching struggle. To such struggle, Thomas' book is one of the surest stimuli ever produced in all the devotional history of religion. Writing of it some years ago, in *World Outlook*,¹¹ I made a comment which for me still holds in full force and effect:

When my spirits are in the doldrums, perception dulled, usually high hopes inert and sagging, I turn to this little book. . . . By some strange alchemy, it starts currents of vitality within me. Spiritual skies clear, mental vision sharpens, and I embark, happily confident, toward an under-

¹⁰ J. B. Phillips, *Letters to Young Churches* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1951), p. 142.

¹¹ Florence Hooper, "A Little Blue Book—And a Christian World Tomorrow," *World Outlook*, May 1945, p. 27.

standable and desirable future. Again and again, this book has so affected me, me and tens of thousands of other Christian people, through full five centuries.

That, after all, is the essential thing to remember about 'Thomas à Kempis' style: it accomplishes, often and often, the miracles of the Spirit for which he prayed as he wrote. Not, indeed, a negligible accomplishment for a modern preacher to strive after, as he fashions sermons for his flock!

This is an uncompromising book: "The ghostly enemy sleepeth not, neither is the flesh yet fully mortified. . . ." (p. 89). ". . . it is no little thing to win or lose the kingdom of heaven" (p. 208). But it is just as truly a joyous one,

For [as Thomas remarks] "after winter cometh summer; after the night cometh the day; and after a great tempest sheweth again right clear and pleasant weather" (p. 84).

It is no hopeless and unrewarded quest to which he prompts man's soul. "He rideth safely whom the grace of God beareth and supporteth" (p. 85). He is rich in the "familiar friendship of Jesus" (p. 80).

Synopsis of the Imitation

It is difficult to classify *The Imitation* as to literary form. It is divided into four parts or "books," each of which is, in turn, made up of brief, essay-like chapters treating directly and urgently of some phase of Christ-like development toward which a man must use his best endeavor.

the first book

admonitions useful for a spiritual life

The keynote of Book One—and of *The Imitation* as a whole—is set by the title of the first chapter: "Of the Imitation or Following of Christ, and of the despising of all vanities of the world." Right through to the twenty-fifth and final chapter of Book One, "Of the fervent amending of all our life. . ." this section emphasizes the easily-forgotten facts that "a good life maketh him [a man] beloved with God" (p. 3); and "they that follow their sensuality hurt their own conscience. . ." (p. 4).

The more cunning [ability] thou hast . . . the more grievously shalt thou be judged for the misusing thereof (p.5).

The author is not in the least afraid of plain, positive admonition. Man is sinful, and his only hope of improvement and of escape from the pains and penalties of sin, here and hereafter, lies in the pursuit of godliness. Godliness is just another name for the quality of life produced when a sinner, recognizing his wickedness and his own insignificance, turns with all his heart to "God above all created things" and finds in this new relationship power to replace his badness with the goodness which is God himself.

Trust not thyself, but all thy trust set in God . . . that giveth all things, and that desireth to give Himself above all things (p. 14).

But we be occupied with our passions, and be much busied with transitory things. . . (p. 19).

To refuse to yield to "inordinate affections," to flee rash

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judgments and manfully to resist temptations of every sort, to such soul-strengthening exercises Thomas exhorts. Vividly, he sets forth the ways in which the early Christians became friends of God:

In them shined all perfection of virtue, true meekness, simple obedience, charity, patience, with other like virtues and gracious gifts of God (p. 32).

With all the fervor of his Christ-filled heart, he urges himself and all others to:

Leave vain things to them that will be vain, and take thou heed only to those things that our Lord commandeth thee. Shut fast the door of thy soul, that is to say, thy imagination, and keep it warily from beholding of any bodily thing, as much as thou mayest: and then lift up thy mind to the Lord Jesu, and open thy heart faithfully to Him, and abide with Him . . . for thou shalt not find so much peace without (pp. 42-43).

Thou mayest well be ashamed that thou hast not conformed thyself to Him more than thou hast done (p. 62).

Time lost cannot be called again. Without labour and diligence thou shalt never get virtue (p. 64).

Sombre sayings, those; and then, like sunshine: "He that followeth me," saith Christ, our Savior, "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

the second book

admonitions tending to things internal

The outline and purpose of Book Two may best be inferred from its chapter headings, five of which are:

"Of, inward conversation" ["The kingdom of God is within you, saith Christ our Saviour"] (chap. 1), "Of the love of Jesus above all things" (chap. 7), "Of the familiar friendship of Jesus" (chap. 8), "Of the small number of the lovers of the Cross" (chap. 11), and "Of the way of the Cross, and how profitable patience is in adversity" (chap. 12). Another translation of the title of the final chapter of Book Two is "Of the King's highway of the Cross," which has become famous.

I keep wondering, as I read this section of *The Imitation*, if Thomas had been deeply pondering our Lord's teaching in the fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. At so many points the two run parallel in thought. The "inward" man, according to Thomas, is one whose patience is crowned by steadfastness in suffering for and with Christ; whose whole existence flows toward God always and under every problem or provocation.

A man meeketh himself for his offences . . . and reconcileth himself to them whom he hath offended. [And him] God defendeth and comforteth; to him He inclineth Himself and sendeth him great plenty of His grace. . . . him also He . . . lifteth. . . up to glory (p. 71).

He first sets *himself* in peace and so may then "the better pacify others" (p. 72).

A good peaceful man turned all things to the best (p. 72). [For a man] to live peaceably with evil men, or with froward men that lack good manners and be untaught, or with those that be also contrarious unto us, is a great grace and a manly deed . . . (p. 73).

"Plainness" [purity] and "cleanness" [simplicity]

also characterize the person who gives himself to "inward things."

Plainness is in the intent, and cleanness is in the love. The good, true, and plain intent looketh toward God, but the clean love taketh assay [testing], and tasteth His sweetness. . . . If thou intend well, and if thou seek nothing but God and the profit of thine own soul, and that of thy neighbour, thou shalt have great inward liberty of mind. . . . A clean heart pierceth both heaven and hell (p. 74).

Thomas is very sure that no one can be good in Christ's sense of the word who does not stop blaming others for their sins and turn, instead, to an honest study before God of his own shortcomings. He does not mince words. The sins he denounces are not the "parlor sins" of a self-styled "nice people," easily dismissed as not too damning. They are, rather, evils that corrode the inmost soul; love of a temporal and material good; refusal of individual accountability to God; failure to recognize one's actual depravity and, turning from it, to lose oneself in God.

It is a great achievement, according to Thomas, "to be well conversant with Jesus" (p. 83).

Thy Beloved is of such nature that He will not admit any other love, for He will have alonely [all] the love of thy heart, and will sit therein as a king in his proper throne (p. 79).

If through negligence thou lose Him, what friend shall thou then have? . . . In Him and for Him both enemies and friends are to be beloved, and for them all we ought meekly to pray to Him, that so He may be beloved and honoured of all His creatures (pp. 83-84).

AN INTRODUCTION TO FIVE SPIRITUAL CLASSICS

Always stand strongly after the will of God, and turn all things that shall come to thee to the laud and praisings of His Name (p. 84).

There is none more rich, none more free, nor any of more power than he that can forsake himself and all passing things, and that truly can hold himself to be lowest and vilest of all others (p. 94).

As this surrendered man, at first unwilling and hesitant—"For it is not in the power of man gladly to bear the cross, to love the cross . . . to flee honours, gladly to sustain reproofs . . ." (p. 98)—begins to take his initial, faltering steps on the King's highway, he finds "strength from heaven" given him and "the world and the flesh . . . made subject" (p. 98) to him. Power rises from within him to attempt obedience to Jesus' hardest saying,

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Matt. 16:24).

THE THIRD BOOK

THE INWARD SPEAKING OF CHRIST TO A FAITHFUL SOUL

This is by far the longest of the four books. God himself—"not Moses or any other of the Prophets" (p. 106)—must speak.

They speak fair, but if Thou be still, they kindle not the heart . . . They shew the way, but Thou givest comfort to walk therein (p. 106). Speak then to me to the . . . amendment of all my life past (p. 107).

Men must "learn not to fly on their own wings but to hope and trust under my [God's] feathers" and "to live

before God in truth and in meekness."¹² To estimate oneself by the exacting standards of the holy God is essential, even though, as is sure to be the case, a true estimate shows a frightening state of affairs that call for thorough repentance and purposeful prayer for cleansing.

For of that vice whereby a man loveth himself inordinately, well-nigh dependeth all that ought groundly to be destroyed in man. And if that be truly overcome, anon shall follow great tranquillity and peace of conscience. But for as much as there be but few that labour to die to themselves . . . they lie still in their worldly comforts, and may in nowise rise up in spirit above themselves (p. 227).

The joyous results of listening to God and then implicitly obeying him spill over into chapters of pure happiness: "Of the marvellous effect of the love of God" (chap. 5); "That it is sweet and delectable to serve God, and to forsake the world" (chap. 10); "How our Lord God savoureth to His lover sweetly above all things and in all things" (chap. 34). But Thomas never lets his readers think that the way to such joy is easy. "The desires of the heart ought to be well examined and moderated" (cf. title of chap. 11, p. 131). Man must suffer and obey. He must fight stalwartly against the pride which always threatens to possess him. "The very true solace and comfort is in God alone" (p. 140) and "all our study and business of mind ought to be put in God" (p. 141). We "should forsake ourselves, and thrust all covetise [lust] out of our heart" (p. 177). The

¹² These two quotations are from Everyman's Library edition of *The Imitation of Christ*, 1937, Pages 111 and 101. (Cf. p. 121 of the Cardinal Edition.)

conclusion of the whole matter is the unforgettable prayer with which the book closes:

Defend and keep me amidst the manifold dangers of this corruptible life; and through Thy grace direct me by the way of peace into the country of everlasting clearness. Amen (p. 246).

Several sections of Book Three depict a soul desolate, disappointed, persecuted, "set little by," humbled and failing before his fellows. Note especially the chapter entitled: "How a man that is desolate ought to offer himself wholly to God" (chap. 50). Here and elsewhere, the attentive student will glimpse a suffering servant of God almost in despair, yet meeting with poise and in the obedience of Jesus the injustice of those in authority over him, struggling, heartbroken, but still confident in Almighty Power and Love. Can this man be Gerhard Groote? Gerhard Groote in the dismay into which he was plunged when the Bishop of Utrecht revoked his license to preach? It is worthwhile to peruse carefully these chapters which he may have written "from the depths of his overthrowing" and to witness in them the triumph, in his whole personality, of the Indwelling God.

the fourth book concerning the sacrament

Book Four, climax of *The Imitation*, treats of the prerequisites, the manner, and the life-changing results of a man's communion with God in Christ. In fifty pages or so, alive with vivid consciousness of his own unworthiness, with passionate love and with ardent seeking after

the Divine, the author discusses the inmost nature and the life-giving efficacy of the Holy Communion when entered upon with reverence and humility. The poignantly appealing prologue reads:

Come unto Me, saith our Lord, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. And the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me and I in him. The words that I speak unto you they are spirit, and they are life (p. 250).

Note the biblical, completely non-ecclesiastical, language, surprising, it seems to me, in a literary product of the time and the conditions under which Thomas—or was it Gerhard?—wrote this book.

In these chapter headings—"With how great reverence Christ is to be received" (chap. 1), "That the great goodness and charity of God is given to man in this blessed Sacrament" (chap. 2), "That it is very profitable oft to be houseled" [to receive the Holy Sacrament] (chap. 3), "Of the inward remembrance and exercise that a man ought to have afore the receiving of the Body of Christ" (chap. 6), "That he that shall be houseled ought to prepare himself thereto with great diligence" (chap. 12), "That a devout soul should greatly desire with all his heart to be united to Christ in this blessed Sacrament" (chap. 13)—and in the text itself lurk, if one looks for them, all sorts of theological problems that have convulsed the Church in past times. But it is clearly evident that to the mind of the writer they are

not present. His one eager, burning desire is to bring his readers and himself into ever more complete and increasingly renewed fellowship with his Lord. He assumes this sacrament as a rite of the church polity which he knows and follows, a rite of the mediaeval Church. But all that he says about it and about its possible effect on a man's inner life applies equally to any twentieth century Christian, Protestant or Catholic, ritualist or non-ritualist. By some amazing simplification he uses the particulars of his time and place as avenues into the universal. So that, whatever the form or lack of form with which those who truly seek Him may worship, they do actually, now as then, receive what Thomas calls "the nourishing of immortality" (p. 251). No need to argue about a *fact*. "In this Sacrament," he says, "spiritual grace is given, and the virtue that was lost in their soul is repaired, and the beauty that was deformed through sin returneth again" (p. 255).

Of the wonder opened for every man, he writes:

Thou sayest: Come ye all unto Me. But that Thou, Lord, hadst said it, who would believe it to be true? (p. 252).

Of the difficulty of honestly and meekly and undividedly entering into this most demanding of all relationships, he says:

Seldom am I gathered together in Thee, and more seldom am I purged from having my mind overmuch on worldly things (p. 253).

Keep thou mine heart, and my body immaculate, that in a glad and a pure conscience I may oftentimes celebrate Thy mysteries and receive them to my everlasting health . . . (p. 259).

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My soul coveteth to receive Thy body, my heart desireth to be united with Thee (p. 260).

Stir up my heart unto a full beholding of Thee, and deliver me from the great sloth and idleness in which I have been in time past (p. 262).

Our Lord saith:

If thou wilt that I come to thee and dwell with thee, cleanse thee of all the old filth of sin, and cleanse also the habitation of thine heart, making it pleasant and fair. Exclude the world and all the clamorous noise of sin; sit solitary as a sparrow alone upon the housetop, and think upon all thy offences with great bitterness of heart (p. 286).

Prepare thyself unto devotion before thou shalt be houseled . . . also diligently . . . keep thyself therein after the receiving of the Sacrament (pp. 287-288).

I am He to Whom thou must give all, so that from henceforth thou live not in thyself but only in me (p. 288).

SUMMARY OF THIS INTRODUCTION

I have developed at some length the foregoing synopsis of the content of *The Imitation* because such a summary or interpretation seems to be a necessary prelude to an initial study of this book. The language of most of the translations is archaic; many words are used with meanings just enough different from those to which we are accustomed to cause a real possibility of misunderstanding. When one is thoroughly familiar with the volume as a whole, these verbal difficulties lose their importance in the bright radiance of its presentation of

spiritual truth. Furthermore, the vocabulary and the ideology are, in great part, conditioned by the fact that the writer was a fourteenth or fifteenth century Christian with an ascetic, monastic, background. One must learn by frequent, careful reading and rereading to eliminate those ideas of his that are contrary to, or distortions of, biblical truth or of later Christian experience. Meanwhile, however, it will, I think, be a help to the student to have a preview with brief comment from one who is a present-day lay Protestant. The synopsis should be carefully considered before the book itself is read, not because this summary is one with which the reader will eventually agree fully, but because it will serve as a guide through what may appear at first a maze of unfamiliar ideas and expressions.

THE IMITATION — A PERSONAL BOOK

The Imitation is essentially a personal book. It deals with the intimate, inward spiritual life of the individual and speaks little, if at all, of Christian social action, of community welfare, of missionary enterprise or, indeed, of the Church itself as a force in society. Because of this lack of expressed social concern, it has been attacked as the voice of one who has alienated himself from the world and its complex life.

In this criticism I do not now concur, as I observe the effect upon my own religious outlook of the decade of intensive use of *The Imitation* as a devotional help. In the beginning I was disturbed by its failure to stress or even to mention unselfish Christian group activities, or the outreaching toward humanity in need, which are

basic in New Testament thought and in modern religious concepts. But I have come to recognize that the author does not mention these things because he is so completely convinced that they must, to have lasting value, be the *outgrowth* of the purification of the individual soul, and not its prelude. Only he who knows God well enough to be possessed by his Spirit and under his guidance can serve others with power and assurance. Take as authoritative the experiences of our Lord. Solitary fasting and victory over temptation in the wilderness preceded the opening of his ministry. A night of prayer, alone on a mountainside, determined his choice of the Twelve. The unutterable spiritual isolation of Gethsemane issued in the complete sacrifice of himself, for others, on the cross of Calvary. No one is strong to serve Christ in the hurly-burly of the world who has not, through solitude and prayer, become really acquainted with him. He only is qualified to be a "brother of the common life" who is first a brother of the Lord.

Do not misunderstand me. Any form of religious observance, no matter how valuable in itself, may lead to overindulgence and to excess. One who prays long hours alone *may* be thrilling himself, neglecting his real duty and not serving God at all. But the odds are against this result, for God is present at the interview, and his spirit is mighty to convict of sin and to bring about the amendment of the sinner. That Thomas recognizes the danger of too constant withdrawal, however, there are many proofs in *The Imitation*. Note particularly the chapter, "That it is good that a man give himself to meek bodily labours, when he feeleth not himself disposed to high

works of devotion" (p. 220). Frequently one finds the author's practical good sense running athwart the natural currents of the monastic life and its ascetic practices. Leaving such practices aside, one has, I think, in our overwhelmingly "outward" epoch little to fear from solitary seeking after the Divine, and very much to gain in vital power to serve. Men need so desperately the Christ we can then mediate to them.

SUGGESTED USES OF THE IMITATION FOR GROUP STUDY

Because *The Imitation* is, as we have seen, intensely personal in its orientation, it would seem at first thought to be a book for private devotional reading only, and not for group study. Further consideration, however, suggests that it can be used with telling effect as a study book for Woman's Societies or for circles, for Wesleyan Service Guilds, and even for special study groups having more time for detailed research. The synopsis given earlier in this chapter might well be the basis for the initial study by all members of the class or circle. Then, the many questions that will surely arise from it could profitably be discussed under the guidance of the group leader. Among these questions there will be many requiring additional information. Such problems could be made the basis for papers to be written after inquiry and investigation of historical and other sources. For example, persons to whom words are a delight as well as a puzzle might be assigned comparisons of Thomas' use of words (as found in the translation, of course), with our present-day English meanings and connota-

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tions. Take, for instance, the word "creature" as found in *The Imitation* and parallel it with today's usage.

Another subject, fascinating in itself and, in addition, serving to acquaint the student ever more fully with the content of the book, is this: Do all the chapters seem of equal value? If not, try to discover why. There are times when *The Imitation* seems tiresomely repetitious both in phraseology and in ideas. Study it with a view to ascertaining whether the iterations are mere repetition or whether they may be fresh ways of stating the same facts, or exhortations, or warnings, iterations that have cumulative effect and hence have force in psychological emphasis.

Class discussion might center at one session about the very important question: Is *The Imitation* in agreement at all points with the recorded life and teachings of our Lord? If not, where, how, and why does it diverge from the Gospel accounts? Much could be learned from consideration of the historical background of the period during which *The Imitation* was probably composed. For example, remembering that Gerhard Groote lived from 1340 to 1384 and Thomas from 1380 to 1471, one finds it interesting to recall that Geoffrey Chaucer lived from 1340 to 1400 and that his poem, "The Love Unfeigned," closely parallels parts of *The Imitation*. Petrarch, in Italy (1304-1374), wrote three essays significantly titled "Concerning Contempt of the World," "Concerning the Solitary Life," and "Concerning True Wisdom." Perhaps Thomas was not so far out of the current of the thought of his time, after all! In 1429, when he was forty-nine, Joan of Arc raised the siege of

Orleans, and in 1431 she was burned at the stake. The battle of Agincourt was fought in 1415, when Thomas was thirty-five. His long life covered, in whole or in part, the reigns of three English kings (Henry IV, V, and VI) and the childhood of a fourth, Henry VII. Why does he mention none of this in his book?

Sidelights on the value of *The Imitation* in helping to mold the religious development of great men and women would be gained by the compilation of a list of some of those who have acknowledged their debt to it. For instance, it is said that a well-marked copy was found in Edith Cavell's cell after her execution. Lively discussion will be stirred by the questions: Could a modern man have written this book? Give reasons for your answer. Has it present-day significance? How? Does it meet or fail to meet modern ethical, social, and religious standards? Show how it serves—or fails to serve—contemporary religious needs. Discussion and even controversy in the class will be all to the good, for they will set class members to thinking, comparing, and revising their own religious practices and points of view.

IN PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

Thus the class sessions should be very valuable, but it is abundantly evident that they are only preliminary to a vital use of *The Imitation*. It is intended for the individual, alone in search of God, and should be so employed after group consideration has provided background and clarification. Because, properly understood, this book can transform one's entire life, its comprehension is a matter of profound import. In a way it is a

dangerous volume; it has such revolutionary implications for one's everyday living.

Its thesis—neither more nor less than unity of a human soul with the Divine as revealed in Jesus Christ—demands unconditional devotion of all energy and ability to him. With remarkable application of practical means to intense and passionate religious devotions, the author uncompromisingly insists that God shall have first place in every smallest detail of living. A vista is opened down the path of such self-surrender, which shows this as the only way to spiritual understanding and to efficient service to others, as well. A rough road, this; not easy for Jesus himself on earth, much less for us, his "little servants."

How does one achieve this union? Thomas says: "Exercise thyself daily in the life and passion of our Lord." Let him be the gauge by which every thought, every activity, every hope is measured. "Like as iron put in the fire loseth his rust and shall be made bright, so a man turning him wholly to God is freed and taken from sloth and changed into a new man."¹³ (Cf. p. 74.) Will this union affect more than one's own character? Will oneness with Christ help meet the problems of the world? How? These questions and others as weighty will arise and demand honest and reverent thought. New insights gained should be practiced. Sins realized and repented of should, by the grace of God, be conquered.

Thus it will come to pass that the Divine Spirit, through this old book, will renew in yet another life the miracle of transformation so often wrought before.

¹³ Everyman's Library edition.

Chapter Three

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

A. The Author

1. HIS TIMES
 - a) Church and State
 - b) Peasants in Lorraine
2. HIS CONVERSION
3. HIS WORK
4. HIS SPIRITUAL LIFE

B. Our Practice of God's Presence

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DEVOTED LIFE
2. REDEDICATION AND GROWTH

C. Legacies From the Author

1. ON A WAY OF SETTING THE MIND ENTIRELY ON GOD
2. ON AN INTERPRETATION OF LOVE FOR GOD
3. ON DIRECTING ALL ACTIVITIES UNTO GOD
4. ON PRAYER
5. ON FAITH AND CERTAINTY
6. ON HUMILITY
7. ON A WAY OF LIFE

D. Brother Lawrence's Challenge to Us

More than fifty times in the Gospels, Jesus says that he does nothing, says nothing, even thinks nothing, except what his Father gives him to do and say and think. To be like Jesus means to be like that. Probably nobody in all the last 2,000 years has come closer to that experience of Jesus than Brother Lawrence. His story is especially touching because he learned to walk with his Lord in the kitchen while washing dishes.

FRANK LAUBACH

the practice of the presence of god

the author

It has been more than two hundred and fifty years since Nicholas Herman, whom we know as Brother Lawrence, lived his quiet, unobtrusive life. The quality of his life was such that those who knew him were convinced that in a very real sense he walked and talked with God.

How did it come about that this obscure man who was neither philosopher nor scholar acquired that treasure, that more abundant life, sought vainly by many who went before him and by many who follow? Shall we find several volumes in which are carefully prepared rules of conduct, formulas, methods of procedure for living a holy life? No, there is nothing of this kind for us. We have only excerpts from four *Conversations*, sixteen short *Letters*, a short paper called *Maxims* which was found among his effects, and two brief sketches of the Life and the Character of Nicholas Herman, published after his death.¹

However, these have such warmth and depth and offer such encouragement and promise that few are able to

¹From "*The Practice of the Presence of God*" by Brother Lawrence. Arranged and edited by Douglas V. Steere, p. 4. Copyright, 1950 by The Upper Room, Nashville, Tennessee. Used by permission.

AN INTRODUCTION TO FIVE SPIRITUAL CLASSICS

read them without experiencing a glow of hope, a rekindling of faith, a pensive longing to give themselves to God entirely and let love for him motivate every thought and act, as did Brother Lawrence.

The preface to the original French edition of his writings (A.D. 1692) reads as follows:

Although death has carried off last year many of the Order of the Carmelite Dechausses, brethren who have left in dying rare legacies of lives of virtue; Providence, it would seem, has desired that the eyes of men should be cast chiefly on Brother Lawrence. . . .

Several persons having seen a copy of one of his letters, have desired to see more; and to meet this wish, care has been taken to collect as many as possible of those which Brother Lawrence wrote with his own hand. . . .

All Christians will find herein much that is edifying. Those in 'the thick of the great world will learn from these letters how greatly they deceive themselves, seeking for peace and joy in the false glitter of the things that are seen, yet temporal: those who are seeking the Highest Good will. . . . see herein a brother, busied as they are in outward affairs, who in the midst of the most exacting occupations, has learnt so well to accord action with contemplation, that for the space of more than forty years he hardly ever turned from the Presence of God (p. 2).²

²*Brother Lawrence—His Letters and Conversations—on the Practice of the Presence of God.* Used by permission of The Forward Movement Publications, Cincinnati, Ohio. These paragraphs and all other selections from this booklet quoted subsequently are used by permission. All quotations are identified only by the number of the page on which they appear in the classic, as in this instance.

HIS TIMES

One of the reasons most frequently given by Christians of our time for failure to live more godly lives is the character of the highly socialized and scientific age in which we live. We think of life as being much more complex in the twentieth century than in the seventeenth; that occurrences which might have produced awe in the Christian of that time are easily explained now by science; that the multiple demands upon our thoughts, time, and energy preclude opportunity for the intense spiritual experiences described by Brother Lawrence. If we now take a brief look at the times in which he lived, we shall find that those times were strangely like our own.

Nicholas Herman was born of peasant parents in the French province of Lorraine in 1611. For more than a hundred years the breach between Catholics and Protestants had been growing. There was much disorder and religious bitterness in Europe. The Edict of Nantes (1598), during the reign of Henry IV (of the Bourbons), had ended a series of civil wars during which French Huguenots had been persecuted. The edict gave religious freedom and full civil rights to Protestants. The problem, however, was far from being solved. Not only was there strife because of the breaking off of "reformed" churches from the Catholic body, but also because of the separation of civil and religious powers. Civil rulers still claimed divine right to rule and insisted upon political supremacy in their own branches of the Church. Many church officials, popes and cardinals, became shrewd and sometimes unscrupulous politicians in

their efforts to perpetuate a Roman Catholic hierarchy superior to that of kings.

church and state

The rulers were faced with a pressing problem, that of granting religious tolerance without interfering with national unity.

For the first few years(1618-1620)of the Thirty Years' War, the policy of France was indecisive. However, when the first period of the war had left Germany spent and prostrate, and when word was received of the frightful massacre of Protestants in Italy in 1620 with the approval of the cardinal, the king of France, Louis XIII, became aroused. Being a strict Catholic, Louis doubtless would have preferred supporting the Catholic countries, but circumstances and the general tendencies of the time were too strong for his preferences. Under the guidance of Cardinal Richelieu, France became first a secondary power and then a principal in the Thirty Years' War.

There is not space enough in this study for a detailed description of the turbulence of the seventeenth century: the bloody religious wars, with the persecution and massacre of the Huguenots; the changes in boundaries affecting rulers and peoples; the struggles for power; the social wretchedness; the political plots and their ramifications.

"History is like the face of a clock; we see the hands that move and mark the time, but not the wheels and secret springs whereby it goes."

PEASANTS IN LORRAINE

Into this violent world was born Nicholas Herman. There was, however, a way of life far removed from royal courts and fields of battle, the life of the peasant folk in the province of Lorraine. This was a simple life, but one requiring much hard work, because the livelihood of the people depended upon their care of crops and cattle. Living standards were low. Families accepted as inevitable the discomforts of life. Changing weather might destroy crops; disease might kill cattle; but both disasters were part of life. Nevertheless, life in Lorraine offered more than hard work, anxiety, hunger, and other distress.

The winters were cold and misty, but the summers were pleasant. There were in Lorraine plowed fields, orchards, farms, streams, flowers, and trees.

There was an intricate design in the warp and woof of the seventeenth century. The *Douai* (Roman Catholic) translation of the Bible first appeared in France at Douai in 1610 (the New Testament had been printed at Rheims in 1582). In the same year that Nicholas Herman was born (1611), the King James Version of the Bible was printed in England.

This was the age of Bunyan and his *Pilgrim's Progress*; of Francis Bacon, the statesman and philosopher; of Descartes, the father of modern philosophy; and of Alexander Pope and his *Essay on Man*. The Reformation had come; and, seeking a place to worship God according to the dictates of their own hearts, men had begun to colonize a new world, America.

HIS CONVERSION

It is true that God manifests himself to us in many ways. The vision of God in the Temple filled Isaiah with awe. Because of it, he rededicated his life to the doing of God's will. Paul became a changed man after his experience on the Damascus road. There was no mistaking the light from heaven or the voice which admonished and directed him; there was no question of his blindness. Not every person who comes to God comes by way of an experience involving supernatural phenomena. However, without exception, all who come to him tell of a changed attitude and new outlook on life. Small things become great, and great things become small. A familiar object suddenly may take on a new appearance; an old process becomes awe-inspiring, and old ideas take on new meaning and interpretation.

Persons have been reborn into the realm of spirituality by way of seeing a starlit night, a tree, a flower, a mountain. Nicholas Herman, from the information we are able to gather, did not have a spectacular conversion. When he was eighteen years old, perhaps he took a walk one winter day. He had seen the countryside of Lorraine every winter, cold and barren, with trees stripped of leaves, and bushes without flowers or foliage. To poor people, winter usually means hardship, sacrifice, scarcity, and need. It is no wonder, then, that the boy could gain fresh courage by remembering that the tree he observed now was once not bare and brown but green and full of leaves. It was doubtless the thought that the tree would be renewed that gave rise to meditation. How would it be renewed? By the power of God

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

by whom the world is constantly renewed. "And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit. . .after his kind. . ."(Gen. 1:12).

No longer did Nicholas see the barren, cold countryside, but what it would be like by God's power, for God is Nature's architect. There would be green woods, lush meadows, sparkling waters, buttercups and clover, cherry trees in bloom, cowslips and dandelions turning green fields to gold. It was in this spirit that Nicholas took his first step toward God. A friend to whom Nicholas gave an account of his conversion experience later wrote the following as what Brother Lawrence had told him:

. . .he received a high view of the providence and power of God, which has never since been effaced from his soul. That this view had perfectly set him loose from the world, and kindled in him such a love for God that he could not tell whether it had increased during the more than forty years he had lived since (p. 5).

HIS WORK

There is scant information concerning the years between the conversion of Nicholas and his entering the monastery. He was a professional soldier in the 'Thirty Years' War. We do not know why he decided to join in the fighting. Did he do it out of sheer boredom and in search of excitement and adventure? Was he using this opportunity to rid himself of parental control and gain his independence? Had earning a livelihood become such a task that he decided to see if he could help

the family by becoming a mercenary? Was it out of patriotism? We have no way of knowing the answers to these questions.

We do know that Nicholas must have had some painful experiences as a soldier:

Here he was compelled to learn how cheap life had become in a war that abused, trampled, robbed, shot, hanged, burned and starved men, women, and children alike, and where there were no lines between soldiers and civilians in the misery that cut the population. . . almost in half.³

There were no international rules governing the treatment of captured enemy soldiers or civilians. One account states that Nicholas was once captured and charged with spying. He denied the charges with such unconcern and indifference that the penalty of hanging was not carried out. As he was severely wounded in the leg, he was forced to give up soldiering, and returned home. For the rest of his life, he experienced periods of discomfort with the leg and walked with a decided limp.

He had a clear understanding of the problems facing a soldier, for in one of his letters he wrote of a soldier:

Let him think of Him as often as he can, especially in the greatest dangers. A little lifting up of the heart suffices. A little remembrance of God, one act of inward worship, though upon a march and sword in hand, are prayers which, however short, are nevertheless very acceptable to God; and far from lessening a soldier's courage in occasions of danger, they best serve to fortify it (p. 36).

³Steere, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Later, Nicholas found employment as a footman in the household of a Frenchman, Monsieur Fieubert, attending the carriages and assisting the butler. Nicholas tells of how awkward he was at the job, how he broke almost everything he put his hands on. He was greatly embarrassed and perturbed by his awkwardness and finally gave up the job.

How far Nicholas had developed in his spiritual life at this time we do not know. It is obvious that he was not satisfied with his spiritual status and had the urge to devote his entire life to religious pursuits. He had planned to live the life of a hermit, but after living alone for a while he decided that the experiment was not successful. He had an uncle who was a member of the Carmelite Order and encouraged him to join it. (The Carmelite Order was founded on Mt. Carmel about 1156.) Nicholas applied for membership and was accepted, perhaps in 1651, when he was forty years old. We may assume that he took the vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience as did all who entered a religious order. He became a lay brother, was assigned to kitchen duty in the Paris monastery, and was given the name of Brother Lawrence.

his spiritual life

What is so distinctive about the life of Brother Lawrence? He could lay no claim to fame because of his parentage. He produced no new system of theology, no new philosophical concepts. He *did* discover a way of life! Those who observed his way or conversed with him knew that he had found that which many have sought,

a richer, more abundant life through the abiding presence of God.

Cardinal de Noailles sent his vicar, Monsieur de Beaufort, to ask Brother Lawrence how one could learn to live a virtuous life—the vicar later recorded excerpts from four conversations with Brother Lawrence—and from him received a simple but profound precept:

That we should establish in ourselves a sense of God's Presence by continually conversing with Him (p. 6).

Brother Lawrence further explains this idea in his spiritual maxims:

That practice which is alike the most holy, the most general, and the most needful in the spiritual life is *the practice of the Presence of God*. It is *the schooling of the soul to find its joy in His Divine Companionship*, holding with Him at all times and at every moment humble and loving converse, without set rule or stated method, in all time of our temptation and tribulation, in all time of our dryness of soul and disrelish of God, yes, and even when we fall into unfaithfulness and actual sin.

Since you cannot but know that God is with you in all you undertake, that He is at the very depth and centre of your soul, why should you not thus pause an instant from time to time in your outward business, and even in the act of prayer, to worship Him within your soul, to praise Him, to entreat His aid, to offer Him the service of your heart, and give Him thanks for all His loving-kindnesses and tender-mercies?⁴

⁴Brother Lawrence, *Spiritual Maxims and Gathered Thoughts* (London: H. R. Allenson, Ltd.), pp. 14, 15, and 16. Used by permission.

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

It is interesting to observe that Brother Lawrence does not attempt to set up rules or a system of ethics or morals. He simply set out to let God possess his entire and complete being. Although the customary pattern of monastery life called for prayer, devotion, and self-negation, Brother Lawrence went beyond these. His self-denial consisted of those practices that are required and expected of a monk—giving up pleasurable food and all activities of entertainment—but Brother Lawrence pursued this course with a complete forgetfulness of self. He learned to live *with* God, to keep his mind constantly *on* God.

OUR PRACTICE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

As we seek to know God better, each of us discovers that there are no hard and fast rules whereby we may attain this goal, and that it is not reached solely through our endeavors. We have been told that we shall learn to express our faith not by words alone but by our every thought and act, that this faith accepts the promises of God with unwavering trust, and that gradually our values will change so that Christ will become to us the *all*. Day and night our meditations will be of him, and our actions will be controlled by him. That this achievement is not just for the scholarly and learned is exemplified in Brother Lawrence. God has often used the weak and the simple to confound the strong and the wise. His promise to fill our lives to overflowing is for everyone who sincerely hungers and thirsts after righteousness. The well is never dry. The source of supply is adequate; it is in fact as limitless as God himself.

If we think of Brother Lawrence as only an idealist, if we make excuses for ourselves by contrasting our times with his, if we feel that the goal he reached is beyond our power to attain, then any effort we may make will be half-hearted and doomed to failure. On the other hand, if we believe with all our heart and mind and strength the words of Jesus, we know that such an attainment is possible for all Christians, and that it is desired by God. "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DEVOTED LIFE

Perhaps it would be well for us now, at this very moment, to resolve to explore new spiritual realms for a more meaningful, a richer, and a fuller life. A good way to begin is to take a look backwards at our own conversion.

The conversion experience has been variously described by Christians as a distinctively different occurrence defying comparison. St. Francis of Assisi, upon his conversion, was filled with utter compassion and gentleness and desire to serve others. There are no *writings* by him as to *how* he lived in the consciousness of God, but no one more clearly *demonstrated* a way. By giving up all and going forth in meekness and poverty, he set for others an outstanding example. In everything common, he saw the Divine and lived a life of continual dedication. Accredited to him is this beautiful prayer:

I beseech Thee, O God, that the flaming yet sweet power of Thy love may wrest and absorb my soul from all things that are not Heaven's; that I may die out of love

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of Thy love—as Thou didst descend to die for love of my love.⁵

St. Francis said of prayer, "In prayer we converse with God, and hear Him speak, and we live the life of the Angels. . . ." ⁶

Meister Eckhart declared:

There is a capacity in my soul which is unreservedly open to God. Of this I am as sure as that I live. Nothing is as close to me as God. He is nearer to me than I am to my self. His presence is my being.⁷

It would seem that God has granted to some the blessing of an unclouded vision of himself. Is this because these persons are willing to do more and see more than others? Have we not at some time in our Christian experience entered into the Holy of Holies, into the very presence of God himself? Was the experience short-lived? Have we tried to know that blessed and supreme ecstasy? Or have we rationalized and said that in a world such as ours one must be practical and keep one's feet on the ground, that such experiences cannot be lasting? Brother Lawrence's experiences and those of many others tend to indicate that it is possible literally to practice the presence of God.

REDEDICATION AND GROWTH

Our first step may well be the reconsecration and rededication of our lives to God, with the conscious pur-

⁵Sheldon Cheney, *Men Who Have Walked With God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1945), p. 181. Used by permission.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Op. cit.*, p. 195.

pose of establishing a sense of God's presence with us at all times. We must not just quote glibly such passages as, "Lo, I am with you always. . ." and "Where I am, there ye may be also." God *is* ever with us, but it remains for us neither to ignore his presence, nor to forget it, nor to lose awareness of it. We must learn not to think of God as being with us only at certain times or in certain places. Brother Lawrence discovered that God indeed dwells neither in certain mountains nor in Jerusalem's temple; rather he dwells in the hearts and minds of those who love him and who share their lives with him. God is in the tallest office building with its tons of brick, stone, steel, and cement. God is in the crowded streets of cities, in busses, trolleys, subways, stores. He is in the quiet park, on lakes and rivers. He is in the woods and mountains and streams. He is in the plowed fields, pastures, and farmyards. He is in our homes, be they palatial or humble. He is *with* us in our most precious moments, in moments of bitterest defeat, and in the monotony of everyday living. It is unfortunate that most of us acknowledge his presence only when we feel the need of it or when it is convenient for us to do so.

As we think of this new venture, are there doubts and reservations in our minds? Will it be less easy for us in our environment *literally* to practice His presence than it was for Brother Lawrence in the confines of a monastery? Must one be a mystic in order to have an experience similar to his? If by *mystic* we mean someone with a personal inner experience, then the answer is yes. The only sure way one can gain strength and life is through personal communion with God. Mysticism is not merely

a personal experience; it is a thought-out "doctrine or belief that direct knowledge of God, of spiritual truth," is possible through spiritual insight.

What wonderful insight Brother Lawrence possessed! What insight *we* may acquire if we are patient and faithful!

legacies from the author

Let us look now to see what help he offers in acquiring new spiritual insight. And let us not be discouraged, for he advised Monsieur de Beaufort:

That we should not wonder, if, in the beginning, we often failed in our endeavors. . . . (p. 16).

on a way of setting the mind entirely on God

Brother Lawrence's legacy to us has been neither a multiplicity of words, a system of thought, nor a ritual. He would have us know that not all virtue is to be found in any one method and that different methods succeed with different souls. He does answer for us the question as to whether Christianity can help us to live a good life. It is well that he has not offered a stereotyped spiritual process, for this we do not need. He demonstrated the way of "total forgetfulness of self by having the mind set entirely on God and God's purposes, a readjustment of everything with God as the real center of all."⁸

⁸T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, Inc., 1917), p. 71. Used by permission.

ON AN INTERPRETATION OF LOVE FOR GOD

To us Brother Lawrence has bequeathed his understanding and interpretation of love. He "resolved to make the love of God the *end* of all his actions. . . . That he was pleased when he could take up a straw from the ground for the love of God. . . . (p. 7).

Once he was so troubled about his soul's welfare that he felt that he would be lost, but happily ceased from worrying after he reasoned in this manner:

I engaged in a religious life only for the love of God, and I have endeavored to act only for Him; whatever becomes of me, whether I be lost or saved, I will always continue to act purely for the love of God. I shall have this good at least, that till death I shall have done all that is in me to love Him (p. 8).

ON DIRECTING all ACTIVITIES UNTO GOD

Although Brother Lawrence had an aversion to the menial tasks in the kitchen, he accustomed himself to do everything for the love of God; and this he did without complaint for fifteen years, for he found "pleasure in every condition by doing little things for the love of God" (p. 10). Since he accepted willingly his obligation to love God in all things, he had no need to be told what to do. He was not discouraged by his faults but "confessed them to God" and "resumed his usual practice of love and adoration." He thought that all possible kinds of mortification might be practiced (fasting and other forms of self-negation), but if they were devoid

of the love of God, they were of no value.

Brother Lawrence relates:

That the most excellent method he had found of going to God was that of *doing our common business* without any view of pleasing men [Gal. 1.10; Eph. 6: 5-6], and (as far as we are capable) *purely for the love of God* (p. 16).

Having found in many books different methods of going to God, and divers practices of the spiritual life, I thought this would serve rather to puzzle me than facilitate what I sought after, which was nothing else than how to become wholly God's. This made me resolve to give the *all* for the *all*; so after having given myself wholly to God, to make all the satisfaction I could for my sins, *I renounced, for the love of Him, everything that was not His, and I began to live as if there was none but He and I in the world* (pp. 21-22).

Most of us have thought and talked often of God's love for us; of the gift of his Son, our Savior, and of the great love Jesus had for us in the laying down of his life. Seldom it is that many of us speak of our love for God. Not so, with Brother Lawrence. He maintains that to know God, we must often think of him, and when we come to *love* him, we shall then also think of him often, for our hearts will be with our treasure. This is true, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21).

We need to recognize the reciprocity of love and desist from presuming that it is enough for God to love us. In a very real sense, God wants us to love him.

ON PRAYER

Brother Lawrence considered:

That it was a great delusion to think that the times of prayer ought to differ from other times; that we are as strictly obliged to adhere to God by action in the time of action as by prayer in the season of prayer (p. 16).

...his view of prayer was nothing else but a sense of the Presence of God, his soul being at that time insensible to everything but Divine Love; and that when the appointed times of prayer were past, he found no difference, because he still continued with God, praising and blessing Him with all his might, so that he passed his life in continual joy; yet hoped that God would give him somewhat to suffer when he should have grown stronger (p. 16).

He expressed a similar view when he was questioned by his Superior in the monastery. At the beginning of his novitiate, he used the designated prayer time thinking of God, impressing upon his mind and heart ideas having to do with the divine existence. He used no time in studied reasonings and elaborate meditations. He resolved to live in a continual sense of God's presence and if possible never to forget him.

He proceeded about his work after filling his mind with thoughts of the Infinite Being; and, after considering his job requirements and fulfilling them, he spent every available moment in prayer—before, during, and after his tasks.

He applied prayer to everything: prayers of thanks for God's benefits, small or great; prayers for pardon for his weaknesses; prayers for guidance and direction;

prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

The time of business [said he] does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament (p. 20).

On first thought, nothing seems farther removed from the Sacrament of Holy Communion than the heat and bustle, the pots and pans in a kitchen. Those who knew Brother Lawrence attest to the fact that he recognized no such separation.

It is clear that to him prayer took on no liturgical form. He must certainly have obeyed his superiors in the monastery; yet he permitted nothing to cause him to deviate from his purpose. Prayer to him was not a crutch upon which to lean, not an art or science. He formed the holy habit of continuous prayer. We too may form this habit if we persevere.

Evelyn Underhill says of prayer:

In prayer, we open up our souls to the Divine energy and grace perpetually beating in on us; and receive that energy and grace, in order that it may be transmuted by our living zest into work—may cleanse, invigorate and slowly change us. . . .

. . . all the machinery of prayer has but one very simple object—our loving intercourse with God. . . .

In all normal cases, God feeds and leads the soul very gently. Growth is gradual.⁹

⁹Evelyn Underhill, *Collected Papers*, ed. Lucy Menzies (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., Inc., 1946), pp. 40, 41, and 44. Used by permission.

Prayer may be of many kinds: the vocal prayer offered in an assembled gathering or congregation in which one person attempts to voice the prayers of all gathered, serving as a spokesman for communal needs and blessings; the unspoken prayer of meditation, with quiet and simple reflection; prayers of praise, adoration, hope, and aspiration; petitions for guidance and direction. Prayer is beautifully described in James Montgomery's poem "Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire."¹⁰ Quiet prayer often takes us out of ourselves because of our ecstasy and intense awareness of God's presence.

Prayer is a spiritual activity. Prayer was life to Brother Lawrence, and life was prayer. We too must learn the real meaning and value of prayer, and "...in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6). Then we shall know the peace and contentment that Brother Lawrence knew, for "...the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7).

on faith and certainty

Brother Lawrence gives reassurance to all of us whose faith may not be strong. He had known "want of faith." There was a period of four years when he was not sure of salvation. He finally discovered that his trouble arose from lack of faith; once he recognized this, he simply "placed his sins betwixt him and God, as it were to tell Him that he did not deserve His favors. . . ." (p. 8).

¹⁰*The Methodist Hymnal*, No. 303.

He makes it clear that in his trouble he consulted God and gained reassurance because he lost his anxiety in the knowledge that the pardoning of sins is granted because of the blood of Jesus Christ. He therefore vowed to love him with all his heart. God seemed to have granted the greatest favors to the greatest sinners—this was a signal monument to his mercy.

We are doomed when the vision of God is withdrawn from us. God wants our trust and honors it; from such we receive much grace. We demonstrate our faith in God when we are no longer worried and anxious, confident that as long as we are trying to do his will all things will work together for good.

The core of Christianity, according to Brother Lawrence, is made up of faith, hope, and love. Said he:

...all things are possible to him who *believes*...less difficult to him who *hopes*...easy to him who *loves*...
(p. 17).

From his example we learn to launch out on faith, to take God at his word and rely on his promises. We can never know the extent of God's promises until we exercise our faith and accept his generous offers.

on humility

News of the spiritual accomplishments of Brother Lawrence traveled throughout the community. Frequent requests came for interviews and letters explaining this practice of God's presence. Brother Lawrence had not gone about expounding and boasting of his success. It

was that those with whom he had occasion to come in contact were able to observe how he lived. When the Mother of a religious order for women requested him to communicate with her to explain the method by which he arrived at the habitual sense of God's presence, he hesitated to do so, but because she was so persistent, he did it on the terms that she not show the letters to anyone.

Monsieur de Beaufort relates that in the very first conversation, Brother Lawrence led him to know that his only concern was to give light, if possible, to those desirous of serving God, but if this were not his (M. de Beaufort's) major interest, then he should not visit him again.

Brother Lawrence was called up by his Superior and questioned about his practice of God's presence. He hesitated to explain, thinking it rather presumptuous that a lay brother should teach or inform his Superior in the church.

His whole attitude was one of humility. His motives were pure and unselfish. He had discovered a method which helped him to know God better; he should share it with others, but not use it to bring popularity to himself. This gift to him, this discovery, was an undeserved favor which God had bestowed in abundance, along with many other blessings. None of his accomplishments reflected any credit on himself, for always he prayed this prayer: "Lord, I cannot do this unless thou enablest me," and received more than sufficient strength.

Many times he went before God "as a criminal before

a judge," recognizing his guilt and expecting just punishment, but always, before much time had passed, his heart became aware of God as the Heavenly Father loving and caring for his children regardless of their weaknesses.

How can we be other than humble before God? Whatever we have done is little compared with what we should have done. There are many things we have neglected to do. Much that we do is imperfectly done. It would be well for us to accept the suggestion of the Old Testament prophet: "...do justly. . .love mercy, and. . .walk humbly with thy God" (Mic. 6:8).

on a way of life

What we do over and over becomes easier with the doing. Brother Lawrence repeatedly reminds us that to live continuously in the presence of God is not easy:

That in order to form a habit of conversing with God continually, and referring all we do to Him, we must at first apply to Him with some diligence; but that after a little care we should find His love inwardly excite us to it without any difficulty (p. 8).

He grants that at first the effort will require diligence, but he encourages us to go on regardless of the difficulties that may be encountered. He offers no crutch to lean upon. The need is for a resolute heart despite the difficulties. He used his will to drive away from his mind everything that was capable of interrupting his thought of God.

We need to watch lest useless thoughts slip in to spoil our conversation with God. These should be rejected immediately, and when our thoughts wander, as they will, we should turn them back to things of God.

One does not become holy all at once. This should be a sobering but encouraging thought for us. Our growth and development are gradual. We must resolve to renounce everything that does not lead to God and learn to be absolutely dependent upon him. Brother Lawrence tells us that once this is begun, God gives "as in a clear mirror," answers to our requests for guidance. There can be no doubt that the way to heaven lies in perfect resignation to God, a way in which we shall always find sufficient light for our conduct.

Brother Lawrence assures us that *everyone* can converse directly with God, some more closely than others, but that God knows what each of us is capable of doing. We should begin this new way of life, for "perhaps He is just waiting for one generous resolution on our part."¹¹ This is too big a venture for us to attempt on our own, but we have the assurance that God will be with us to help us, and by constant practice we may some day perfect the habit of living moment by moment in the awareness of the presence of God.

What will be our reward after all our efforts, trials, and failures? Success must come to us, and at that time we shall know that no price was too high to pay for such a reward.

¹¹Steere, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

God's treasure, he says, is like an infinite ocean, yet a little wave of feeling, passing with the moment, contents us. Blind as we are, we hinder God and stop the current of His graces. But when He finds a soul permeated with a living faith, He pours into it His graces and favors plentifully; into the soul they flow like a torrent which, after being forcibly stopped against its ordinary course, when it has found a passage, spreads with impetuosity its pent-up flood (p. 24).

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I say again, let us enter into ourselves. Time presses, there is no room for delay; our souls are at stake. . . .for, in the spiritual life, not to advance is to go back. But those whose spirits are stirred by the breath of the Holy Spirit go forward even in sleep (p. 25).

BROTHER LAWRENCE'S CHALLENGE TO US

This new way of life will call for new attitudes resulting from our closer walk with God. We learn to accept—even to welcome—suffering. Brother Lawrence reasoned that after such great joy as he experienced in the presence of God, he should have a turn at pain and suffering. He was not uneasy about this, for he knew well that God would give him strength to bear whatever came upon him. In perfect resignation he resolved to endure anything for God.

Many Christians have learned to turn suffering and pain into blessings. Pain greater than any physical suffering can occur when, once having known God, we lose our closeness to him.

AN INTRODUCTION TO FIVE SPIRITUAL CLASSICS

Failure no longer has the sting of defeat when we learn to practice the presence of God. We simply confess our faults and weaknesses and admit our inability to do *anything* without God's help. The prayer used at such times by Brother Lawrence was:

I shall never do otherwise [than fail] if Thou leavest me to myself; it is Thou who must hinder my falling, and mend what is amiss (p. 9).

When we act toward God and speak with him in simplicity, imploring his assistance in our affairs, there is no need for our continuing to worry. We simply rise after every fall and try again.

Anxieties have no place in our lives when we embark upon this new life. Brother Lawrence learned to be calm and unhurried in his everyday tasks, regardless of the confusion around him. He organized his tasks to do things "in season" and proceeded in the even tenor of his way.

How wonderful it would be for us who live in a world of hustle and bustle to calm ourselves and not allow our environment to throw us off the course we have begun! It is possible to be more aware of God in day-to-day activities than in periods especially set aside for devotions.

Self-evaluation takes on a different complexion when made in terms of Christ's way of life. As we attempt to examine what we really are,

"...we should find ourselves worthy of all contempt, and not deserving indeed the name of Christians. . . .we

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

should not wonder that troubles, temptations, oppositions, and contradictions happen to us from men" (p. 17).

Many times God must humble us by pain and labor until our only recourse is to rely solely upon him and to do everything unto him.

There is much for us to learn from others who are striving as we are to know God better and to love him more. One who sought diligently this new way wrote:

I felt God's love so powerfully upon me that only a mighty sorrow crept over me. . . .sorrow for the past, mixed with regret. . . .

Well, what did I do? I committed myself to him [God] in the profoundest belief that my individuality was going to be destroyed, that he would take all from me, and I was willing. In such a surrender lies the secret of a holy life.¹²

Brother Lawrence has pointed out a way for us, that we should "so fix our will and our affections upon God as to permeate all that we do with this relationship."

There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual walk with God. Those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it; yet I do not advise you to do it from that motive. It is not pleasure which we ought to seek in this exercise; but let us do it from the motive of love, and because God would have us so walk.

Were I a preacher, I should above all other things, preach *the practice of the Presence of God*; and were I a

¹²Leuba, "Studies in the Psychology of Religious Phenomena," *American Journal of Psychology*, VII (1896), p. 375. Used by permission.

AN INTRODUCTION TO FIVE SPIRITUAL CLASSICS

"director," I should advise all the world to do it, so necessary do I think it, and so easy, too (pp. 26-27).

Let us accept this challenge to love God without reservation, strengthened by his love and this prayer:

O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.¹³

¹³George Matheson. (See *The Methodist Hymnal*, No. 318.)

Chapter Four

A SERIOUS CALL TO A DEVOUT AND HOLY LIFE

A. The Profound Influence of This Book

B. Biographical Notes

1. RELIGIOUS INDIFFERENCE OF THE TIMES
2. LAW'S LIFE AND OUTLOOK
3. A CHOICE DICTATED BY CONSCIENCE
4. "A MASTER OF ENGLISH PROSE"

Part I

C. The Truly Christian Life

1. CHRISTIANS NECESSARILY DIFFERENT
2. HOLY LIVING
3. SERIOUS INTENTIONS
4. A HAPPY LIFE
5. MONEY AND TIME, A STEWARDSHIP

D. A Serious Call Needed Today

Part II

E. Instructions on Prayer—Hours and Topics

1. EARLY MORNING—PRAISE AND ADORATION
2. NINE O'CLOCK—HUMILITY
3. TWELVE O'CLOCK—LOVE AND INTERCESSION
4. THREE O'CLOCK—DOING GOD'S WILL
5. SIX O'CLOCK—SELF-EXAMINATION AND REPENTANCE
6. BED TIME—COMMITMENT TO GOD

F. Conclusion

What youth attending a national or international Christian student conference the first half of this century did not hear John R. Mott (Methodist layman and Christian statesman) stress the importance of daily devotions? Invariably followed the recommendation that every young person read William 'Law's A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, which, Dr. Mott testified, influenced him to give his life to the cause of Christ.

J. B.

a SERIOUS call to a DEVOUT and holy life

The Influence of This Book

Few English books of devotion have exercised so great an influence as this enthusiastic appeal, with which in 1729 William Law broke in upon the religious apathy of the eighteenth century.¹

Of special interest to Methodists should be the facts that Law was at one time John Wesley's spiritual adviser and that Wesley said that it was Law's book that convinced him "of the impossibility of being half a Christian,"² while "Charles Wesley is said, at one time, to have meditated on his writings 'day and night.'"³ This influence on the Wesleys, however, was far more than personal in its outreach. In fact, one biographer goes so far as to say that Mr. Law "by his excellent pen"⁴ did more than any other person to promote the great religious revival that gave Methodism its birth.

¹F. W. Drake, *Masters of the Spiritual Life* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1916), p. 134. Used by permission.

²*Ibid.*, p. 145.

³Arthur W. Hopkinson, *About William Law* (London: Society for Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1948), p. 124. Used by permission.

⁴R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 314. Used by permission.

Aldous Huxley refers to William Law as the "most surprising product of the English 18th century" and adds this interesting comment:

How very odd our educational system is! Students of English literature are forced to read the graceful journalism of Steele and Addison, are expected to know all about the minor novels of Defoe and the tiny eloquences of Matthew Prior. But they can pass all their examinations *summa cum laude* without having so much as looked into the writings of a man who was not only a master of English prose, but also one of the most interesting thinkers of his period and one of the most endearingly saintly figures in the whole history of Anglicanism.⁵

Another who was extravagant in his testimony as to the effect of the book upon his own life was Samuel Johnson, who confessed, "I took up Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* expecting to find it a dull book (as such books generally are) and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me."⁶ He adds that after reading the book he began for the first time to take religion seriously. That is just what William Law wanted—that people should take religion seriously. His purpose was not so much to convert the sinner as to fan into a flame that tiny "spark of piety"⁷ that might be latent in the hearts of lukewarm and indifferent Christians. Perhaps that is why in this our own

⁵Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1945), p. 177. Used by permission.

⁶J. V. Moldenhawer, Introduction to *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, by William Law (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948), p. xv. Used by permission.

⁷Henri Talon, *William Law—A Study in Literary Craftsmanship* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1949), p. 30. Used by permission.

day, characterized by Frank Laubach as a period of world-wide "spiritual depression—in power, in faith, in prayer, and in love,"⁸ an effort is being made to bring this time-honored classic from its hiding place on the book shelves of saints and scholars to the ordinary people of our workaday world.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

RELIGIOUS INDIFFERENCE OF TIMES

William Law came into the world in a century that was lacking in religious fervor and power. The laity as a whole was not openly antagonistic, though some definitely scorned religion. The majority, perhaps, made of it simply a matter of convenience for this world and a means of gaining a desired reward in the next.

This unhappy combination of religious indifference on the part of the people and spiritual lethargy among the clergy resulted in a situation which some writers felt was decidedly hopeless. William Law came upon the scene to declare in no uncertain terms that Christianity was the most real and worth-while thing in the world; moreover, that it did not have to be proved, as some had asserted, but rather that it had to be lived!

LAW'S LIFE AND OUTLOOK

The fourth of eleven children, Law was born in 1686, in the small and secluded village of King's Cliffe, Northamptonshire, England. His father was a merchant and

⁸Frank C. Laubach, *A Call to Spiritual Advance* (Cincinnati: Woman's Division of Christian Service, 1952), p. 4.

from all accounts a fine and worthy man. Some writers think that William Law's *PATERNUS*, in *A Serious Call*, was an attempted likeness of his own father, Thomas Law, while *EUSEBIA* was a similar effort to portray his mother.

William Law was no more of a weakling physically than he was intellectually or spiritually. Looking at him through the eyes of various authors, we see a tall, keen-eyed and broad-shouldered man, a bit inclined to plumpness. In mental strength he towered above most of his contemporaries, and like many other men of that caliber was "often impatient of foolishness" yet exercised "more than exemplary patience towards persons. . . ."⁹ Because of his plain-spoken manner, and the fact that the very nature of his message called for strong and almost harsh words, he was by some considered grim and unfriendly. He fits best, perhaps, in the category of those whose admirers are many but whose friends are few—a status that evidently satisfied him, for it is said that "he found his own company his best company, and craved no other."¹⁰ The thing that recommends him most highly as the author of a book dealing with life on the superlatively high level set forth in *A Serious Call* is that there is no doubt as to his own sincerity and singleness of purpose, and that as he wrote, so he lived. Here was a man who really "treated God seriously." The highest compliment that one could hope for was paid to him after his death which occurred in 1761, by Edward Gibbon. The historian said, "He left the reputation of a

⁹Moldenhawer, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii.

¹⁰Hopkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

worthy and pious man, who believed all that he professed and practised all that he enjoined."¹¹ And Gibbon had opportunity to know, since Law was for some years a tutor in his father's home.

Interested from early life in education and religion, William Law went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he obtained a sizarship (comparable to our scholarship) in 1705. Ordination as a deacon and election to the position of fellow of his college followed in due time, and it seemed that he was well on his way to success in a life for which he was eminently fitted—that of a "studious, celibate. . . college don." But, in the words of Talon, "Providence would have it otherwise."¹²

a CHOICE DICTATED BY CONSCIENCE

A new monarch, George I, came to the throne of England. Because of the relationship between Church and State, there arose the question of the oath of allegiance to the new dynasty. William Law was not the only churchman who had to face this issue and make a decision. His choice, conscientiously made, automatically placed him in a group known as the "nonjurors," briefly and aptly described by Hopkinson as "men swayed by conscience, who disqualified themselves for public and official positions, and were content to serve God and their neighbour in obscurity,"¹³ rather than swear allegiance to a ruling house which they considered usurpers. The exacting nature of his conscience is further re-

¹¹Drake, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

¹²Talon, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹³Hopkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

vealed in a letter which he wrote to his brother, George, about this time:

My prospect, indeed. . . is melancholy enough. . . . The benefits of my education seem partly at an end, but that same education had been more miserably lost if I had not learnt to fear something more than misfortune.¹⁴

For fourteen years following this decision, William Law lived in the home of Mr. Edward Gibbon at Putney, as a tutor to his son who later became the father of the historian already mentioned. It was in this rather circumscribed life, then, that Law found his great opportunity. The quiet and seclusion gave him what he needed, and as a result he no doubt reached more people with his message than if he had remained in the field of his original choice.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform. . . .¹⁵

William Law did not simply drift into his life work. Numerous books and treatises came from his ready pen, but it is with *A Serious Call*, considered by many his master work, that we are now concerned.

law's style — "a master of english prose"

To make his points clear, Law draws for his readers the character sketches for which he has become famous, and which Hopkinson compares with the parables of

¹⁴J. H. Overton, *William Law, Nonjuror and Mystic* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1881), p. 13. Used by permission.

¹⁵William Cowper (see *The Methodist Hymnal*, No. 68).

Jesus, calling them "hypodermic needles of truth," adding that they will never be forgotten so long as English literature survives. Of course, all these characters are fictitious. Yet every sincere reader will feel as he gazes upon the infirmities and inconsistencies of William Law's make-believe characters that he is in the position of a man walking (so he thinks) toward another man, and, suddenly finding himself face to face with himself in a mirror, realizes "Thou art the man" (II Sam. 12:7).

The question has been asked, Why is it that William Law speaks so often from a negative point of view? Why does he so persistently show up the inconsistencies and weaknesses of his characters rather than the strong points and commendable virtues, which to some extent they must have had? One answer could be that he felt that by so doing he might help his readers avoid acquiring some of these very undesirable characteristics. He himself says, "...as we best learn the nature of things by looking at that which is contrary to them; so perhaps we best apprehend the excellency of wisdom by contemplating the wild extravagance of folly." Another and different reason has been given by J. V. Moldenhawer in his Introduction to *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, published by The Westminster Press. He says:

Law was heartily sick of the whole lot of these pleasant-mannered, self-satisfied, and half-empty Christians. He had had all he could bear of these various examples of half-hearted loyalty that he proceeded to draw in a whole series of painfully accurate portraits of typical eighteenth century Church members. And the astonishing fact is that these unflattering likenesses have never be-

come "dated." With changes of only a word or two in each, these "characters" slip into place in the twentieth century without splitting a single seam of their perfectly fitting garments.¹⁶

Repetition of words and phrases as well as of thought strikes the reader immediately. To some, this redundancy is annoying; others revel in the "solemn and yet pressing rhythm"¹⁷ and detect in it the urgency of Law's message. It is because he is so in earnest, and so eager for his readers to find "the way" that he says the same thing over and over, and yet over again.

The forthright manner in which he expresses his truth is tempered by such an abundance of keen wit to liven up his words of weighty wisdom that some who have opened *A Serious Call* from a sense of duty have found themselves reading on in sheer enjoyment.

PART I

THE TRULY CHRISTIAN LIFE

A one-sentence summary of the message of this book might well find expression in a slight paraphrase of Romans 12:1: "I beseech you therefore. . . that ye present your. . . [all] a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service"; or in that companion passage from I Corinthians, which is closely akin in thought if not in form: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31). With William Law there was no compromise, no equivocation, no deviation from the

¹⁶Moldenhawer, *op. cit.*, pp. xvi-xvii.

¹⁷Talon, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

straight and upward path of whole-hearted Christian living. The imprint of that conviction is plainly and indelibly stamped on every page.

He begins by saying:

Devotion is neither private nor public prayer; but prayers, whether private or public, are particular parts or instances of devotion. Devotion signifies a life given, or devoted to God (p. 1).¹⁸

And, just as the Preacher in Ecclesiastes says, "let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccles. 12:13), so William Law concludes:

...all worldly attainments, whether of greatness, wisdom or bravery, are but empty sounds; and there is nothing wise, or great, or noble, in an human spirit, but rightly to know and heartily worship and adore the great God, that is the support and life of all spirits, whether in Heaven or on earth (p. 353).

There is a finality about these words that leaves no room for argument. This is characteristic of William Law.

CHRISTIANS NECESSARILY DIFFERENT

If one is to be "strictly pious in his prayers," Law insists, there is just as much reason to be "as strictly pious

¹⁸William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1906. Everyman's Library, no. 91), p. 1. This selection and all others from *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* quoted in this book, *AN INTRODUCTION TO FIVE SPIRITUAL CLASSICS*, are used by permission. Succeeding quotations are identified in the text only by the number of the page in *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* on which they appear, as in this instance.

in all the other parts of his life" (p. 1). He continues:

It is for want of knowing, or at least considering this, that we see such a mixture of ridicule in the lives of many people. You see them strict as to some times and places of devotion, but when the service of the Church is over, they are but like those that seldom or never come there. In their way of life, their manner of spending their time and money, in their cares and fears, in their pleasures and indulgences, in their labour and diversions, they are like the rest of the world. . . . This is the reason why they are the jest and scorn of careless and worldly people; not because they are really devoted to God, but because they appear to have no other devotion but that of occasional prayers (pp. 2-3).

In other words such persons are simply "adding Christian devotion to a Heathen life" (p. 11). The absurdity and incongruity of such a course is tersely set forth in this one razor-like sentence:

And it is as possible for a man to worship a crocodile, and yet be a pious man, as to have his affections set upon this world, and yet be a good Christian (p. 10).

JULIUS illustrates what Law is trying to say:

Julius¹⁹ is very fearful of missing prayers; all the parish supposes Julius to be sick, if he is not at Church. But if you were to ask him why he spends the rest of his time by humour or chance. . . why he is ready for every diversion. . . why there is no amusement too trifling to please him? why he is busy at all balls and assemblies? why he gives himself up to an idle, gossiping conversation? why he lives in foolish friendships. . . why he allows himself in foolish hatreds and resentments against particular per-

¹⁹For this and the meaning of other characters, see p. 146.

sons without considering that he is to love everybody as himself? If you ask him why he never puts his conversation, his time, and fortune, under the rules of religion? Julius has no more to say for himself than the most disorderly person. For the whole tenor of Scripture lies as directly against such a life, as against debauchery and intemperance. . . (p. 3).

The implication is obvious, that JULIUS was merely a "church-going" Christian, which is not enough.

Law draws other pictures—of LEO and EUSEBIUS:

Leo has a great deal of good nature, has kept what they call good company, hates everything that is false and base, is very generous and brave to his friends; but has concerned himself so little with religion that he hardly knows the difference betwixt a Jew and a Christian.

Eusebius, on the other hand, has had early impressions of religion, and buys books of devotion. He can talk of all the feasts and fasts of the Church, and knows the names of most men that have been eminent for piety. You never hear him swear, or make a loose jest; and when he talks of religion, he talks of it as of a matter of the last concern (p. 9).

And yet, as you follow these two men you find them liking the same things, going to the same places, enjoying the same kind of company. William Law banishes all doubt as to his opinion in this matter:

. . .if Christianity has not changed a man's mind and temper with relation to these things, what can we say that it has done for him? For if the doctrines of Christianity were practised. . .it would be as easy a thing to know a Christian by his outward course of life, as it is now difficult to find anybody that lives it (p. 10).

Three questions may clamor for supremacy in the reader's mind: Is such a life as William Law describes possible? Is it to be expected of us today? Did Law himself ever attain it? The third question already has been partially answered in the quotation from Gibbon. His testimony is corroborated by R. Newton Flew, who, in his volume *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology*, writes of William Law, "In the depth and power of his religious life he stood out far above most of his contemporaries."²⁰ He had his critics, to be sure, and there were those who disagreed with him at some points, as did John Wesley in later years. However, so far as we know, none questioned his sincerity, his earnestness, or his undivided loyalty to his purpose, which was to live, and persuade others to live, a life of real Christian devotion.

holy living

As to the second question, William Law's answer most certainly would be that the call to a devout and holy life is a timeless one and pertains to all Christians in all periods of the world's history, even as it pertains to all men and women in all walks of life.

The profession of a clergyman is an holy profession, because it is a ministration in holy things, an attendance at the altar. But worldly business is to be made holy unto the Lord, by being done as a service to Him, and in conformity to His Divine will.

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Clergymen must live wholly unto God in one particular

²⁰Flew, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

way. . . . But men of other employments are, in their particular ways, as much obliged to act as the servants of God, and live wholly unto Him in their several callings.

This is the only difference between clergymen and people of other callings (pp. 32-34).

SERIOUS INTENTIONS

In his reply to the first question, William Law at least shocks his readers out of their complacency and into a listening attitude by saying that the reason why "the lives even of the better sort of people are thus strangely contrary to the principles of Christianity" is "neither through ignorance nor inability, but purely because. . . [they] never thoroughly intended it." At least three chapters of the book are given to a discussion of this lack of genuine and serious intention on the part of Christians and the necessity of making such an intention basic to all true Christian living:

Here, therefore, let us judge ourselves sincerely; let us not vainly content ourselves with the common disorders of our lives, the vanity of our expenses, the folly of our diversions, the pride of our habits, the idleness of our lives, and the wasting of our time, fancying that these are such imperfections as we fall into through the unavoidable weakness and frailty of our natures; but let us be assured, that these disorders of our common life are owing to this, that we have not so much Christianity as to intend to please God in all the actions of our life, as the best and happiest thing in the world (p. 18).

Lest some persons may think that William Law makes religion only a matter of ordered devotion and

good works, this further word from him should be added:

This doctrine does not suppose that we have no need of Divine grace, or that it is in our own power to make ourselves perfect. It only supposes, that through the want of a sincere intention of pleasing God in all our actions we fall into such irregularities of life as by the ordinary means of grace we should have power to avoid; and that we have not that perfection, which our present state of grace makes us capable of, because we do not so much as intend to have it (p. 19).

Here he brings in the sobering story of PENITENS, whose life aptly exemplifies this lack of intention. PENITENS was a prominent and prosperous tradesman who had found business, pleasure, and kindred interests very important; but now facing imminent death at the early age of thirty-five, suddenly confessed that all these things sank into "mere nothings" (p.26). Said PENITENS to his friends:

It is true, I have lived in the communion of the Church, and generally frequented its worship and service on Sundays, when I was neither too idle, or not otherwise disposed of by my business and pleasures. But then, my conformity to the public worship has been rather a thing of course, than any real intention of doing that which the service of the Church supposes: had it not been so, I had been oftener at Church, more devout when there, and more fearful of ever neglecting it.

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In the business of life, I have used prudence and reflection. I have done everything by rules and methods. I have been glad to converse with men of experience and

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judgment. . . I have taken no step in trade but with great care and caution. . . I have always had my eye upon the main end of business. . .

But what is the reason that I have brought none of these tempers to religion? What is the reason that I . . . have all this while never once thought of any rules, or methods, or managements, to carry me on in a life of piety? (pp. 29-31).

I could have called in as many helps, have practised as many rules, and been taught as many certain methods of holy living, as of thriving in my shop, had I but so intended, and desired it (p. 31).

a happy life

From this rather morbid story the author moves on, in colorful contrast, to a lengthy discussion of the "more excellent way." In fact, to William Law there is only *one* way—the way of Christian living. It is the normal way, the happiest way, the most reasonable and satisfying way. They are mistaken, he points out, who feel that to follow all these rules of holy living puts too much restraint upon human life. Rather, it is just the opposite. ". . . Instead of making our lives dull and melancholy, they will render them full of content and strong satisfactions." In the second place, by acknowledging a wise and good God as governing the world, by seeing him in everything, by conforming more and more to his will, we come to enjoy God more and thereby "heighten and increase all that is happy and comfortable in human life." In addition, by "endeavoring to subdue and root out. . . all those passions of pride, envy, and ambition,

which religion opposes," we achieve a greater degree of happiness than by "contriving means to indulge them" (p. 116).

The man of pride has a thousand wants, which only his own pride has created; and these render him as full of trouble as if God had created him with a thousand appetites, without creating any thing that was proper to satisfy them. Envy and ambition have also their endless wants, which disquiet the souls of men, and by their contradictory motions, render them as foolishly miserable, as those that want to fly and creep at the same time (pp. 118-119).

Furthermore:

If religion forbids all instances of revenge, without any exception, it is because all revenge is of the nature of poison. . . . If religion commands an universal charity, to love our neighbour as ourselves, to forgive and pray for all our enemies without any reserve; it is because all degrees of love are degrees of happiness. . . . and are as necessary to its [the soul's] health and happiness, as proper food is necessary to the health and happiness of the body (p. 126).

money and time, a stewardship

No attempt to give the content of William Law's message would be complete without reference to his ideas of charity as related to almsgiving. Pursuing his usual line of appealing to the intellect, or reason, and endeavoring to show that all that a man has beyond his own actual needs should be used for others, he employs a graphic and unforgettable illustration:

If a man had eyes, and hands, and feet, that he could give to those that wanted them; if he should either lock

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them up in a chest, or please himself with some needless or ridiculous use of them, instead of giving them to his brethren that were blind and lame, should we not justly reckon him an inhuman wretch? . . .

Now money has very much the nature of eyes and feet; if we either lock it up in chests, or waste it in needless or ridiculous expenses upon ourselves, whilst the poor and distressed want [lack] it for their necessary uses. . . we are guilty of his madness, that rather chooses to lock up eyes and hands, than to make himself for ever blessed, by giving them to those that want them.

For after we have satisfied our own sober and reasonable wants, all the rest of our money is but like spare eyes or hands; it is something that we cannot keep to ourselves without being foolish in the use of it, something that can only be used well, by giving it to those that want it (pp. 57-58).

Most readers will find the above passage more interesting than practical. And they will not be alone in this position, for William Law's indiscriminate charities certainly brought upon him a large measure of criticism. He justifies his standard of giving, however, by quoting the familiar "inasmuch" passage from the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew and climaxes it with another of his apt and pithy sentences.

I have quoted this passage at length, because if one looks at the way of the world, one would hardly think that Christians had ever read this part of Scripture (p. 61).

It may ease the reader's mind a bit to know that toward the close of his life this good man's convictions along this line underwent some modification—perhaps

partly because of the ever-increasing number of applicants at his door! It is hinted that he may even have found himself in agreement with men like Hopkinson, who said: "Almsgiving which does not set the recipient in a permanently better condition of life falls short of its Christian objective."²¹ Nevertheless, in these days when the goal of all too many people seems to be to get more money to buy more things, William Law's words are well enough worth more than a passing thought; so we conclude this subject with something that he said in another connection:

This, therefore, being so useful a meditation, I shall here leave the reader, as I hope, seriously engaged in it (p. 32).

Flavia represents those people who respect, even admire and accept, religion but seem to make no progress in it, and yet do not know the reason.

William Law has the answer:

...it is because religion lives only in their head, but something else has possession of their heart (p. 65).

And this has come about, he says, not through gross sinning but by the indiscreet use of such things as are lawful to be used. Then, as is so often his method, he plies his readers rather unmercifully with direct questions:

What is more innocent than rest and retirement? And yet what more dangerous than sloth and idleness? What is more lawful than eating and drinking? And yet what more

²¹Hopkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

destructive of all virtue, what more fruitful of all vice, than sensuality and indulgence? (p. 66).

Flavia would be a miracle of piety, if she was but half as careful of her soul as she is of her body (p. 68).

Flavia has been the wonder of all her friends, for her excellent management, in making so surprising a figure on so modest a fortune. . . . She has everything that is in the fashion, and is in every place where there is any diversion. Flavia is very orthodox. . . is generally at Church, and often at the Sacrament. She once commended a sermon that was against the pride and vanity of dress, and thought it was very just against Lucinda, whom she takes to be a great deal finer than she need to be. If any one asks Flavia to do something in charity, if she likes the person who makes the proposal, or happens to be in a right temper, she will toss him half-a-crown, or a crown, and tell him if he knew what a long milliner's bill she had just received, he would think it a great deal for her to give (pp. 67-68).

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If you visit Flavia on the Sunday, you will always meet good company. . . . If you would know who is rude and ill-natured, who is vain and foppish, who lives too high, and who is in debt. . . if you would know how late Belinda comes home at night, what clothes she has bought, how she loves compliments, and what a long story she told at such a place; if you would know how cross Lucius is to his wife. . . though they appear so kind in public; you must visit Flavia on the Sunday. . . .

Thus lives Flavia, and if she lives ten years longer, she will have spent about fifteen hundred and sixty Sundays after this manner. . . . With great management, and under mighty rules of economy, she will have spent sixty hundred pounds upon herself. . . (pp. 69-70).

William Law assures his readers that he is not arbitrarily closing the door upon FLAVIA's eternal salvation, but remains adamant in his conviction that she has no scriptural grounds upon which to base such a hope. Her whole pattern of life has been contrary to that which the Gospels set forth as essential to salvation.

On the other hand:

Miranda (the sister of Flavia) is a sober, reasonable Christian: as soon as she was mistress of her time and fortune, it was her first thought how she might best fulfil everything that God required of her in the use of them, and how she might make the best and happiest use of this short life. She depends upon the truth of what our blessed Lord hath said, that there is but "One thing needful," and therefore makes her whole life but one continual labour after it. . . (p. 75).

Miranda does not divide her duty between God, her neighbour, and herself; but she considers all as due to God, and so does everything in His Name, and for His Sake. This makes her consider her fortune as the gift of God, that is to be used, as everything is that belongs to God, for the wise and reasonable ends of a Christian and holy life (p. 76).

To relate her charity, would be to relate the history of every day for twenty years; for so long has all her fortune been spent that way. She has set up near twenty poor tradesmen that had failed in their business, and saved as many from failing. She has educated several poor children, that were picked up in the streets, and put them in a way of an honest employment. . . (p. 79).

She has a great tenderness for old people that are grown past their labour. The parish allowance to such people is

very seldom a comfortable maintenance: for this reason they are the constant objects of her care. . . (pp. 80-81).

Miranda never wants compassion, even to common beggars. . . . (p. 81).

It may be, says Miranda, that I may often give to those that do not deserve it. . . But what then? . . . Do I beg of God to deal with me, not according to my merit, but according to His own great goodness; and shall I be so absurd as to withhold my charity from a poor brother, because he may perhaps not deserve it? Shall I use a measure towards him, which I pray God never to use towards me? (p. 82).

Every morning sees her early at her prayers; she rejoices in the beginning of every day, because it begins all her. . . rules of holy living, and brings the fresh pleasure of repeating them. She seems to be as a guardian angel to those that dwell about her, with her watchings and prayers, blessing the place where she dwells, and making intercession with God for those that are asleep. . . (p. 77).

This is the spirit, and this is the life, of the devout Miranda; and if she lives ten years longer, she will have spent sixty hundred pounds in charity; for that which she allows herself, may fairly be reckoned amongst her alms (p. 84).

These are only a few of the interesting characters we shall meet in *A Serious Call*. Nearly all of them, according to Talon, are unhappy because they mistake success for happiness. There is FLATUS, restless, always seeking some new diversion; FELICIANA, finding so-called happiness in passing pleasures and worthless trivialities; SUCCUS, caring only for "a good night's rest in bed, and a good meal when he is up" (p. 141).

That this is not the supreme good in life, that there is something far better and infinitely more satisfying and enduring is what William Law is trying to say. A paragraph early in the book is a good illustration of the repetition he uses for emphasis, also his lavish use of the emphatic conjunctions, with "if" apparently his favorite.

...If self-denial be a condition of salvation, all that would be saved must make it a part of their ordinary life. If humility be a Christian duty, then the common life of the Christian is to be a constant course of humility in all its kinds. If poverty of spirit be necessary, it must be the spirit and temper of every day of our lives. If we are to relieve the naked, the sick, and the prisoner, it must be the common charity of our lives, as far as we can render ourselves able to perform it. If we are to love our enemies, we must make our common life a visible exercise and demonstration of that love. ...If we are to be wise and holy as the new-born sons of God, we can no otherwise be so, but by renouncing every thing that is foolish and vain in every part of our common life. If we are to be in Christ new creatures, we must show that we are so, by having new ways of living in the world. If we are to follow Christ, it must be in our common way of spending every day (pp. 6-7).

A SERIOUS Call Needed Today

This, then, is the message with which William Law startled the ears and stirred the hearts of the slumbering Christians of the eighteenth century. Is it possible that across the barriers of time and space he may speak helpfully and hopefully to the "hurry-drugged men and

women" of our own day? The nineteenth century sounded a call to social and national righteousness. Perhaps the time has come for the pendulum to swing in the other direction. At least, so Hopkinson believes,²² and many will agree with him that the individual, as well as the larger group, must face and assume a share of responsibility for things as they are and as they ought to be.

Lest they be "weighed in the balance and . . . found wanting" (Dan. 5:27), the Christian people of this twentieth century need to be called, and recalled, to a devout and holy life. William Law has pointed the way and, as will be shown later, has revealed the secret of attaining it to those who are willing to yield the priceless coins of time and dedication. If, as has been said, one can not stand under the eaves with a good man during a rainstorm and not be the better for it, then surely no Christian can read any part of *A Serious Call* and slip back again into easy and careless ways of living.

Part II

INSTRUCTIONS ON PRAYER - HOURS AND TOPICS

William Law has shown the necessity of a devout habit of mind in every part of our lives, in our business, and in the use of all God's gifts. We are now to consider the times and hours of prayer as outlined in *A Serious Call*.

²²Hopkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-130.

EARLY MORNING—PRAISE AND ADORATION

I take it for granted, that every Christian, that is in health, is up early in the morning; for it is much more reasonable to suppose a person up early, because he is a Christian, than because he is a labourer, or a tradesman, or a servant, or has business that wants him.

Prayer is the nearest approach to God, and the highest enjoyment of Him, that we are capable of in this life.

It is the noblest exercise of the soul, the most exalted use of our best faculties. . . .

He therefore, that chooses to enlarge the slothful indulgence of sleep, rather than be early at his devotions to God, chooses the dullest refreshment of the body, before the highest, noblest employment of the soul. . . .

You will perhaps say though you rise late, yet you are always careful of your devotions when you are up.

It may be so, but what then? . . . It is as much your duty to rise to pray, as to pray when you are risen (p. 162).

Some people will. . . tell you, that they indulge themselves in sleep, because they have nothing to do; and that, if they had either business or pleasure to rise to, they would not lose so much of their time in sleep. But such people must be told that they mistake the matter; that they have a great deal of business to do; they have a hardened heart to change; they have the whole spirit of religion to get. . . (p. 166).

If we think devotion "to be of less moment than business or pleasure," or that we have nothing to do because only our prayers are awaiting us, then we do indeed have much to learn.

On the other hand, if you were to rise early every morning, as an instance of self-denial. . . . It would teach you to

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exercise power over yourself, and make you able by degrees to renounce other pleasures and tempers that war against the soul.

...it would dispose your mind to exactness. . .bring the remaining part of the day under rules of prudence and devotion. . .and prepare you for the reception of the Holy Spirit (pp. 169-170).

Christ, the apostles, and the early Christians had a religion of reality, joy, and action for God. Can we be thought to have this experience in God if we have not even zeal enough to rise early to pray?

We will find that most people are changeable in their devotions. Sometimes they feel the Divine Presence very clearly; at other times their hearts do not respond to the Spirit. According to William Law, this is because such people are so "sunk into their bodies." Therefore, it is wise for most Christians to have a form of prayer to follow, to provide in this way against the changeableness of the heart. If while praying one feels led into higher forms of devotion, he may leave the formal prayer for a time and follow his heart in new expressions of joy, praise, and exaltation in the presence of God.

It is well, also, to have a certain place for prayer, that it may be a place "kept holy unto God." Kneeling and closing your eyes in a "short silence let your soul place itself in the presence of God" (p. 172).

When you begin your petitions, use such various expressions of the attributes of God, as may make you most sensible of the greatness and power of the Divine Nature.

Begin, therefore, in words like these: O Being of all

beings, Fountain of all light and glory, gracious Father of men and Angels, whose universal Spirit is everywhere present, giving life and light and joy to . . . all creatures upon earth. . . (p. 173).

In this way, our hearts will be raised to high planes of worship. As morning is the beginning of new life, so is it proper that the first prayers of the day should be praise.

If in reading the Scripture or other devotional books one finds a passage that seems to turn the heart to God, let him try to make it into the form of a prayer.

Law makes a suggestion for "people of leisure. . . who are so much at a loss how to dispose of their time. . . ." who have "hours that hang heavily upon their hands:"

. . . if such were to appoint some certain spaces of their time to the study of devotion, searching after all the means and helps to attain a devout spirit; if they were to collect the best forms of devotion, to use themselves to transcribe the finest passages of Scripture-prayers; if they were to collect the devotions, confessions, petitions. . . and thanksgivings, which are scattered up and down in the Psalms, and range them under proper heads, as so much proper fuel for the flame of their own devotion; if their minds were often thus employed, sometimes meditating upon them, sometimes getting them by heart, and making them as habitual as their own thoughts, how fervently would they pray, who came thus prepared to prayer! (pp. 178-179).

Persons of leisure may seem especially called to this life of devotion, but "persons of much business and labour must not think themselves excused" from it.

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For the greater their business is, the more need they have of some such method as this, to prevent its power over their hearts. . . and preserve a sense and taste of heavenly things. . . (p. 179).

Many use all their time and talents to improve their worldly status, but very little of either to deepen their devotional life. MUNDANUS, a fine businessman, studies the best methods of carrying on his business, but uses the same prayers he learned as a boy. CLASSICUS, a very learned man, reads and re-reads the best literature, but has no desire to read books that will increase his knowledge of God. He would not even include the Bible in his library were it not that the Testaments "are both to be had in Greek." He has no other religious books in his library. Why not, CLASSICUS, William Law seems to protest, include the lives of some of the saints, and other followers of Christ, in your library, so that you may imbibe some of the spirit of these devout men?

But if you will have no other book of piety besides the Bible, because it is the best, how comes it, Classicus, that you do not content yourself with one of the best books amongst the Greeks and Romans? (p. 182).

How comes it that you read so many commentators upon Cicero. . . and Homer, and not one upon the Gospel? . . .

Why then must the Bible lie alone in your study? Is not the spirit of the saints, the piety of the holy followers of Jesus Christ, as good and necessary a means of entering into the spirit and taste of the Gospel, as the reading of the ancients is of entering into the spirit of antiquity?

AN INTRODUCTION TO FIVE SPIRITUAL CLASSICS

Is the spirit of poetry only to be got by much reading of poets and orators? And is not the spirit of devotion to be got in the same way, by frequently reading the holy thoughts, and pious strains of devout men?

... And is it not as reasonable for him who desires to improve in the Divine life, . . . to search after every strain of devotion that may move, kindle, and inflame the holy ardour of his soul?

... And is there not the same benefit and advantage to be made by books of devotion? Should not a man use them in the same way, that habits of devotion, and aspiring to God in holy thoughts, may be well formed in his soul? (p. 183).

Both MUNDANUS and CLASSICUS think that a mere belief in the truth of Christianity is all that is required.

How wise might Classicus have been, and how much good might he have done in the world, if he had but thought as justly of devotion, as he does of learning! (p. 182).

We need to "give prayer its full power" by self-denial, retreats, reading of good books, "composing forms for ourselves, or using the best we can get. . . changing, improving, and suiting our devotions to the conditions of our lives," and according to the need of our hearts. Because of their occupation, and not from choice, some have little time to follow these rules. "They must make the best use of that little they have. For this is the certain way of making devotion produce a devout life" (p. 185).

Another thing that should not be neglected is the beginning of our prayers with the singing or chanting of

a psalm or hymn—not the reading but the singing of it.

You are, therefore, to consider this chanting of a psalm as a necessary beginning of your devotions, as something that is to awaken all that is good and holy within you, that is to call your spirits to their proper duty, to set you in your best posture towards heaven, and tune all the powers of your soul to worship and adoration.

For there is nothing that so clears a way for your prayers, nothing that so disperses dulness of heart, nothing that so purifies the soul from poor and little passions, nothing that so opens heaven, or carries your heart so near it, as these songs of praise (p. 186).

We are not required to sing these psalms to entertain other people but only to sing God's praises as a part of our own devotions. The objection may be raised that though this singing is of great benefit to us, we cannot do it without making our devotions public to others, thus seeming to make a parade of it.

[We] have an excellent pattern to follow, . . . St. Paul and Silas, who sang praises to God in prison, though we are expressly told, that the prisoners heard them. They therefore did not refrain from this kind of devotion for fear of being heard by others (p. 199).

Singing is a wonderful means of expression. If we had been with Moses at the Red Sea and had seen God save the Israelites from Pharoah, how easy it would have been to sing with them, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation" (Exod. 15:2). Joy in the heart will find an outlet. Before we begin our songs, let us use our imagination to see and hear the heavenly choirs singing the praises of God, or to see

David with his harp and let him teach us "to exalt. . . [our] hearts unto God" in some of the wonderful psalms. Or, imagine how blessed it would have been to be with Jesus and his disciples when they sang a hymn! So much for our early devotions.

nine o'clock—humility

At nine o'clock it is proper to renew our prayers; for prayer, "rightly and attentively performed, is the most natural means of amending and purifying our hearts. . ." (p. 206). The subject recommended for this hour is humility,

. . . because humility is the life and soul of piety, the foundation and support of every virtue and good work, the best guard and security of all holy affections. . . (p. 208).

Those who have made some progress in a holy life are more apt to become proud than are others who lay no claim to a special piety, for it is easy to become proud of every good thought and every good action. But when we think of Christ as having suffered for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world, we cannot be proud of our own worth—we are not worthy except as having pardon through his mediation and intercession.

Merely commending humility and condemning pride are not sufficient to make one humble. CAECUS is rich, haughty, proud, fond of dress and of luxurious living, overbearing to inferiors, sure that he himself cannot be mistaken. He loves humility and hates pride—in other people—but does not even suspect himself of being proud.

Humility is not thinking worse of ourselves than we deserve; it is based on a right view of our own weakness and sin. We are not able to do anything of ourselves; we can act only as God gives us the power. All of us have "a great deal of pride to repent of," because there is "no greater sign of a more confirmed pride, than to think that you are humble enough." If that is our attitude, we are "not so much as a beginner in the practice of true humility."

Humility demands a course of training. One great difficulty in attaining this virtue comes from a lack in the education of children. Most education does not include the teaching of this virtue, but tends, rather, to enhance their sense of their own abilities. Whatever trade or profession is to be followed, the youth is pointed to the persons highest in that line as though the end and aim of his career should be to imitate and perhaps surpass them. If he does not attain to this high point, his life is considered a failure. Christian education should teach the young to live in all things as a Christian should.

PATERNUS, who lived many years ago, had one son. When this son was about ten years old, his father took occasion to have a long talk with him. Pointing to the great works of creation and reminding him of God's care for his people from scriptural times through the years to the present, he showed the lad that all this is very small in God's sight.

And yet, [said Paternus] you are as much the care of this great God and Father of all worlds and all spirits, as if He had no son but you. . . . He numbers the hairs of

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your head, watches over you, sleeping and waking, and has preserved you from a thousand dangers. . . .

Your eyes, indeed cannot yet see Him. But all things that you see are so many marks of His power and presence, and He is nearer to you than anything that you can see.

Take Him for your Lord, and Father, and Friend. . . (p. 239).

. . . you belong to a greater family than mine; you are a young member of the family of this Almighty Father of all nations. . . .

. . . let it now be a rule of your life, to look up to God in all your actions, [and] to do everything. . . according to His will (p. 240).

First of all, my child, worship and adore God, think of Him magnificently, speak of Him reverently, magnify His providence, adore His power, frequent His service, and pray unto Him frequently and constantly.

Next to this, love your neighbour, which is all mankind, with such tenderness and affection as you love yourself. Think how God loves all mankind, how merciful He is to them, how tender He is of them, how carefully He preserves them; and then strive to love the world, as God loves it. God would have all men to be happy; therefore do you will and desire the same. . . .

Never do anything in order to excel other people, but in order to please God, and because it is His will that you should do everything in the best manner that you can (pp. 241-242).

Do good, my son, first of all to those that most deserve it; but remember to do good to all. . . (p. 242).

. . . study nothing but how to think of all things as they deserve, to choose everything that is best, to live according to reason and order, and to act in every part of your life in conformity to the will of God.

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Study how to fill your heart full of the love of God, and the love of your neighbour. . . .

Let your dress be sober, clean, and modest. . . .that your outward garb may resemble the inward plainness and simplicity of your heart (p. 243).

Two very different characters now appear on the scene to show how daughters should, and should not, be taught. MATILDA, mother of three daughters, supervises personally every detail of their education. She has heard them read the Scriptures over and over, and they can repeat great portions from memory. They are also well supplied with devotional books. She is very solicitous as to their dress, that it may be very rich and beautiful. She has a great zeal for religion, but a much greater zeal for finery—she, herself, is more careful of her complexion than of her devotions. If the daughters miss going to church, they are afraid to meet her, but are more afraid to meet her if they are not laced as tight as she thinks they should be. One of them died of tight-lacing, and one eloped with a gambler, but MATILDA feels that she is not to blame, as her conscience tells her that she did all she could for them.

EUSEBIA, a rich and devout widow, has five daughters whom she feels God has given her as a sacred trust, and she is educating them to fit into the Kingdom of God. She meets with her daughters and her maids many times a day for prayer and the singing of hymns. The daughters are taught "all kinds of labour that are proper for women, as sewing, knitting, spinning, and all other parts of housewifery" (p. 254), so that, rich as they are, they may be able to help those who need aid. This she does, feel-

ing that they will be able to assist people more by their labor than by money. She tells them that when their father died she grieved most because his children could not see and follow "such an eminent example of Christian virtues" (p. 255). She impresses upon them that they are made in the image of God. If they live as did the saints, praying and doing good, they will be ready to live with them in heaven.

When they were small, they had time for play, but now they employ their time ministering to the poor, in gifts and service. They have a heart of love to all, they choose the best, they live and act in conformity to God's will. Through tenderness and compassion they show their fine home training. Thus educated, any of these daughters "would be a blessing to any family that she came into; a fit companion for a wise man" (p. 265) and a good mother.

twelve o'clock—love and intercession

The theme of the twelve o'clock devotions is universal love and intercession. Christ commended his love to us as a pattern of our love to one another:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you. . . . By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

We should desire the happiness of all men, since God wills that all men should be happy. We should forgive all affronts we receive from others and do all the good we can to those who thus treat us. We may not be able

to do acts of love to a great many people, but if our hearts are full of love we have great power in that we may pray for the relief and happiness of those in distress. We may not be able to build hospitals, schools, churches, but if we believe in and pray for those who are doing so, and thank God that they are led to do those things, we can be sharers in their good works.

We are obligated to love all men "in imitation of God's goodness" that we may be true children of God. Jesus laid down his life for us, not because of our merit, but in order to make us good. So we should love others, not because of their merits, but "wishing them all the good that they want and are capable of receiving" (p. 288). We should intercede for others daily, as we do for ourselves, and as our neighbors need deliverance from evils or need particular gifts or blessings. When we pray for someone, our hearts will be filled with kindness and tenderness towards him. "For there is nothing that makes us love a man so much as praying for him" (p. 294). If masters would pray for their servants, parents for their children, neighbors for neighbors, what a mighty power would be released! Such prayers would unite communities in the strongest bonds of love and tenderness and would also be the best means of arbitration in all quarrels.

Then, too, intercession tends to show us the true state of our own hearts, for there are many things which we think are lawful and innocent, but when viewed in the spirit of prayer are not so. SUSURRUS was a "pious, temperate, good man. . . constant at the service of the church," giving much to the poor. However, he was

always trying to find out "the defects and infirmities of all about him" (p. 308).

Susurrus had such a tender, compassionate manner of relating things the most prejudicial to his neighbour, that he even seemed, both to himself and others, to be exercising a Christian charity, at the same time that he was indulging a whispering, evil-speaking temper (p. 309).

A friend told SUSURRUS that if he would pray for these persons before telling of their mistakes he would not then "by uncharitable whispers and secret stories" (p. 309) harm them. SUSURRUS' conscience was so awakened that he could never again whisper "anything to the prejudice of another" (p. 310). If others, who do not realize their faults, would "try their spirits by such an intercession, they would often find themselves to be such as they least of all suspected" (p. 310).

These considerations will, I hope, persuade you to make such intercession. . . the constant, chief matter of your devotion, at this hour of prayer (p. 310).

OURANIUS is a priest of a country village, "Every soul in it is as dear to him as himself. He loves them all. . . as he loves himself, because he prays for them all, as often as he prays for himself" (p. 295).

When he first came to the village, he resented the fact that he was called away from his studies to pray for some of his people, but, taught by the Divine Spirit, he has overcome this attitude, so that any unreasonable behavior now only gives him a desire to pray more for them. He "only wants more time to do that. . . which his soul thirsts after" (p. 296)—to attend to the needs of his

people. He desires to be the servant of all, as was his Master. He feels that even the poorest deserves all that he can do for him. He believes that the prayers of those living holy lives "have extraordinary power with God" (p. 298). So he seeks Christian perfection, purifies his own heart, lives in temperance, meekness, and humility, desiring "that his prayers for his flock may. . .avail much with God" (p. 297). He is a fine example of what intercession may do for the intercessor as well as for those for whom he prays.

THREE O'CLOCK—DOING GOD'S WILL

At three in the afternoon, become accustomed to thinking of "the necessity of resignation and conformity to the will of God. . . (p. 311). "...it must be the great desire of your soul, that God's will may be done by you on earth, as it is done in heaven" (p. 312). We should believe that we are God's, that we belong to him, and are to act in "thankful resignation to the Divine pleasure" (p. 312). If we can thank God as much for suffering and misfortune as for health and prosperity, then we can be sure that we are real Christians.

This holy resignation and conformity of your will to the will of God being so much the true state of piety, I hope you will think it proper to make this hour of prayer a constant season of applying to God for so great a gift. . . . (p. 323).

Now you must not reserve the exercise of this pious temper to any particular times or occasions, or fancy how resigned you will be to God, if such or such trials should happen. . . . (p. 324).

But if we consider everything as God's doing, either by order or permission, we shall then be affected with common things, as they would be who saw a miracle (p. 324).

SIX O'CLOCK—self-examination and repentance

Our six o'clock meditation should be an examination of the actions of the day in order that we may repent of any sins of that day. Rather than to confess ourselves as sinners in general "and ask forgiveness in the gross" (p. 326), we need to examine ourselves step by step, repent, and ask forgiveness of God for each wrong action. We know more of our own hearts than we do of other people's and can therefore convict ourselves of sins that we only know of ourselves.

The greatness of our guilt rises chiefly from the greatness of God's goodness towards us, from the particular . . . blessings, the favours, the lights and instructions that we have received from Him (p. 336).

We should examine ourselves, not in comparison with others, but considering the advantages we have had—our education, good books, friends, blessings—and our many failings and the times we have not listened to our conscience. Such an examination will give us a wonderful newness of mind, a spirit of wisdom, and such a desire for perfection as we have never known before.

BEDTIME—commitment to God

Having thus examined and confessed your sins . . . you must . . . betake yourselves to prayer again, just before you go to bed.

And then commit yourself to sleep, as into the hands of God. . . .

For this time of the night is exceeding proper for such prayers and meditations. . . . (pp. 338-339).

Conclusion

Thus has William Law "explained the nature of devotion, both as it signifies a life devoted to God, and. . . a regular method of daily prayer" (p. 340). Probably most Christians desire to reach a state of perfection, and so these plain rules of Christian living need to be stressed and repeated again and again. Christian perfection does not necessarily "call one to a cloister, but to the full performance of those duties which are necessary for all Christians and common to all states of life" (p. 340). It calls to a life of strict devotion, leading to the greatest happiness. It leads to a high level of duty, reverence, love, honor, and gratitude to God. Indeed, if one were to ask who is the greatest saint, the answer might well be:

It is not he who prays most or fasts most; it is not he who gives most alms, or is most eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice; but it is he who is always thankful to God, who wills everything that God willeth, who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for it (p. 197).

Finally, as we know more of the value of the best things, as we are able to judge rightly of the things which concern us most, if we would rather be in a state of Christian perfection than to have any worldly happiness—then we have the highest wisdom, much higher than

any earthly knowledge can reach and so we shall live for God in all our actions.

For if there is an infinitely wise and good Creator, in whom we live, move, and have our being. . . surely it must be the highest act of our understanding to conceive rightly of Him; it must be the noblest instance of judgment, the most exalted temper of our nature, to worship and adore this universal providence, to conform to its laws, to study its wisdom, and to live and act everywhere as in the presence of this infinitely good and wise Creator (pp. 350-351).

CHARACTERS

(The names and explanations below are from the recommended classic, pages 354-355.)

JULIUS: the suggestion is, that Caesar is the worldly power as opposed to God.

LEO: the lion, probably suggesting the favorite of Society.

EUSEBIA: pious in the Ecclesiastical sense, as the name of the first Church historian.

PENITENS: Penitent almost in the sense of remorseful.

FLAVIA: stands for worldly pomp, half innocent, half vicious.

MIRANDA: admirable.

FLATUS: wind and vanity.

FELICIANA: she who belongs to the family of the Happy according to this world.

SUCCUS: the suggestion is of juicy and appetising meat.

MUNDANUS: worldly-wise-man.

CLASSICUS: a classical scholar.

CAECUS: blind.

PATERNUS: the character, it is thought, is drawn from Law's father.

MATILDA: perhaps chosen as the name of the first English Empress.

OURANIUS: heavenly

SUSURRUS: whisper.

GLOSSARY

TEMPER—disposition.

WANT—lack, need.

CHARITY—love.

PIOUS, PIETY—devout, devotion.

PLAINNESS—simplicity.

Chapter Five

A TESTAMENT OF DEVOTION

Part I

A. A Modern Saint

1. THE LIFE OF THOMAS KELLY
2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS MODERN SAINT

Part II

B. Five Messages

1. THE LIGHT WITHIN
2. HOLY OBEDIENCE
3. THE BLESSED COMMUNITY
4. THE ETERNAL NOW AND SOCIAL CONCERN
5. THE SIMPLIFICATION OF LIFE

C. Holy Obedience—For You? For Me?

In the few years since Thomas R. Kelly's Testament of Devotion was published, it has become a classic of the Christian life, and doubtless will live through the centuries. It breathes the spirit of "holy obedience" and responsive listening to God, and through it flows a deep, pure stream of Christian devotion.

GEORGIA HARKNESS

a testament of devotion

part one — a modern saint

To you in this room who are seekers, to you, young and old who have toiled all night and caught nothing, but who want to launch out into the deeps and let down your nets for a draught, I want to speak as simply, as tenderly, as clearly as I can. For God *can* be found. There *is* a last rock for your souls, a resting place of absolute peace and joy and power and radiance and security. There is a Divine Center into which your life can slip, a new and absolute orientation in God, a Center where you live with Him and out of which you see all of life, through new and radiant vision, tinged with new sorrows and pangs, new joys unspeakable and full of glory (p. 18).¹

These words from a lecture delivered at a Friends' meeting in January, 1938, express the main theme running through the five essays in *A Testament of Devotion*. One can find and know God, and the results are glory unspeakable. This little book is an appeal and a guide to a completely committed, God-centered, radiant Christian life.

¹Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1941), p. 18. This selection and all others from *A Testament of Devotion* quoted in this book, AN INTRODUCTION TO FIVE SPIRITUAL CLASSICS, are used by permission. Succeeding quotations are identified in the text only by the number of the page in *A Testament of Devotion* on which they appear, as in this instance.

Speaking not from the pristine enthusiasm of early Christianity, not from the background of the Middle Ages, nor from the realm of Catholic mysticism, nor even from another continent, but out of the scientific, industrial, war-ridden, materialistic world of today, Thomas Kelly insists with passionate earnestness:

Each one of us can live such a life of amazing power and peace and serenity, of integration and confidence and simplified multiplicity, on one condition—that is, *if we really want to* (p. 116).

Few indeed are the great devotional books. The majority of those available have come out of the experience of Roman Catholic saints of long ago. Eagerly then, we turn to this modern devotional classic written from a Protestant background, American in authorship, addressed chiefly to Quaker audiences, but with a universal appeal to Christians of all communions and nationalities. When it appeared in 1941, it was widely acclaimed by the religious press as meeting a long-felt need, ranking with the best in religious literature, ancient and modern. Ministers and church leaders were urged to keep it close at hand. Earnest seekers for a deeper life in Christ were referred to it as a guide book of unusual spiritual power meriting constant rereading. *The Christian Century* appraised it in these words:

If this [book] does not ultimately rank among the few great and undying books of devotion, it will be only because it is lost to view among the multitude of good but lesser books. That should not be allowed to happen.²

²From an excerpt printed on the jacket of *A Testament of Devotion*.

A TESTAMENT OF DEVOTION

That this has not been allowed to happen is evidenced by the fact that the book has gone through nine printings since 1942 and, according to its publishers, the demand for it is on the increase year after year. It has been published in the British Empire, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland, the editions in German, French, and Swedish, reaching beyond denominational and racial boundaries.

The occasion for the publishing of *A Testament of Devotion* was the untimely death of Thomas Kelly, in January, 1941. He was unexpectedly taken at the age of forty-seven, at the height of a career of rare spiritual contribution to his fellow men. Especially in the last three years of his life, he spoke and wrote with convincing power out of a deep and radiant experience of God. Only a few of his lectures and writings had appeared in print before his death. We are indebted to Douglas V. Steere, professor of philosophy at Haverford College, for gathering together these five essays and for writing the illuminating biographical memoir which precedes them. In a recent letter commenting on the wide use of the book, Douglas Steere wrote:

It has been a great source of inspiration in many parts of the world. It has the flavor of Brother Lawrence's *Practice of the Presence of God* put into the vernacular of our time and with the authentic vindication that it has come out of a life lived in our own generation.

In starting to write about *A Testament of Devotion*, one is tempted to throw down the pen and urge, Just read it, every word of it, and reread it! It is all there in 124 pages, including the biographical sketch by Steere.

You may find yourself, like many another, placing it beside your Bible with your choicest devotional literature for frequent tastings, so deeply does it speak to the human heart. Yet, if bringing out a few facts and sharing with you some of the insights that have made this book precious to the writer will serve to awaken in you a desire to discover it for yourself, then it is well. That is the humble and sincere prayer for the pages that follow.

the life of thomas kelly

Shall we first look into the life of Thomas Kelly? It is a benediction to read the memoir by Douglas Steere (pp. 1-28). It gives word pictures that infuse Kelly's essays with the personality of their writer. We should know little of him personally without this preface.

Thomas Kelly was born of Quaker parents in 1893, near Chillicothe, Ohio. He early absorbed the inner integrity and purposeful attitude toward life characteristic of the Friends. After his father died, when Thomas was four, his mother assumed responsibility for the support of the family and for the education of the children, Thomas and his sister Mary.

Attending college at Wilmington, Ohio, Kelly soon developed a passionate interest in science. His Quaker honesty sought truth without compromise, and science seemed to be the adequate medium for that quest. Pursuing further studies at Haverford College in 1913, he came under the influence of Rufus Jones, an outstanding Quaker philosopher and mystic; and to his scientific interest and training, Thomas Kelly began exploring

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courses in philosophy. Teaching philosophy eventually became his profession. But much was to happen before he arrived, twenty-three years later, at a place on the faculty of Haverford, in the very department in which he began his philosophic studies.

We can hear Kelly, in his student days, idealistic, hungry for life at its best, saying to Rufus Jones, "I am just going to make my life a miracle." Always sensitive to human needs, and with a deep religious vein, he volunteered as a missionary in 1916 and planned to go to Japan. In preparation he enrolled for ministerial training at the Hartford Theological Seminary, and received there his Bachelor of Divinity degree—but not before World War I had interrupted and changed his plans. During the war he volunteered his services as a Quaker, first in canteen duty with the Y.M.C.A. and later with German prisoners in England. This German contact was to lead to much richer service later.

It was in the associations at Hartford that he met Lael Macy, whom he married in 1919, and in whom he found an understanding life companion. She loyally supported him in the decisions and ventures of his personal and professional career. Into their home, through the years, came two children, Lois and Richard.

His deep and growing interest in philosophy led him to further studies at the Hartford Theological Seminary, where he took his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1924. Later, he had two years of philosophic study at Harvard University.

Before devoting himself to the field of philosophy, he held teaching positions in science and in Bible. At

different periods he taught philosophy at Earlham, the Quaker college at Richmond, Indiana. In 1935 he accepted a position on the faculty of the University of Hawaii, hoping thus to become better versed in the philosophies of the East, for, as he wrote a friend, he had a deep desire—

... to be acquainted with the philosophic thought of the whole world, not merely with the thought of the Western World. To live solely within one's own cultural traditions...not actively familiar with the powerful thought of India, China and the rest impresses me as a provincialism not warranted by the spirit of philosophy itself (p. 13).

It was from this position in Hawaii that he was called to Haverford College for what proved to be his last term of service.

Mention should be made of his one book published before his death, entitled *Explanation and Reality in the Philosophy of Emile Meyerson*. It is a scholarly work, the result of seven years' intensive research in the field of philosophy and the thought of this French philosopher. Its publication was in a way a turning point in Kelly's career, seeming to release him for fresh, creative endeavor.

Twice through these years he was sent by the Friends to give leadership and ministry in Germany. Out of this special service came some of the deepest experiences of his life, to which reference is made later.

He continued to work with and through the American Friends Service Committee in various capacities, giving special attention to work in the Far East. He never lost

his interest in Japan. However, it was not in organization and committee work that he placed his greatest faith; it was in the impact of life upon life. His finest ministry was his contact with individuals, his students and the small intimate groups that met for fellowship and spiritual discovery. He was eager that individual Christians should come into the life of peace and power that is their rightful heritage. To him there was nothing more important in awakening other men to the love of God than "a holy life, transformed and radiant in the glory of God" (p. 123). He was preparing to present a suggested devotional technique to help bring others into this transformation when he was suddenly taken from his labors in this time-bound world.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS MODERN SAINT

What then are the outstanding characteristics of this modern saint? For a saint he was—without canonization—a saint whose life became the "miracle" that he longed for in his youth.

He was completely devoted to truth. In his nature was no dallying with half-truth, no patience with compromise. With the exactness of a scientist and the thoroughness of a research scholar, he followed his quest. In one of his lectures on "Reality of the Spiritual World" (not included here), he set up, one after another, the traditional arguments for the existence of God and showed their weakness. He then proceeded to give the one infallible proof—quite undemonstrable through methods of science or logic—yet vitally true to the individual, and openly valid by its fruits in society—the

experience of God in the heart of man, the man who lives by faith.

His religious hunger was the dominating factor in his life. His deepest yearning was to know God. All his studies and activities moved in that direction. In the words of another, on a similar quest, he knew the real meaning of life to be:

...not self-fulfillment or anything that the self can create—but God, finding God, and finding oneself in God, and adoring God, and loving Him, and being loved by Him! "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." One does not know that until he knows God. Thereafter his life becomes a conscious panting after God, that is increasingly a conscious partaking of God.³

He gave himself with abandon to the will of God and the needs of the world. He entered into the agony and suffering of this generation and found his participation to be one of the pathways to God:

There is a sense in which, in this terrible tenderness, we become one with God and bear in our quivering souls the sins and burdens, the benightedness and the tragedy of the creatures of the whole world, and suffer in their suffering, and die in their death (pp. 106-107).

During a brief visit at Pendle Hill, a small community center of study on the edge of Philadelphia, where the simple way of Quaker life is shared and taught, and where Thomas Kelly was known, and loved, and listened

³Albert E. Day, *An Autobiography of Prayer* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1952), p. 53. Used by permission.

to, I heard those who had known him, or known of him, speak of his unstinted sharing of himself. In fact, they said that there seemed to be two sides to his life: the deep abiding inner joy—"no one can take that from me!"—and the deep suffering from the weight of the world's misery. This joy and this vicarious suffering led him to spend himself unsparingly, even though he knew he had a weak heart.

He was utterly humble and sincere. We find little in his writings of Thomas Kelly himself, his wide variety of contacts, his travels, his achievements. Only here and there, as some experience could bring home a point of help to another, do we get a glimpse of him in action. Always we feel in his writings a personal warmth, a deep interest in people, a direct appeal, an earnest pleading from a heart made humble by the glory of its experience, and enkindled with a passion to pass on its joy.

He embodied "the rugged feature of sincerity" which Rufus Jones picked out as basic to the Quaker way of life:

This call to sincerity lies at the root of the Quaker attempt to live the simple life. . . . Simplicity at its best and truest is this utter honesty of heart and life, this complete sincerity of soul before God and in relation to our fellow men.⁴

Kelly's convictions on the importance of simplicity are forcefully expressed in the final chapter of the book.

⁴Rufus Jones, "Rethinking Quaker Principles," *The Pendle Hill Reader*, ed. Herrymon Maurer. (New York: Published in association with Pendle Hill by Harper & Bros., 1950), p. 172. Used by permission.

He was a great teacher. His students spoke of him as intellectually exciting. They loved and respected him. From Earlham College it was reported, "He was a great teacher here, always eager, ardent, alive in the classroom" (p. 10). In his learnedness he was not beyond and apart from his class. While in 1934 he anticipated that his writing and other work would tend toward closer and more detailed studies in "basic problems of research in metaphysics and epistemology"—the very terminology of which would seem to remove him from the orbit of the simple thinker—yet from 1938 to 1941 we find him earnestly speaking and writing in terms comprehensible and deeply moving to the everyday Christian.

He was an understanding friend.

He was the perfect friend, [wrote one who knew him well], whether we shared the gay sunlight of humor, or ascended the peaks of highest vision together. I had especially marvelled to see how he grew always in insight and power, and rejoiced at the light he brought me and all men. He was a great strength to me. The thought of him was always a beatitude, a great light, a wind of courage (p. 27).

He had unusual warmth of personality. Perhaps this characteristic will have the greatest appeal to the readers of these pages. Thomas Kelly had his full share of the anxieties, uncertainties, disappointments, and ill health that enter into the life of the average individual. After one deep disappointment, he wrote to a friend, "the calibre of a man is found in his ability to meet disappointment successfully, enriched rather than narrowed

by it" (p. 10). But throughout these vicissitudes there remained a warm attractiveness and lovableness that won to him even those who might disagree with his point of view. Quick in his sympathy, possessed of a rich sense of humor, he was always a lover of good fellowship, and in a group his hearty laugh was often heard. No ascetic, aloof from the world, was this saint. He was very much in the world. Eager, interested, vital—this is the picture we get from his biography, and the picture on the jacket of the book (I hope it is still there) shows a warm smile that draws one to him. We wish that we might have known him.

In a recent letter, Lael Kelly writes, "It was so wonderful to be the wife of such a person. He truly lived as he wrote—always loving, never one unkind word—not only was he that in his home but to all people."

PART TWO — FIVE MESSAGES

As we read the book itself, we shall discover it to be not a book *about* religion but rather a sharing of vital experience in the discovery of God. It is not a confession as such, though the record of spiritual experience is clear. It is not a handbook of instruction, though it is rich with pointed suggestions. It is not a book of theology, though it follows very largely the Quaker pattern and terminology; in fact, with its steady emphasis on the "inner witness," it strikes a most responsive chord in Methodist hearts. One does not detect here the exact scientist, or the learned philosopher, or the trained theologian, though Thomas Kelly was all three. These pages are written with the simplicity, the clarity, the

winsome sincerity that all will read with satisfaction. Of course one must have in mind that the book is not a single composition, but a collection of five writings. The essays have not been edited or correlated. Each one stands by itself, and it is not surprising, therefore, if we find repetition of ideas and expressions. But this very repetition only serves to emphasize the basic theme of God in the inner life.

Perhaps the unique appeal of this book to many will be the fact that of all the five classics introduced in this volume it is the only one written by a contemporary. He lived in places familiar to us. He attended and later taught in familiar colleges. He entered, in the role that his Quaker principles would allow, into the world struggle of war. He followed the accepted pattern of modern scholarship. He studied with men well known in the present generation. He produced a scholarly work as the result of years of study. Little did he dream that his most effective written contribution to the world would be this little book with its note of tenderness, its sensitiveness to the wounded, hurt, defeated lives about him; its yearning and reaching out to them that they might share his joy in the unsearchable riches that were flooding his own soul. With humble eagerness he seeks for just the right mode of expression or figure of speech that will carry conviction and inspire new hope.

And how well he finds those arresting phrases! Let us read.

the light within

The first of the essays, "The Light Within," was

actually Thomas Kelly's final writing. Concerning it, Douglas Steere gives this information:

Nine days before his death, he [Kelly] wrote me a letter which he sent to Portugal by clipper. In it he described the last piece of writing he was to do. "Spent last week (vacation) writing in bare hope of publication, on practical procedure and conduct of the self in living by, and oriented toward, the Light within, both in private devotion and in public reaction to the world of men and events, seeing them in and through the Light. . . Read one at Pendle Hill last Sunday." These three chapters of rare grace and suggestiveness form the opening chapters of this little collection (p. 26).

His last earnest endeavor, then, was to lead others to a deepening devotional life. Having become keenly aware of the poverty of soul of many who call themselves Christian, and sensitive to the underlying hunger for God in the inadequate lives about him, he sounds a call to depth Christianity, and points out the path to "an amazing Inward Life with Him" (p. 32), a life that is not only radiant and triumphant within but finds itself "bestirred to an outward life of unremitting labor" (p. 36). The secret of this continuous consciousness of God lies in those "secret habits of unceasing orientation. . . about the Inward Light, ways of conducting our inward life so that we are perpetually bowed in worship" (p. 31). He goes on to explain that life can be lived on two levels, the one of external affairs, the other at the profounder level where there is a continuous turning toward God, a quiet commitment to his will and guidance.

Do we seem to hear Brother Lawrence telling of the habit of continuous conversation with God, referring to him all that we do, day by day, and hour by hour?

But this is not the voice of an ascetic of the Middle Ages, but of a fun-loving saint of the twentieth century, proclaiming that this practice of inward worship and listening is still the heart of religion. Kelly said:

A practicing Christian must above all be one who practices the perpetual return of the soul into the inner sanctuary, who brings the world into its Light and rejudges it, who brings the Light into the world with all its turmoil and its fitfulness and recreates it. . . ." (p. 35).

What is the Light Within? Let us return to Kelly's opening words of this essay:

Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself. Yielding to these persuasions, gladly committing ourselves in body and soul, utterly and completely, to the Light Within, is the beginning of true life. It is a dynamic center, a creative Life that presses to birth within us. It is a Light Within which illumines the face of God and casts new shadows and new glories upon the face of men. It is a seed stirring to life if we do not choke it. It is the Shekinah of the soul, the Presence in the midst. Here is the slumbering Christ, stirring to be awakened, to become the soul we clothe in earthly form and action. And He is within us all (p. 29).

To establish the habit of inward prayer, of subjecting all of life to the penetrating and healing rays of the Inner Light, is not easy, even though Brother Lawrence may seem to imply that it is. It calls for continued application, complete self-giving, persistence in the face of frequent lapses, a humble submission to God's will, and a quiet thankfulness for his patient and gentle leading. But as this inner stream of quiet worship becomes steadier in its flow, we find the life changing, acquiring new evaluations, new interests, new glories.

We look out upon the world, and. . . we may be given to respond, in some increased measure, in ways dimly suggestive of the Son of Man (p. 45).

Two apparently opposite results appear.

He plucks the world out of our hearts, loosening the chains of attachment. And He hurls the world into our hearts, where we and He together carry it in infinitely tender love" (p. 47).

Sometimes—not often—this inward prayer may reach such depths that prayer seems to flow through one "like a mighty tide" (p. 45); sometimes for a particular person; sometimes reaching out to all the world.

This wonderfully unfolding inner experience, Thomas Kelly insists, is not merely for the saint or religious devotee or particular group. It is for every follower of Jesus Christ. It is for you and me. As we read this chapter, the words tug at our hearts as they describe this Inner Light—the Christ—present and waiting within us.

holy OBEDIENCE

The summer before Thomas Kelly presented his lecture on holy obedience in March, 1939, to the Yearly Quaker Meeting, he had spent some weeks in Germany visiting German Friends. He had been sent there, as previously noted, by the American Friends Service Committee to journey from place to place, living in the homes of the people, sharing their interests and problems as a spiritual leader and interpreter of the Quaker way of life.

These months of inner fellowship with families and individuals seem to have brought him to a high point of spiritual illumination. Douglas Steere quotes him as saying repeatedly on his return, "It is wonderful. I have been literally melted down by the love of God" (p. 21). He wrote to Rufus Jones that fall:

I have had this summer, and still have, such a sweeping experience of "refreshment of the spirit" so amazing, so sweet, and so prolonged as to go clear down to the roots of my being (p. 21).

Small wonder then that in this outstanding lecture of the year he should embody an appeal to holy obedience, a quality of life, or shall we say, a level of life, attained by the wholly committed, God-possessed soul. Listen to his description:

The life that intends to be wholly obedient, wholly submissive, wholly listening, is astonishing in its completeness. Its joys are ravishing, its peace profound, its humility the deepest, its power world-shaking, its love enveloping, its simplicity that of a trusting child. . . . And

A TESTAMENT OF DEVOTION

it is a life and power that can break forth in this tottering Western culture and return the Church to its rightful life as a fellowship of creative, heaven-led souls (pp. 54-55).

Holy obedience is no average goodness, no half-measure. It is complete surrender to God with no reservations whatsoever, "to follow God's faintest whisper."

One way into this holy obedience, says Kelly, is by profound mystical experience.

Then is the soul swept into a Loving Center of ineffable sweetness, where calm and unspeakable peace and ravishing joy steal over one (p. 56).

However, such exaltation is not essential. In fact, many heaven-dedicated souls never know it. But they do know the utter dedication of their will to the will of God, a dedication that may be achieved not all at once, but "piecemeal and progressively" (p. 59). It is the will that counts.

Four steps are suggested along the way. The first is the "flaming vision of the wonder of such a life" (p. 59). How does such a vision come? He refers to the Scriptures and the lives of the saints, or some living example of the truly holy life. Personally I know of no modern work that supplies this vision more clearly than Thomas Kelly's own writings, or his own life.

His second step is an immediate beginning. "Begin where you are. Obey *now*. . . Live this present moment, this present hour. . . in utter submission and openness toward Him" (p. 60). The continuous inner prayer life described in "The Light Within" opens the way to

adoration and submission and ever-increasing consciousness of the Presence.

Third, one must quickly recover from a slip or backward step. Immediately begin again. And fourth, do not *try* so hard.

Learn to live in the passive voice—a hard saying for Americans—and let life be willed through you.

Your life is "hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3*b*).

Among the many fruits of holy obedience, profound humility is clearly evident. "He only is near to God who is exceedingly humble" (p. 63). Yet this is not a self-debasing, negative humility. Actually the selfless life of obedience, possessed of God, often leads to a self-forgetting boldness in witness to God's power. It is the utterly humble who can confound the mighty. It was so in the days of early Christianity. It is so under religious persecution today. Coupled with this complete humility there comes a craving for complete holiness, for absolute purity of heart. No compromise here. Honesty, gentleness, self-control, unwearied patience and thoughtfulness, are some of the "absolutes," reminding one of the "four absolutes" of the Oxford Group movement prominent over a decade ago; or of the principles held essential for members of the Disciplined Order of Christ who seek to affirm with Paul, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Thomas Kelly's experiences in Germany are poignantly with him as he describes entrance into suffering as another fruit of holy obedience. To become keenly sensitized to suffering is one of the penalties for drawing

close to the heart of God, to the "man of sorrows. . . acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). God "has planted the Cross along the road of holy obedience" (p. 71).

With the spirit of a prophet, Kelly warns against giving in to pleasant, comfortable, self-centered living when the tragedies that have devastated the world could eventually descend anywhere and find us spiritually unprepared to "enter into the divine education and drastic discipline of sorrow, or rise radiant in the sacrament of pain" (p. 70). Remembering the blighted lives in Europe unprepared for the disasters that broke them, he pleads for this utterly dedicated life as the only preparation. He sees hope in the development of groups of those who are completely committed to live in peace and power in a confused and suffering world, to share in the burdens and suffering of others. Thomas Kelly once told of an hour on his knees in the Cathedral at Cologne when all the weight of the world's anguish seemed to descend upon him, "a burden too terrible to be borne—but yet with His help bearable" (p. 21). Kelly's friends noted that this experience left an indelible impression upon him, deeply reflected in the last two years of his life.

One more fruit of holy obedience he gives is the simplicity of the trusting child, a simplicity that is actually maturity. Its mark is radiant joy. "In serene, unhurried calm it walks in time with the joy and assurance of Eternity" (p. 73). I have no words to state it as well as Kelly does, so I continue to quote:

The wholly obedient life is mastered and unified and simplified and gathered up into the love of God and it

lives and walks among men in the perpetual flame of that radiant love (p. 75).

Each of these essays (what an inadequate word to describe them!) contains at least one direct plea, an evangelistic note, as it were. Listen to these closing words:

Hasten unto Him who is the chief actor of the drama of time and Eternity. It is not too late to love Him utterly and obey Him implicitly and be baptized with the power of the apostolic life (p. 76).

the blessed community

"When we are drowned in the overwhelming seas of the love of God"—so begins this chapter, "The Blessed Community." What a way to express the all-enveloping presence of God!

Such an experience of God, says Thomas Kelly, inevitably draws together those who have it. There is a hunger for fellowship with others who know Him in the deep intimacy of their souls. These others may be discovered one by one, or in groups. Many, and increasing in numbers, are the prayer groups throughout the Church, and in many walks of life, drawn together either by the experience of God, or by the hunger to discover and know him.

"Let me read to you a description of our group," one leader began, in her prayer group one morning as she opened to this chapter, "The Blessed Community." "Of course," she continued, "this is much larger in scope than we are, but see if you can find us in it."

So together they went over the description of the holy fellowship of glowing hearts. A relationship of love, amazing in its riches, disciplining, transforming, ennobling, empowering. They recognized the "new alignment" of friendships that had come to them as the love of God had ever-increasing control; that some persons had begun to stand out in significance, while some apparently important persons began to recede. The group smiled understandingly at the description of some active leaders who are shown "in the X-ray light of Eternity, to be agitated, half-committed, wistful, self-placating seekers, to whom the poise and serenity of the Everlasting have never come," and they could almost name those with a "well-intentioned, but feverish over-busyness, not completely grounded in the depths of peace," concerning whom they could wish "they would not blur the beauty of their souls by fast motion" (p. 79). In fact, each one in the group pondered whether some of the description might not fit her.

They knew too, as it said, that their group fellowship far exceeded the mere sociability of a church fellowship program, both in quality and in depth. They were rooted and grounded in the love of God. They knew each other through him, and their fellowship had been in prayer and silences with him.

Going further in the chapter, they agreed that the spirit of their humble little prayer group was all-inclusive, for they were of different backgrounds and different economic levels. Kinship was felt with all who were *at home with God*. All would be welcome. No creeds or cultures or political viewpoints could restrict such a

relationship. So they firmly believed, and let us hope that they would be proved right, should a testing come.

Yes, and they too felt the urge to widen their fellowship, to "find more friends for the soul" (p. 82) by reading the lives of the saints, *The Imitation of Christ*, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, and other devotional literature. Provocative, instructive, inspiring—this widening fellowship through reading had led them forward.

As they read further in the chapter, they sensed as never before the vastness of this wider fellowship of which they were a tiny part, individually and as a group. Members of one small prayer group, sincerely and earnestly seeking and finding God, they had not realized before that "within all groups [the fellowship] springs up, smiling at differences, for, existing in time, it is rooted in the Eternal One" (p. 85).

They paused for meditation over such expressions as:

...amazing group inter-knittedness of God-enthralled men and women who know one another *in Him* (p. 80).

Where the Fellowship is lacking the Church invisible is lacking (p. 86).

...the final pooling of joy and love in Him is accomplished in the silences of the Eternal (p. 87).

...such a man no one can touch except he touch God also (pp. 82-83).

Can we make *all* our relations to our fellows relations which pass *through Him*. . . the conductor on a trolley . . . the clerk who serves us in a store? . . . [We can] meet each person with a background of eternal expectation and a silent, wordless prayer of love (p. 88).

We know that today this prayer group is but one of many thousands of similar informal gatherings for prayer—of praise, of discovery of a deep life with God, of intercession. A tremendous upsurge of spiritual hunger is expressing itself in various orders, fellowships, and simple prayer groups. Poor indeed is the church or Woman's Society of Christian Service or Wesleyan Service Guild that does not have at least *one* such nucleus of "God-hungry" persons, permeating and leavening the total membership with their spiritual activity, and helping to bring to pass in their particular corner a measure of "The Blessed Community."

the eternal now and social concern

The "eternal now"—what does that mean?

To this time-blinded world, Thomas Kelly explains that "now" is merely an incidental point linking the past and the future, of no special importance. But to one who has known the wondrous experience of Divine Presence in his life, each Now is a meeting place with the Eternal, precious and significant. It is the place where Eternal Love breaks in upon time and

...heaven comes down our souls to greet,
And glory crowns the mercy seat.⁵

Such experiences lift life from the level of time to the "level of the Timeless." The world of time ceases to be all-important. The glorious secret of God's presence changes life from a cautious, anxious planning for the

⁵Hugh Stowell, "From Every Stormy Wind That Blows" (*The Methodist Hymnal*, No. 317).

future—"calculated wisdom," as he puts it—to a serene and joyous surrender to the guidance of the Spirit.

Instead of being the active, hurrying church worker and the anxious, careful planner of shrewd moves toward the good life, we become pliant creatures. . . . The energizing, dynamic center is not in us but in the Divine Presence in which we share (pp. 96-97).

God is seeking us in every Now.

He is anxious to swell out our time-nows into an Eternal Now by filling them with a sense of Presence (p. 97). For the Eternal is urgently, actively breaking into time, working through those who are willing *to be laid hold upon*, to surrender *self*-confidence and *self*-centered effort, . . . and let the Eternal be the dynamic guide in recreating, through us, our time-world (p. 99).

Vividly, appealingly, the fruits of this Spirit-led life are portrayed here. A joy that sings within us and through us into the world; a love that "reloves" everyone and everything in a new way, that draws us to the suffering and the needy, that leads us into the fellowship of others who have this secret, that implants in us a yearning to share the secret so that still others may be found of God; and last, the peace that comes from a serene, unbroken faith. Out of such peace comes power—"...a life of amazing, victorious faith-living. . ." (p. 103), "...breath-taking boldness. . . amazing confidence" (p. 105).

One of Dr. Kelly's favorite words is "amazing." Repeatedly he uses it in describing some result of the experience of God in the life of the completely committed soul.

But what has this to do with "social concern"? The Friends are known the world over for their sense of social responsibility and their social service work. Thomas Kelly, as we have seen, was continually active in humanitarian as well as educational and spiritual ministry. How is such work related to the "eternal now"? Because, he says, "Social concern is the dynamic Life of God at work in the world. . . ." (p. 111) and comes from this very experience of the Love of God described above. The impulse to saviorhood is a part of that love. This concern becomes world-wide in its outreach, but to each one of us are given particular responsibilities that are our special *concerns*, divinely entrusted to us, and upon which we should concentrate.

A final word in this chapter calls attention to the simplification of life which comes when one centers down to a few concerns and gives them faithful and unhurried attention. This idea makes an excellent introduction to the final chapter of the book, "The Simplification of Life."

the simplification of life

"This week is much too full." Does that have a familiar sound? For a really good description and analysis of the present day busyness of the average American, read the first four pages of this chapter. Thomas Kelly contrasts it with the "amazing power and peace and serenity" with which each one of us can live *"if we really want to."*

Here is this word "amazing" again. In fact, a study of the outstanding words of this essay almost tells the tale.

On the one side, we find "breathless" used over and over. "Hurry," in one form or another, crops up four times. "Frantic," "fretful," "feverish," are repeated. "Complexity," of course, stands out. On the other hand, we find "unhurried" used repeatedly. "Integrated" and "integration" comes in for seven counts. "Serenity" shows up four times. His favorite word, "amazing," appears six times. And that longed-for word, "peace," crowns them all with nine references.

It is not complexity that explains the hectic rush, he says, but a lack of inner integration. Instead of being centered around one mastering Will within us, we are a "whole committee of selves," pulled this way and that (p. 114).

What is the solution? How can we have the deeper life of unshaken composure," this life that is "unhurried, cheery, fresh, positive," carrying a full load "with quiet joy and springing step," this life of "amazing equilibrium" and "amazing effectiveness"? (p. 116).

The answer has been given in previous chapters and is reiterated here. This "deeper life of unshaken composure" is found in the heaven-directed life by all who are "humbly walking in the presence and guidance and will of God." A life centered in him becomes simplified. Through him there is a re-evaluation of interests. He does this for us if we will let him. We come to understand what is important and to what we can say no. Many of the things we have been doing lose their interest and importance. The question is how deep is our desire to submit our crowded programs to his appraisal? John

Woolman, an early Quaker leader, refused to let his business grow beyond his actual needs. When it did, he sent customers elsewhere. Could we do that? Listen to Thomas Kelly's characteristically personal approach:

Let me talk very intimately and very earnestly with you about Him who is dearer than life. Do you really want to live your lives, every moment of your lives, in His Presence? . . . Do you love His Presence? . . . Have you set yourselves to be His, and *only* His, walking every moment in holy obedience? . . . This life, this abiding, enduring peace that never fails, this serene power and unhurried conquest, inward conquest over ourselves, outward conquest over the world, is meant to be ours. It is a life that is freed from strain and anxiety and hurry, for something of the Cosmic Patience of God becomes ours. . . .

Do you *want* to live in such an amazing divine Presence that life is transformed and transfigured and transmuted into peace and power and glory and miracle? If you do, then you can (pp. 119-120).

And thereby comes simplification.

For all this, the desire must be deep, very deep and compelling. This total devotion to the inner Presence does not disrupt programs; nor is it time consuming. "One can have a very busy day, outwardly speaking, and yet be steadily in the holy Presence" (p. 120). The chapter, "Holy Obedience," has already shown how by quiet, persistent practice an inward adoration may be singing through the heart, a secret undercurrent of love and praise regardless of the surface occupation. For religion is not something added to life but is the very core and center of life.

AN INTRODUCTION TO FIVE SPIRITUAL CLASSICS

There is need, of course, for some time for meditative reading and for going down into "the recreating silences" where God is, but "one can carry the recreating silences within oneself, *well-nigh all the time*" (p. 121). And this life "hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3) has a splendor and glory beyond words.

This unhurried life, centered down to singleness of purpose, rooted and grounded in the love of God, cannot keep this radiant love to itself. A sense of commission is born. We love people as we never loved them before. We would be the means of awakening them to the transforming love of God, and so under God's devotion we find our bundle of responsibility and accept our portion in the vast world concern. Quietly we go forward under his guidance.

Life from the Center is a life of unhurried peace and power. It is simple. It is serene. It is amazing. It is triumphant. It is radiant. It takes no time, but it occupies all our time. And it makes our life programs new and overcoming. We need not get frantic. He is at the helm. And when our little day is done we lie down quietly in peace, for all is well (p. 124).

holy OBEDIENCE — for you? for me?

Whoever reads these pages and considers them a substitute for reading the book is totally wrong. I cannot recommend too strongly that every seeking Christian possess this little volume and keep it in the devotional corner or on the bedside table for deep refreshment and inspiration toward holy living. We find in it the basic theme of John Wesley's teaching and of Methodism's

message, the inner witness of the heart cleansed and warmed by the presence of God—the Light Within. It sounds the call to holy obedience and points the way. We see the God-possessed life gravitating toward others of the kindled heart, becoming identified with a blessed community of those who are immersed in the love of God, living in his kingdom and quietly bringing others into it. We see this committed life free from the shackles of time and geared to eternity, lived each moment in God's presence as an eternal now, and impelled with burning heart out into the world to share and interpret this Eternal Love in social concern. And finally we see the simplification and winsomeness, the unhurried peace and power, that come to one who has surrendered himself utterly to the will and guidance of God. We see this life, self-renounced and God-committed, going forth with heaven-born boldness to help meet the greatest need in the world today—the need for God.

Much that Dr. Kelly has written may seem far beyond our humble experience. Yet something within us says that it is true. He opens windows and doors of the soul onto far vistas of spiritual attainment. We hear the divine whisper of invitation to step forward into a life of glorious fulfilment—the life with God.

There is just one question: do we really want to? Enough to go all the way?

It is ours for the asking, the taking, the willing, the complete self-giving.

BOOKS ABOUT THE CLASSICS AND THEIR AUTHORS

Books marked with an asterisk (*) may be ordered from Literature Headquarters, 7820 Reading Road, Cincinnati 37, Ohio. Other books in print may be ordered from The Methodist Publishing House in your territory. Your local church, public, and college libraries may be able to lend you the books marked "out of print."

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The authors of This Book

All the writers of AN INTRODUCTION TO FIVE SPIRITUAL CLASSICS are members of Woman's Societies of Christian Service and in other ways are active in The Methodist Church. They were selected for several reasons as the authors. Enthusiasm for the subject and writing ability were basic assets. Also it was the hope of the persons planning the book that the authors might include one writer from each of the three former communions now merged into The Methodist Church, from several of the former woman's organizations, from as many jurisdictions and different sections of the country as possible, from the group of deaconesses serving in the United States, and from missionaries now serving overseas.

By now the readers have sensed the deep appreciation each writer feels for "her" devotional classic, and, doubtless, share in her enthusiasm; they know of each author's stylistic skills. The five authors are from two of the former churches, three of the former woman's societies, and three jurisdictions; one is a deaconess and one a foreign missionary. Two are mothers, housewives, and ordained ministers, and one of these is also a professional social worker. Two of the authors have been writing for publication many years.

When leaving the editor's office recently, one writer affirmed, "This study and writing have brought me into a deeper spiritual experience, and I intend to become fully dedicated."

LOUISE KILLINGSWORTH

Author of the Chapter, "The Confessions of St. Augustine"

Miss Louise Killingsworth was born in Fayette, Mississippi, where she spent a happy childhood with her parents, an older brother, and a younger sister. Having received her B.A. degree from Mississippi State College for Women, she taught English in Mississippi for twelve years. During her summers, she studied at the University of Chicago, George Peabody College for Teachers, in Nashville, Tennessee, and Tulane University, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

In 1936, following the departure of her sister to China as a missionary, Miss Killingsworth entered Scarritt and Peabody Colleges to prepare herself for teaching on the mission field.

In the spring of 1937 she was commissioned under the Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for work in China. Because of the Sino-Japanese War, her first appointment was to Colegio Buenavista, in Havana, Cuba. The following year conditions were such that she could go to Peking, China, for her year of language study. She then went to McTyeire School, in Shanghai, where she remained until she was interned along with over a thousand other aliens by the Japanese military authorities. She was among those who were repatriated on the S. S. "Gripsholm." She returned to McTyeire School in 1946, where she worked until she left China in 1950, after eleven months under the Communist regime.

She sailed for Malaya in 1954 to teach at Lady Treacher Girls' School in Taiping. During the intervening three years, she taught at Paine College, Augusta, Georgia.

When she is not teaching, Miss Killingsworth spends most of her time in local church activities. She is particularly interested in using religious drama as a way of creating meaningful worship for youth in the belief that it will lead to constructive action. Her strong desire to make worship meaning-

ful has also led her to become interested in church architecture. Miss Killingsworth says, "When I am in a church that is new to me and that I do not find worshipful, I catch myself figuring out ways of remodeling it."

FLORENCE HOOPER

Author of the Chapter, "The Imitation of Christ"

Florence Hooper has spent all her life in or near Baltimore, Maryland, where her family for four generations has been a part of the city's life—in Methodist circles, in politics, and in trade and manufacturing.

Miss Hooper has an A. B. degree from Goucher College and is a member of Phi Beta Kappa; also she is a Certified Public Accountant of Maryland. For twenty-eight years she served as national treasurer of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Her present business activities consist in acting as a field agent for a large life insurance company and in taking care of investments and income tax returns for relatives and friends, both individually and as trustee of her grandfather's estate.

Since 1950 she has taught each year in the summer schools and institutes of both the Woman's Society of Christian Service and United Church Women. Winters are spent in teaching, and in speaking and writing on missionary subjects—freelance, "without portfolio"! This, she declares, is fun, and she loves it. She is a contributor to *World Outlook* and *The Methodist Woman*.

In 1949 Miss Hooper visited Methodist work in South America and wrote a series of articles for *World Outlook*, which were later published as a pamphlet, *Portrait of a Mission*. In 1951 she flew to Africa and observed the missions of The Methodist Church south of the Sahara. Her trips combine her most compelling "hobbies": missions and travel.

"Collecting churches" is another hobby. "This collection, gathered world-wide, is fascinating and easy to take care of, for it's all in my memory and requires no storage space!" Miss Hooper exclaims. When she has free time, which is "precious seldom," she does hemstitching, needlepoint, or knitting. She is an unorthodox, but interested, cook.

A happy woman, Miss Hooper attributes her deep content to Christ's presence in her life, gradually but surely transforming her attitudes toward everything and everybody. "There's a lot of transforming still to do, but I'm on my way!"

LILLIAN WARRICK POPE

Author of the chapter, "The Practice of the Presence of God"

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Mrs. Lillian Warrick Pope from her earliest childhood dreamed of a full-time Christian vocation. A graduate of the Bible Institute of Pennsylvania, she received her B. S. degree from Temple University. Graduate study included work at Temple School of Theology and at the Graduate School of the University of Pennsylvania with a major in religious education. She also has an M. A. degree in group work and a professional diploma as a "Specialist in Early Childhood Education," from Columbia University.

Mrs. Pope was ordained in 1939 in the Delaware Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, by Bishop Ernest G. Richardson. She has served as acting pastor of Trinity Methodist Church, East Germantown, Pennsylvania, and as church social worker of the Zoar Methodist Church, in Philadelphia. In 1941, Mrs. Pope became a field secretary of the Woman's Division of Christian Service of the Board of Missions and Church Extension of The Methodist Church and in this service traveled extensively throughout the Central Jurisdiction. Following her marriage in 1944, she accepted the position of director of Christian Education of the Brooks Methodist Church, in Jamaica, New York.

At present, Mrs. Pope is working with Puerto Ricans, as the educational director at the Child Care Center of Union Settlement House (New York City) to which her young son, Roderrick, accompanies her and where he enjoys the benefits of the center.

In addition to her professional work, Mrs. Pope is actively engaged in serving through the Woman's Society of Christian Service in her conference, district, and local church—teaching study courses, conducting workshops, serving at summer schools, and lecturing. She is also active on the Jamaica Council of United Church Women and is chairman of its Commission on Education in her local church.

Mrs. Pope looks toward a future of continued religious vocation, believing that through broadened knowledge and enriched experience she will be able to develop an even more effective ministry of Christian service.

PEARLE TIBBETTS

*Author of the chapter, "A Serious Call to a Devout
and Holy Life"*

Pearle Tibbetts and a twin sister were born at Glasgow, Missouri. Miss Tibbetts' first definite interest in life was music, particularly piano. A favorite pastime of pre-school days was to prop a hymnbook against the back of a straight chair, place a small footstool in front of the chair, and then proceed to "play the piano," occasionally using thimbles to increase the volume of the "music."

From early childhood, too, paper and pencils were a fascination, and every new, five-cent tablet possessed a special charm. The pictures on them are still remembered as the reason for buying them.

"Going places," or traveling, might be listed as a third major interest. Fifteen years of serving as a field secretary for the Kansas City National Training School immediately following

graduation as a deaconess in June, 1915, afforded ample opportunity for that. Then followed more years of parish work, largely in connection with Grand Avenue Temple in Kansas City, Missouri, and the First Methodist Church in Fairmont, West Virginia.

The decision to leave the city was culminated by the acceptance in October, 1952, of the position of office manager in our Methodist Home for the Aged in Marionville.

Throughout Miss Tibbetts' life the church has been such a predominant factor that in reality it created the atmosphere and set the stage for all other activities.

As to formal education—high school, training school, a correspondence course in short story writing from the University of Kansas, a sabbatical year in Denver University and Iliff School of Theology, additional study of piano while in West Virginia, and a summer course at Garrett Biblical Seminary in 1945—these activities tell the story. In it has been written something of a sense of achievement.

Concerning her present work, Miss Tibbetts says: "Now as I 'play' a typewriter instead of a piano, and write figures and addresses instead of lines in pretty tablets and pages in Latin notebooks, it is good to look between times out over the 'campus' of the former Marionville Collegiate Institute (now the Methodist Home for the Aged) and then go at evening time to my own little house located at Wesley Court, Marionville, Missouri."

HELEN PATTEN HANSON

Author of the chapter, "A Testament of Devotion"

The daughter of a Methodist minister, Helen Patten Hanson was born in Aurora, Illinois. Her early life was spent in Evanston, Illinois, after her father became chaplain of Northwestern University and head of its Department of Biblical Literature and History. The father's versatility in languages

and passion for archeological study resulted in the family's traveling extensively in Europe; and travel, both at home and abroad, has continued to be one of Mrs. Hanson's interests. Her mother's deep missionary interest and wide leadership in woman's work of Methodism left an indelible impression on her life.

Following her graduation from Northwestern University, and reflecting the spirituality of her home, Mrs. Hanson specialized in religious education. After studying at Garrett Biblical Institute and at the University of Chicago, for five years she served as superintendent of the missionary department of the Board of Sunday Schools of the Methodist Episcopal Church, with headquarters in Chicago.

In 1917 Helen Patten married the Rev. William C. Hanson, a Methodist minister from Kansas. Their experience of religious education in the family became broadened by two daughters in the home, who now have homes of their own. In recent years Mrs. Hanson has been associated with her husband as co-pastor in his ministry in Greater Kansas City. He is Pastor Emeritus of Old Mission Church with 1,700 members, which they organized in 1942.

For twenty-five years Mrs. Hanson has given leadership in the woman's work of the Church, holding national, jurisdiction, and conference offices. For twelve years she was a member of the Federal Council of Churches and is now associated with the Commission on Worship of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A. One of her vital interests at present is the Disciplined Order of Christ, of which she is a director. Locally she has served as Executive Board member and president of the Young Women's Christian Association of Kansas City, Missouri; also as president of the United Church Women of her area. She has written three books and numerous programs, pageants, and articles.

In Mrs. Hanson's words, her life is "rich with adventure and discovery."

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