



Boston Catholic Journal

The Imitation of Christ

by **Father Thomas à Kempis**
of the Canons Regular of Mount St. Agnes
(1380 - 1471)

A STUDY

*The following pages are dedicated to the Little Hearts entrusted by God
to Cloistered Poor Clare Colettine Nuns*

CHAPTER 3

The Doctrine of Truth

Sister's Commentary:

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

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

We have eyes and do not see. "

Jesus Christ says of himself, "*I am the way, the Truth, and the Life*". We can indeed seize truth by human effort and even attain to knowledge, but always and in every respect it is wanting. Most often we *verge* on the truth; we seize it in part, but never apprehend it in its entirety. What we mean is this: whatever truthful statement we can make about anything (presuming in the first place that it is true), nevertheless fails to embrace the *whole* truth concerning it.¹

Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit of God who reveals the totality of truth to us.

However, instead of pursuing the Truth which leads ultimately to God, we are quite satisfied to be led by idle curiosity to dead ends and blind alleys that lead us no where. We are so remarkably adept at trying to seek Truth where it is not to be found, instead of looking to God and exposing our total being to his Word. Indeed, much like Pontius Pilate, were we to see Truth with our waking eyes, we still would not recognize it. Did not Pilate, even upon beholding the Truth itself in the person of Jesus Christ standing before him, even then insolently ask, "What is Truth?"

Pilate was a politician, a governor --- and not a philosopher. But he was sufficiently educated to know that the question belonged to the philosophers of his day, and though not counted among them, he feigned their erudition, and in that pretension to knowledge revealed not his (superficial) "knowledge", but his blindness to the Truth.

How very often we are purblind to what is immediately before us and revealed in the circumstances of our daily lives, because we are not aware of Christ Who comes to each of us in the sacrament of the present moment. Instead of recognizing Him in our daily duties we seek rather for meaning in all manner of obscurities, visions, apparitions, and superfluities. Much like the Gnostics of old who esteemed themselves to exclusively possess "secret knowledge" that remained a mystery to the uninitiated, to the "common masses", we are eager to possess a "privileged knowledge", a "special insight", locutions and visions accorded us alone, or few, and from which others are excluded. It redounds to our self-importance, and we deem ourselves "chosen", special, among the few "select." We are filled with secret pride and we are jealous of our "knowledge". It invests us with a sense of exclusivity, prominence and pride. --- and we are loathe to relinquish any part of this privileged state by sharing it with others. Our poverty is not that we do not have enough, either materially or intellectually; our real poverty is that we have far too much --- and in failing to share it with others we lose something profoundly greater in a sorry trade: God's grace for the things of this world which perish, if we do not perish first!. Why? Because, "with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again" ² We keep our "possessions" and lose our souls.

In a consumer society it is very hard not to accumulate things, *but* ... here is the invitation to virtue! ... do we then channel the excess to where it will serve and support others? This is our challenge! Not to bury the talent, but to multiply it! ⁵

It is important for us to observe that the problems with which we have to grapple are no different from those which Thomas à Kempis himself had to address and work through 500 years ago. "*Nihil sub sole novum*", "there is nothing new under the sun"! ³ The packaging is just different.

Despite a superabundance of everything, man is empty, unsatisfied.... man is in many ways a soul in mourning for meaning and purpose. Superabundance smothers us, our inner emptiness suffocates us, and our eyes are quick to dart in every direction, trying to follow every new spark that promises to lead us to meaning! This is cause for so much sorrow ... we must look to Jesus Christ, the Word and our life, "*the same yesterday, today, and forever*"! ⁴ In him Who *is* the Truth we will find all truth.

There is a great need for a rediscovery of our true spiritual poverty, that which empties out all the excesses and is prepared to wait on God in love and simplicity and to see where Gods Spirit will lead it, and not where it may choose to go itself!

We are in truth , blind ...

Pray to Mary, the mirror of Christ, to lead us into the depths of the truth of her Son.

¹ Until every possible truthful statement concerning the lamp in its entirety is exhausted, then our apprehension of the total truth of its being is deficient. Only when it ceases to exist can we arrive at the possibility of acquiring the total truth concerning it. For example, it is true that there is a lamp on my desk. But this truth does not exhaust every truth that can or will ever be predicated of it. It is also true of the lamp that it was my sister's before it was mine. Equally true of the lamp is that it was bought at such and such store, and that its parts were assembled in such and such country and was fabricated from ores from another country, and that, moreover, in light of a failure in its circuitry it caused a fire in my sister's study which prompted a response from the local fire department during which a firefighter was injured and brought to a hospital where he acquired an infection that required an antibiotic from a pharmaceutical firm in Zurich which obtained the ingredients from a rare plant grown only in Africa ... *ad infinitum*. That the *entire truth* of the lamp --- that is to say, *everything truthful than can possibly be predicated of it* --- also involves Africa is something we do not ordinarily anticipate in our stating that we grasp the entire truth of the lamp sitting on my desk.

² Saint Matthew 7.2

³ Ecclesiastes 1.10

⁴ Hebrews 13.8

⁵ Saint Matthew 25.14-30

Your Little Sisters in Christ



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