

The Imitation of Christ

Book One

The Third Chapter

The Doctrine of Truth

Blessed is that one 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 the undue concern with those which are irrelevant and harmful, are great folly.

We have eyes and do not see.

What, therefore, have we to do with questions of philosophy?

He to whom the Eternal Word speaks is free from theorizing. For from this Word are all things and of Christ all things speak for Christ, the Eternal Word made flesh is the Beginning Who also speaks to us. Without this Word no one understands or judges correctly. The one to whom this Word becomes everything, who traces all things to this Word and who sees all things in this Word, that one's heart will be at ease and remain at peace with God.

O God, You Who are the truth, make me one with You in love everlasting. I am often wearied by the many things I hear and read,

but in You is all that I long for. Let the learned be still, let all creatures be silent before You; You alone speak to me.

The more recollected one is, and the more simple of heart one becomes, the easier one understands sublime things, for that one receives the light of knowledge from above. The pure, simple, and steadfast spirit is not distracted by many labors, for they are all done for the honor of God. And since that one enjoys interior peace will seek no selfish end in anything. What, indeed, gives more trouble and affliction than uncontrolled desires of the heart?

One who is good and devout arranges in the mind the things that need to be done, not according to the whims of evil

inclination but according to the dictates of right reason. Who is forced to struggle more than the one who tries to master the self? This ought to be our purpose, then: to conquer the self, to become stronger each day, and to advance in virtue.

Every perfection in this life has some imperfection mixed with it and no learning of ours is without some darkness. Humble knowledge of yourself is a surer path to God than the ardent pursuit of learning. Not that learning is to be considered evil, or knowledge, which is good in itself and so ordained by God; but a clean conscience and virtuous life ought always to be of a higher priority. Many often err and accomplish little or nothing because they try

to become learned rather than to live well.

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

Tell me, where now are all the masters and teachers whom you knew so well in life and who were famous for their learning? Others have already taken their places and I know not whether they ever think of their predecessors. During life they seemed to be something; now they are seldom remembered. How quickly the glory

of the world passes away! If only their lives had kept pace with their learning, then their study and reading would have been worthwhile.

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

One is truly great who has great charity. One is truly great who is little in their own eyes and makes nothing of the highest honor. One is truly wise who looks upon all earthly things as folly that Christ may be gained. The one who does God's will and renounces the self will is truly very learned.