

so they may be known by the example that I have given.

The false intellectual light that is given by the devil to a soul in darkness always appears between two black rain clouds. The higher cloud is presumption and self-exaltation, the lower one is contempt and under-estimation of one's neighbour. Whatever knowledge or fervour appears in a soul along with presumption, and exaltation of self, and disdain of one's neighbour, is not the light of grace given by the Holy Ghost. The knowledge may be true in itself, but it comes from the devil if it is acquired suddenly, or else from a man's natural powers if it comes as the result of consideration. And in this way it can clearly be recognized that this false intellectual light is not the light of the true sun.

Those that have knowledge of this sort are full of spiritual pride, but they are unaware of the fact. They are so blinded by this false light that they consider their pride and disobedience to the laws of Holy Church as perfect submission to the Gospel and to the laws of God. They think that the following of their own will is freedom of spirit, and errors and heresies come from them like rain from black clouds. All their preaching leads to damnation, strife, discord, and the condemnation of other walks of life and of other persons.

And yet they claim that all is charity and zeal; but it is not so, for St James the Apostle says: *Ubi enim zelus et contentio, ibi inconstantia et omne opus pravum. Non est sapientia haec desursum descendens a Patri lumen, sed terrena, animalis et diabolica* (James iii. 16, 15). Wherever there is envy and contention there is instability and every evil work. And therefore the wisdom which produces such sins does not come from God, the Father of Light, but it is of the earth, brutish and devilish. And so it is by these signs, pride, presumption, disobedience, indignation, defamation, and the like—the things which come from it—that the false light may be distinguished from the true. For the true sun does not impart

intellectual light and the fullness of charity unless the sky is first clear of clouds, that is, unless the conscience is first purified in this darkness by the fire of a burning desire for Jesus, which destroys and burns up all evil movements of pride, vainglory, anger, envy, and other sins; as the prophet says: *Ignis ante ipsum praecedet, et inflammabit in circuitu inimicos ejus* (Ps. xcvi. 3). Fire will go before him; that is, the desire of love will go before Jesus in a man's soul, and it will burn up all his enemies, that is, it will destroy all sins.

For if a soul is not first made humble by fear, and then well tried in this fire of desire and purified from its spiritual uncleanness by a long time spent in devout prayers and other spiritual exercises, it cannot bear the shafts of spiritual light nor receive the precious liquor of the perfect love of Jesus. But when it has been purified and refined by this fire, then it can receive the grace of spiritual knowledge and perfect love. Holy Scripture says: *Vobis qui timetis Dominum orietur sol justitiae* (Mal. iv. 2). The true sun of justice, that is our Lord Jesus, will shine on you who fear Him; that is, on humble souls who rank themselves beneath their neighbours through the knowledge of their own misery, and cast themselves at the feet of God by the consideration that they are nothing in themselves. It is a reverent fear and the steady spiritual contemplation of God that produces this perfect humility.

For such souls, the true sun will rise and illumine their reason to know truth and will enkindle their affections with burning love, and then they will both burn and shine. By the power of this heavenly sun they will burn with perfect love and shine with the knowledge of God and spiritual things, for then they are reformed in feeling. And so whoever does not wish to be deceived should humble himself and hide in this darkness. He should avoid all dealings with other men, as I said, and forget the whole world, if he can, and follow Jesus with steady desire in prayer and meditation. For I am

sure that the light that follows this darkness is safe and true and shines from the city of Jerusalem. It comes from the true sun to a soul that labours in darkness and cries out for light to show it the way and comfort it in its struggle. For I think that a false light never follows true darkness. That is, if a man really and truly sets himself to forsake the love of the world and by the grace of God comes to knowledge of himself, he will be deceived by no errors or heresies or illusions. For all of these come in by the gate of pride, and if pride is kept out, they will find no place in the soul. Even if they knock at the gate, they will not get in. For the grace that the soul feels in this lowly darkness will teach it the truth, and show all such advances to be tricks of the devil.

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

How it is very profitable for a soul to be brought by grace into this luminous darkness, and how a man should dispose himself to come to it

THERE are many devout souls who by grace come into this darkness and learn to know themselves, and yet do not fully understand their state. And that ignorance is to some extent a hindrance to them. They often feel their mind and their will withdrawn from the things of earth and brought into a profound and very sweet peace, undisturbed by vain thoughts or the bodily senses. Their spirit is free to think peacefully of Jesus, and they can offer prayers and psalms to Him with great relish and sweetness as long as the weakness of human nature will allow it. They know that this feeling is good, but they do not know what it is. To such I would say that it seems to me that this sort of experience, even if it only lasts a short time and comes but seldom, is indeed this darkness

that I have been speaking about. It is first of all a consciousness of themselves and a rising above themselves through a burning desire to see Jesus, or to speak more truly, it is already a spiritual sight of Jesus. And if they can remain in that peace, or by grace make it habitual, so that they can easily and freely have it when they desire, and keep themselves in it, then they will no more be overcome by temptations of the devil or the flesh, nor fall into errors or heresies. They have reached the gate of contemplation and are able and ready to receive the perfect love of Jesus. So he that has it should humbly recognize it, guard it carefully, and cultivate it assiduously. No creature should hinder him from attaining it when it offers. He should forget and ignore everything that might interfere with his practice of it, provided he has no obligations and may do what he likes without scandalizing or offending his neighbour. For I do not think that he can come to this peace easily unless he has great grace and is very faithful in obeying its inspirations. And he ought to be careful to be so. For grace needs to be free from the obstacles of sin and worldly affairs and everything that hinders its effects, even though they are not sin.

But he who has not yet received this fullness of grace and who desires to come to the spiritual knowledge of Jesus must prepare himself for it as well as he can, and so far as possible remove all hindrances to it. He must learn to die to the world and truly to forsake the love of it. First he must renounce pride, bodily and spiritual. He must seek neither the respect nor the praise of the world, neither celebrity nor position, power nor skill, neither riches nor fine clothes. In a word, he must not seek anything that would lead to his being honoured above other men. He must desire none of these things; and if they come to him, he should receive them with fear, so that, if he cannot be both inwardly and outwardly poor, he should be so at least inwardly. He should

desire to be forgotten by the world, so that men regard him no more—however rich or able he may be—than the poorest man alive.

Also, he must not take pleasure at the sight of his own good works or virtues, thinking that he does better than others, because he has left the world and others have not done so. He must suppress all rising of ill-will, anger, and envy towards his neighbour, offending or angering no man unreasonably by word or act. He should be free; no man dependent on him, nor he on any man. He must renounce covetousness; only asking what is necessary for his bodily sustenance, and considering himself well recompensed when God moves other men to give him anything at all. He must not trust in his worldly possessions nor in the help or favour of friends, but only in God, for if he does otherwise, he puts himself under an obligation to the world, and this may interfere with his freedom to think of God.

And in the same way he must renounce gluttony and lust and all other bodily impurity, and especially the carnal love of women. The sort of blind love which exists sometimes between a man and a woman can seem good and honest, in as much as they would not sin in act; but none the less in the sight of God it is impure and culpable. For it is a great sin for a man to allow his heart, which ought to be given to Jesus and to virtue and purity of spirit, to be given deliberately in carnal love to any creature. And especially is this so, when the love is so strong that it takes possession of the mind and disturbs it, so that it can no longer savour the things of God. I take it to be deliberate, when a man does it, even though he says it is no sin,¹ or else, when he is so blinded that he re-

¹ This sentence presents some difficulty. Hilton says simply, "Thus I hold it wilfully that a man doth it and saith it is no sin." Earlier editors (e.g. Dalgairns) and the translators of the French edition have taken it in the sense that it is deliberate when a man does it even though he ac-

fuses to see that it is sin. He must not seek the mere pleasure of his senses in food and drink, but be satisfied with such food as is offered to him; that is, provided his health is good, such food as will take away his hunger and keep the body in normal strength for the service of God. He must not grumble nor be contentious about his food, though it is sometimes not as good as he would like.

These and all other sins must be renounced in will, and, when the occasion offers, in act, and so must anything else that hinders a man from occupying his mind with Jesus. As long as these things stand in the way a man cannot die to the world nor attain this obscure knowledge of himself, and he cannot attain it unless he does all this, as St Paul did, who said: *Mihi mundus crucifixus est, et ego mundo* (Gal. vi. 14). The world is slain and crucified to me, and I to the world. He who, for the love of God, renounces the love of the world and honour and riches, and does not seek these things, but is well satisfied to be without them, and would not have them if he could, is truly dead to the world, for he takes no delight in it. If the world sets him at nought, does not consider him, pays him no honour or respect, but forgets him as though he were dead, then he is dead to the world. This was absolutely St Paul's state, and it must to some degree be the state of any man who would follow him and come to the perfect love of God. He cannot live fully to God unless he first dies to the world.

This dying to the world is this darkness and it is the door²

knowledges it to be a sin. This makes better sense, but the texts do not seem to warrant it.

² The word *gate* is used frequently in this paragraph. It could in Middle English mean either *door* or *way*. The Latin translation made in the fifteenth century translates it always by *via*, but this seems to lose the point of the contrast between *many ways* and only one *door*. It is the idea of many roads converging at one point, which is the true entrance to contemplation.

of contemplation and of reform in feeling, and there is no other. There may be a variety of ways leading souls to contemplation, for there are various exercises adapted to the various dispositions of men and to different states of life, as for example, the religious and the secular. But there is only the one door. It does not matter what exercise a man makes use of, he has not reached reform in feeling nor come truly to contemplation, unless he has attained this humble self-knowledge and is dead to the world as far as his affections are concerned. From time to time he must feel himself in this peaceful darkness in which he is hidden from the world and sees himself for what he is. And if he will enter by any other door, he is a thief and housebreaker, and will be cast out as unworthy. But the man who can reduce himself to nothing and die in this way stands at the door, for he is dead to the world and lives to God. It was of these that St Paul said: *Mortui enim estis, et vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo* (Col. iii. 3). You are dead, that is, you, who for the love of God renounce the love of the world, are dead to the world, but your life is hidden from men, as the life of Christ is hidden in the Godhead from the sight of those who love the flesh.

Our Lord Himself pointed out this door in the Gospel when He said: *Omnis qui reliquerit patrem aut matrem, fratrem aut sororem propter me, centuplum accipiet, et vitam aeternam possidebit* (Matt. xix. 29). Everyone who for love of Me leaves father or mother, sister or brother, or any earthly possession, shall have a hundredfold in this life, and afterwards the happiness of heaven. The hundredfold that a soul will have if it leaves the world is nothing else than the enjoyment of this luminous darkness, which I called the door of contemplation. For he who is in this darkness and is hidden by grace from the vanity of the world has no desire for the things of the world; he is not troubled by them, does not seek them

or care for them, and so he possesses a hundred times more than a king or a man most greedy of earthly possessions. He who seeks nothing but Jesus has a hundredfold, for he has more rest, more peace of heart, more true love and delight in his soul in one day, than the most covetous man in the world, who has all its wealth at his command, possesses in his whole life.

This is, then, a fruitful darkness and a profitable nothingness that brings a soul to such spiritual ease and sweetness. I think David was referring to this night or this nothingness when he said: *Ad nihilum redactus sum, et nescivi* (Ps. lxxii. 22). I was brought to nothing and I knew it not. That is, the grace of our Lord Jesus sent into my heart has slain and brought to nothing in me all the love of the world, and I know not how. For it is through no effort of my own and not by my own will, but by the grace of our Lord Jesus. And so he who wishes to have the light of grace and to feel the love of Jesus abundantly in his soul, must leave the false light of worldly love and remain in this darkness. And if at first he is afraid to dwell in it, let him not turn again to the love of the world, but suffer for a time and put all his hope and trust in Jesus, and he will not be long without some spiritual light. The prophet says: *Qui ambulavit in tenebris, et non est lumen ei, speret in Domino, et innitatur super Deum suum* (Isa. l. 10). He who walks in darkness and has no light, that is, he who wishes to hide himself from the love of the world and may not readily feel the light of spiritual love, let him not despair or turn again to the world, but let him hope in our Lord and lean upon Him, that is, trust in God, cling to Him by desire, and wait patiently, and he shall have light. It is as if a man has been a long time in the sun and then comes suddenly into a dark house. He will be as if blind at first, and see nothing, but if he will wait a bit, he will soon be able to see about him; at first large objects, and then small, and then everything

that is in the house. It is the same spiritually; he who renounces self-love and acquires knowledge of himself is in the dark to begin with. But if he perseveres and continues with assiduous prayer, and often repeats his determination to love Jesus, he will come to see many things, great and small, of which he was at first unaware. The prophet seems to have promised this when he said: *Orietur in tenebris lux tua, et tenebrae tuae erunt sicut meridies. Et requiem dabit tibi Dominus Deus tuus, et implebit animam tuam splendoribus* (Isa. lviii. 10, 11). Light will spring up for you in darkness. That is, the light of blessed love and the spiritual knowledge of God will arise for you who truly forsake the light of worldly love and bury your mind in this darkness. *And your darkness shall be as mid-day.* The darkness of your desire and your blind trust in God will turn into clear knowledge and certainty of love. *And God will give you rest.* That is, your carnal desires and your painful fears and doubts, and the evil spirits that have ceaselessly troubled you, will all grow weak and lose their power. You will be made so strong that they will not hurt you, for you will be hidden from them in peace. *And then our Lord Jesus will fill your soul with light.* That is, when you have been brought into this peace, you will more easily tend to God and be occupied with nothing but the love of Him. He will fill all the powers of your soul with beams of spiritual light. Do not be surprised that I call the leaving of worldly love darkness, for the prophet called it so, saying: *Intra in tenebras tuas, filia Chaldaeorum* (Isa. xlvii. 5). Enter into your darkness, daughter of Chaldee. That is, Soul, who is a daughter of Chaldee through your love of the world, leave it and enter into your darkness.

love, and adore Me in your intellect as Jesus, God Incarnate, Supreme Truth, Supreme Goodness and Blessed Life, for that is what I am. This is what our Lord taught her as I understand it, and so He teaches all other souls to act that are fit for contemplation.

Nevertheless, it is good for souls that are not disposed by nature, or are not yet raised by grace, to persevere by their own efforts in the imagination with human love, until greater grace is given to them. It is not prudent for a man to leave something good until he knows and has tried something better. And the same may be said of other sorts of phenomena that are physical in their nature, such as hearing sweet song, and the feeling of comforting heat, or perceiving certain lights, or the taste of sweet flavours. These are not spiritual experiences, for spiritual experiences occur in the powers of the soul, principally in the intellect and the will, and little in the imagination. But these experiences are in the imagination, and therefore they are not spiritual. At their best they are only outward signs of the inner grace that is experienced in the powers of the soul. This can be proved clearly from Holy Scripture: *Apparuerunt apostolis dispersitae linguae tamquam ignis, seditque supra singulos eorum Spiritus Sanctus* (Acts ii. 3). The Holy Ghost appeared to the apostles in the day of Pentecost in the form of tongues of fire, and inflamed their hearts, and rested upon each of them. Now it is certain that the Holy Ghost, that is the invisible God Himself, was not that fire that was seen, nor the burning that was felt; but He was invisibly felt in the powers of their souls, for He enlightened their reason and kindled their affections through His blessed presence so clearly and ardently that they suddenly possessed the intellectual knowledge of truth and the perfection of love, as our Lord promised when He said, *Spiritus Sanctus docebit vos omnem veritatem* (John xvi. 13). The Holy Ghost will teach you all truth. So the fire and the burn-

ing was nothing else than a bodily sign showed exteriorly in witness of the grace that was experienced interiorly. And as it was with them, so it is with other souls that are visited and interiorly enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and have along with that experience sensible feelings and consolations in witness of the interior grace. And yet that experience does not come, I think, to all perfect souls, but only to those to whom God wills to send it. It is not good for imperfect souls that have the sensible feelings, and have not yet received the interior grace, to rely too much on such feelings, but let them make use of them in so far as they help the soul to fix its thought more steadily on God and to feel greater love. For some of these experiences may be genuine and some false, as I said before.

THE THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER

The meaning of the expression reform in feeling as applied to the soul; the way in which it is brought about, and how the doctrine is found in the writings of St Paul

I HAVE said something about reform in faith and have also touched a little on the further reform in feeling to which the soul may advance. Not that it is my intention to confine God's operations to limits laid down by me, to say that God must act in a soul in this way and in no other. I do not mean to do that, but I merely say that I think God acts in this way with some of his creatures. No doubt He also acts in other ways that exceed my knowledge and my experience. But in whatever way He acts, and by whatever means, in a long time or a short, with great labour for the soul or with little, if the same end is attained, namely the perfect love of Him, then all is well. For if He chooses to give the full grace of