Contemplative prayer: Ven. Father Augustine Baker's teaching thereon from "Sancta Sophia"

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CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER
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R.D. ANSELMUS WILSON, D.D.

Imprimi potest.

R.R. D.D. AIDANUS GASQUET, D.D.,
ABBAS-PRAES.?
FATHER AUGUSTINE BAKER, O.S.B.

Born December 9, 1575; died August 9, 1641.

In sable lines laid o'er a silver ground
The face of that mysterious man is found,
Whose secret life and published writings prove,
To pray is not to talke, or thinke, but love.

Fr. Leander Norminton, O.S.B.
CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

VEN. FATHER AUGUSTINE BAKER'S TEACHING THEREON:
FROM 'SANCTA SOPHIA'

BY

DOM B. WELD-BLUNDELL
MONK OF THE ORDER OF ST. BENEDICT

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PREFACE

It would almost seem an impertinence to commend in these pages *Sancta Sophia*, the famous compendium of Father Baker's treatises on prayer and an interior life. The writings of this venerable servant of God have been in the hands of the public for nearly three hundred years, and have proved an invaluable aid to those who would seriously aspire to the practice of contemplation. The fruits of his labour are to be seen in the lives of the many souls his teaching has led through the difficult paths by which the heights of contemplation are reached.

But though *Sancta Sophia* is useful and of interest to all aspiring to an interior life, it may be said to make its strongest appeal to the members of the English Benedictine Congregation, and to all who draw from the fountain of its spirit. For not only is *Sancta Sophia* the spiritual product of one of its most saintly sons, but it would seem to express the very spirit of the Congregation. As the constitutions drawn up in 1617, and repeatedly confirmed and amplified in succeeding chapters, built up and established the outward form and observance of the Congregation, so the writings of Father Baker appear to have largely influenced and fully expressed its spirit. For no otherwise can be understood the thorough examination to which his writings were subjected, and the subsequent official and almost solemn ratification they obtained from successive chapters, in which were gathered the leading spirits and restorers of the Congregation. This view is amply borne out by the history of
the examination and approbation, by Father Leander Jones and Father Rudesind Barlow, of the original treatises, and the history of the compilation of *Sancta Sophia.*

No one among the restorers of the English Congregation exercised more influence than Father Leander Jones, or, as he was usually called, Father Leander of St. Martin, and Father Rudesind Barlow. They were professed in Spain, pursued their studies at Salamanca, and obtained the degree of Doctor of Divinity. In 1607 and 1611 respectively they went to Doway, and before long Father Leander became Vicar of the Spanish Mission and Father Rudesind Prior of St. Gregory's. They were men of considerable learning and theological attainments. The one held a theological chair and was Regius Professor of Hebrew for many years in Doway University; the other for a long period was Professor of Theology at the College of St. Vaast, and was largely consulted from all parts of Europe. They were held in high esteem in the Congregation, and were chosen to fill every post of responsibility and trust in its early years. Father Leander was its first President-General and Father Rudesind its second, and they were the leading spirits on the Commission deputed by the Chapter of 1633 to frame resolutions on the nature and substance of the Congregation. To these men was entrusted the task of examining and reporting on the writings of Father Baker. The opinion formed by Father Leander is best given in his own words:

'They do all contain very sound and wholesome doctrine for the direction of devout souls, and *fit and agreeable to our calling and Rule,* and especially for the use of our dames;

* We are indebted to Abbot Butler's *Notes on the Origin and Early Development of the Restored English Benedictine Congregation* for most of the facts relating to the history of *Sancta Sophia,* and we should like to take this opportunity to acknowledge his valuable assistance in the preparation of this volume.
† The italics are our own.
the spirit of our holy Rule consisting principally in a
spiritual union of our soul with God in affective prayer, and
exercise of the will immediately on God, rather than in
intellectual and discursive prayer, busying the understand-
ing, as appeareth by our Rule, and the daily use of our choir
office, which for the most part consisteth of aspirations and
affections, and hath very few discourses.'

Father Leander, as ordinary to the nuns at Cambray, also
gave his approbation to a collection of Father Baker's
treatises for the use of the nuns in these words:

'I have read over diligently this book, and find it in all
points worthy of allowance, full of very wholesome doctrine,
and fit for our spirit and calling.'*

As to Father Rudesind Barlow, we find him repeatedly
giving his approbation to the writings of Father Baker in
his capacity of President-General. He declares that they
are 'worthy to be read and read again,' and that they are
'replenished with passing good documents and very fine
explications of the nature and effects of prayer, and there-
fore most serviceable to such as seriously seek a perfect
course of life.'

But perhaps Father Rudesind's belief in Father Baker as
a true exponent of the spirit of the Congregation is best
shown in a practical way. When Father Peter Salvin was
thinking of taking the habit, he inquired of Father Rudesind
what he was principally to aim at in his religious life; and
Father Rudesind Barlow, although President several times,
advised him to go to Cambray to the Rev. Father Baker,
'to be by him fully instructed.' And Cressy also records, in
his Life of Father Baker, the significant fact that

'After having for many years sustained the supremest
offices in the Congregation, condescending to discharge the
office of a master of novices (at St. Gregory's), he (Father

* The italics are our own.
PREFACE

Rudesind Barlow thought it no disparagement to desire of the Rev. Father Baker instructions for a due performance of the said office.

More than twenty years rolled by, and the fruit of Father Baker’s teaching became apparent. There was a marked advance made among the members of the Congregation in the observance of all regular duties—of solitude, humility, obedience, and devotion—especially in the Benedictine nunnery at Cambray. Moreover, many among the secular clergy in England, and not a few among the devout laity, both men and women, made use of Father Baker’s treatises ‘to the wonderful profit of their souls.’ Judged, therefore, by their fruits, it was clear that the writings of Father Baker were of a high order, and exceedingly profitable to souls. But the treatises were lengthy and numerous and scattered, and to get full value from them it was felt that they should be brought together, co-ordinated, and abridged into one handy volume.

The initiative in the matter appears to have been taken by the President himself, Abbot Gascoigne of Lambspring. He ordered an abridgment of the writings of Father Baker to be made, and committed the task of carrying it out to Father Cressy, one of the most scholarly members of the Congregation. Father Cressy set about his task very thoroughly. He collected together more than forty of Father Baker’s treatises, and after careful perusal he abridged and arranged them as they now stand, giving to the book the title of Sancta Sophia. The abridgment completed, it was next submitted to the General Chapter of 1653. Father Cressy, who was present, declares that no one made any opposition ‘at all to any part of its doctrine,’ and that it was unanimously resolved that the abridgment should be published. To insure perfect accuracy, the General Chapter appointed three examiners to compare the abridgment with the originals, and on their approving it, the President
appointed two other censors; so that *Sancta Sophia* passed through the hands of five of the leading men of the Congregation before it was published. It was then presented to the Chapter of 1657, and received its confirmation, as is testified by Father Stapylton, himself a member of the Chapter. Thus, we see that the writings of Father Baker were first approved by Father Leander of St. Martin and by Father Rudesind Barlow, two of the leading spirits in the restoration of the Congregation; next, that they were arranged and abridged by order of the President; then the abridgment was carefully scrutinized by three examiners and two censors, and, finally, was confirmed by two succeeding Chapters. It is incredible to suppose that so much care would be taken in the preparation and examination of the writing of an ordinary member of the Congregation. Indeed, there is every indication that it was understood to be something more, and that there was in question nothing less than the very nature of the spirit of the Congregation. Hence the searching examination to which *Sancta Sophia* was subjected, and the official stamp finally affixed to it by the almost solemn approbation on two occasions of the highest authority of the Congregation. Thus, *Sancta Sophia* appears to be set forth by the restorers of the Congregation as the deliberate, permanent, official expression of the spirit of the Congregation over which they ruled.

And now to turn to the contents of the book, of which something must be said. *Sancta Sophia* is principally a book of instructions for the Prayer of Contemplation, as the subtitle of the original edition explains. What is contemplation? Broadly speaking, it may be defined as a clear, easy, mental view of a thing, a quiet, contented gazing on an object. It is the result of a diligent search into the nature, qualities, circumstances of the object. Of course, there are different kinds of contemplation, according to the nature of the object contemplated. There is a contempla-
tion which is purely philosophical. It consists in the contemplation of some natural truth or object, the nature, qualities, conditions of which are thoroughly understood by a previous course of study and reflection. It is philosophical, because it is an act principally of the intellect, the affections taking but little part in it. But there is another contemplation which is mystical, and of this *Sancta Sophia* treats. It has God for its object. By this contemplation (to use Father Baker's own expressions) the soul without discourse, without inquisitive speculations, without the use even of the internal senses or of sensible images, regards God simply as infinite, incomprehensible truth. It is a pure, simple, reposeful operation of the mind, by which God is contemplated in the obscurity of faith. And as the soul realizes Who He is, she rests in Him with the whole bent of the will and affections, as her infinite, universal, incomprehensible good. This is true contemplation, and is properly the occupation of the angels and the blessed in heaven. Without any discourse, by a simple act of intuition, they behold God in the beatific light as Infinite Good and Infinite Perfection, and they adhere to Him with the whole force of their wills and affections.

This sublime exercise is imitated more or less perfectly by contemplatives on earth. And it is the purpose of *Sancta Sophia* to teach souls who are fitted for it to ascend by successive steps to as perfect contemplation of God as is possible in this life. Father Baker shows that as our minds are almost wholly occupied with a multitude of natural objects, and our affections are closely entwined round them, the first care of the soul aspiring to contemplation must be to inquire after God by meditation, according to the words of St. Augustine: 'All good proceeds from the understanding as from its first principle.' By meditation the soul represents God as an object infinitely loving and lovable, making use of every motive that will help her to
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lift up the will and affections to God, and cause them to rest in Him. The will and affections, being tied to sensible objects, can set themselves free only with much labour and some violence. But by exercise and custom, the force required to do this diminishes. Then at length the Divine Object begins to appear in its true perfect light, and the affections flow towards it more readily and freely, yet with wonderful stillness. At last, when the soul by perseverance approaches perfection, a mere glance at that Divine Object, represented in the obscurity of faith, will suffice to kindle the affections, and to cause the will to adhere and rest in Him. We will, however, leave the reader to learn from Father Baker himself the successive steps by which this end may be attained; the dispositions requisite to pursue it successfully; the guide which must be followed through dimly-lighted ways; the school of solitude and silence, and especially of abstraction, in which it is learned; and, above all, the need of great courage and perseverance.

This volume, however, is not simply a reprint of the original edition of Sancta Sophia, but we have ventured on the publication of a revised and modernized edition of it, and in doing this, it is felt that some apology and explanation is due to the reader. There are some to whom Sancta Sophia is familiar and dear; to whom the language of the book is sacred, or makes a strong appeal; who are well acquainted with writers of the period in which it was written, and can see no obscurity in its style and language. For such, it need not be said, this revision is not intended. They can enjoy the work in its original form, and there is no desire or reason for depriving them of it. But there are others, and they form no inconsiderable portion of the devout reading public, to whom the style and character of the writing have no interest. They are attracted to the work solely on account of its enlightened teaching on prayer, and the duties of an interior contemplative life.
To them the interest of the book lies in the matter, and not in the form in which it is conveyed. Indeed, we may go further. There are many to whom the style is not only of no interest, but is a positive hindrance. They are unaccustomed to the long periods and involved sentences usual in writers of the sixteenth century, so that for them the labour and effort of reading *Sancta Sophia* more than outweigh the pleasure and profit to be derived from its teaching. Besides, there are so many well-written or well-translated spiritual works by saintly authors to be found everywhere, that there is danger that *Sancta Sophia* will cease to exercise the influence its teaching deserves on the spiritual life of the day. Moved by these considerations, we have thought it desirable to make an effort to popularize *Sancta Sophia*, and to render it accessible to such readers. We have not, however, attempted to reproduce the whole of *Sancta Sophia*, but have confined ourselves to what bore more directly on contemplative prayer. This course has had the advantage of enabling us to rule out collateral matter which deals rather with the religious state than with the practice of prayer and the necessary conditions thereto, and to keep the book from attaining to unwieldy proportions. We have also thought it advisable to tone down certain expressions of the venerable author which seemed exaggerated, and at times even misleading, and to bring them into line with the current teaching and feeling of the Church. Thus, by these modifications and omissions, we have been enabled to set before the reader Father Baker's golden teaching on contemplative prayer in a comparatively small compass, and at a price which will place the book within the reach of all.

Of Father Baker* personally little need be said. He was born in Abergavenny on December 9, 1575. His

* We are indebted to Abbot Sweeney's writings for these particulars of the life of Father Baker.
parents were not Catholic. He was educated at Christ's Hospital, in London, and afterwards proceeded to Oxford University, where he was entered as a commoner at Broadgates Hall, now known as Pembroke College. Here he remained two years, and then went to London to pursue the study of the law under his elder brother. Upon his brother's death he returned to his native town and worked under his father, who managed the estates of the Earl of Abergavenny. During all this time little attention was paid to his religious training. He tells us that he led a careless, though not a wicked life. His thoughts, however, about this time took a more serious turn through a remarkable interposition of Divine Providence in delivering him from a critical position, which might easily have resulted in the loss of his life. This led him to enter more seriously into himself, with the result that he placed himself in the hands of a Catholic priest, Rev. Richard Floyd, who instructed him in the Catholic Faith, and received him into the fold of the Church. Thenceforth he abandoned the law, and turned to the sacred ministry. He made acquaintance with a Benedictine Father of the Cassinese Congregation, and shortly after entered the novitiate in the abbey of St. Justina at Padua. His health breaking down before he took his vows, he returned to England; but on recovery he made his profession before some Italian Fathers of the same Congregation, and was one of those affiliated to Westminster and the old English Congregation by Father Sigebert Buckley. Some twelve years later he went to Rheims, where he was ordained priest in the year 1619, at the age of forty-five. In the following year he was appointed chaplain to Mr. Philip Fursden and his family in Devonshire. During all these years Father Baker pursued a life of great retirement and of constant earnest prayer. He often spent as many as five or six hours, and later even
eleven hours, a day in prayer, and was sometimes favoured with ecstasies and other supernatural graces. During his stay with Mr. Fursden he led many inquirers back to the unity of the Faith by teaching them the practice of prayer, through which they obtained light and strength to follow God's holy will. Father Baker's health becoming very delicate, his superiors moved him to London, hoping that more active work might prove beneficial. During this time, in conjunction with Father Clement Reyner, he compiled the well-known *Apostolatus Benedictinorum*, and began to write some of his spiritual treatises.

In the summer of 1623 he was sent to Cambray as chaplain to a Benedictine community of nuns, which had been founded the previous Christmas by Father Rudesind Barlow, the President of the English Benedictine Congregation. Here he remained nine years, and thoroughly grounded the community in the practice of pure prayer and the exercises of an interior life. Many of his treatises were written for the guidance of these nuns.

About 1633 Father Baker retired to the monastery of St. Gregory, at Doway. Here he remained about five years, and was then sent to England, in his sixty-third year, to labour once again on the Apostolic Mission. His attention was divided between London and Bedfordshire. At this time the pursuivants were particularly active, especially in bringing priests to judgment and execution. Challoner mentions no fewer than eighteen priests who were condemned to death in the year 1641. Father Baker himself was frequently sought and pursued, so that he had to fly from place to place to escape apprehension. After three years of toil and incessant anxiety, he was on the point of being captured by his enemies, and was deprived of martyrdom by falling a victim to a contagious fever. In hiding, and under the solicitous care of a good

* This community is now established at Stanbrook, Worcester.
lady, Mrs. Watson, the mother of one of the nuns at Cambray, in constant prayer, he resigned his blessed soul into the hands of God on August 9, 1641.

The interest, however, of Father Baker's life lies not in its outward features, which were sufficiently commonplace, but in his interior spiritual life, which is in part disclosed in his admirable treatises on prayer and the contemplative life. It is in the hope of making the teaching and spirit of this holy man of God more widely known and esteemed that this revision and abridgment of Sancta Sophia is now published under the title of 'Contemplative Prayer.'

B. W.-B.

Stanbrook Abbey,
Xmas, 1906.
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SOULS MAY ASPIRE TO CONTEMPLATION IN EVERY STATE OF LIFE

By the unanimous testimony of mystic writers, solitude is the only proper school of contemplation—that is to say, a condition of life in which the soul is free externally from the burdens, temptations, and solicitudes of the world, and free internally, at least to a considerable extent, from inordinate affections for worldly or carnal objects, so that the soul may have leisure to attend to God, Who deserves our thoughts and affections, and to practise such mortifications and prayer as will dispose her to an immediate and perfect union with Him.

Solitude is to be found more perfectly and permanently in the religious state than in the world; indeed, the religious state affords advantages scarcely to be found elsewhere for the pursuit of contemplation. Still, it must not be thought to be confined to that state. Even in the world, in a secular state of life, God has often guided souls into these perfect ways, affording them as much solitude
and internal freedom of spirit as He saw was necessary to bring them to a high degree of perfection.

Indeed, it is a remarkable proof of the abundant overflow of Divine goodness that the practice of contemplation, the noblest of which a rational soul is capable here or in heaven, is not confined to caverns or deserts, nor limited to religious communities, the intellectually gifted, or the learned. No, even the poorest, simplest soul in the world, if she will faithfully correspond with the internal light and attraction of God's Spirit, may securely arrive at the mountain of vision, and even more speedily than learned theologians, profound scholars, or secluded hermits.

Indeed, history and more recent experience show that God not uncommonly communicates the light and grace of contemplation to simple women endowed perhaps with less brilliant intellectual gifts, but with stronger wills and affections for God, than the ablest men. A reason for this may be that in their case God reaps the glory of His freely-bestowed graces, for if contemplation usually attended on natural endowments, it might be claimed as due to natural abilities and efforts. Another reason may be because substantial holiness (and its perfection, contemplation) consists more in the operations of the will than of the understanding; and as women are usually more constant in their affections and steadfast in their wills than men, it is no wonder that God more often finds them fit subjects for His graces.

Moreover, women as a rule are less encumbered with anxious business, their employments being principally domestic, so that they repair oftener to church, are more assiduous in their devotions, and take advantage of the Sacraments more frequently than men; hence they are called by the Church the 'devout sex.'

Though these instructions are intended principally for
religious aspiring to contemplation, yet being a debtor to all who would tread in these ways, I will show briefly how others also may use them by distinguishing what is common to all aspiring to contemplation from what is special to the religious state.

In the world there are two classes of aspirants to contemplation, or perfection in prayer, namely, (1) ecclesiastics and (2) lay persons.

First as regards ecclesiastics or priests. They, perhaps, ought to aspire to contemplation even more than simple religious, for their sublime office (according to the judgment of the Saints), by which they intercede with God for the whole Church through the immaculate Sacrifice and fervent prayer, supposes them to have attained a habit of recollection. And if they have the care of souls they will need far more stability in recollection than simple religious, if their work is to be done purely in and for God, and if their union with Him is to remain unbroken. Besides, by their profession their obligations are not far removed from the vows of the religious life, for (1) they owe obedience to superiors, though not in every detail of their lives; (2) they profess chastity; (3) they ought to have but little attachment to earthly goods, for whatever is beyond their necessities and the demands of hospitality they can little more dispose of than religious without some wrong to the poor and suffering; (4) and though their employments require more intercourse with others than does the religious state, still they are as much obliged to disengage their affections from riches and worldly interests as are the others. They are also bound to free themselves from distracting employments not belonging necessarily to their calling.

For these reasons, in the early fervent days of the Church scarcely anyone presumed to undertake this sublime calling till he had spent many years in a kind of religious life.
of solitude, mortification, and assiduous prayer. Witness St. Basil, St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Gregory Nyssen, St. Chrysostom, St. Augustine, or St. John Damascene. Yet, after all this, it is wonderful to see how unwillingly and fearfully they undertook the care of souls,—what excuses, prayers, and flights into the desert! And when at length they yielded to God or men they were far from thinking themselves exempt from the contemplative exercises of abstraction, mortification, and prayer. On the contrary, they stole time from necessary refection and sleep to employ in recollection, well knowing that their labours would not be acceptable to God if they proceeded not from grace obtained by prayer.

But the best proof and example of these obligations is our Blessed Saviour Himself. Though by virtue of the hypostatic union He was full of every grace, yet to set an example He spent thirty years in solitude, silence, and the internal exercises of a contemplative life before He took upon Himself the task of converting and instructing others. And during the laborious exercise of the prophetical office, besides much prayer practised openly, the Gospel expressly states that He often retired at night with His disciples to pray; and when a special work was to be done, as the mission of His disciples to preach, He would pass the whole night in prayer. Moreover He frequented deserts, and utterly refused to meddle in secular affairs or controversies.

An ecclesiastic, then, for his own sake and for love of his flock, should account himself bound to practise internal contemplative exercises, especially pure spiritual prayer, which alone will sanctify him and bring a blessing upon his ministry. Hence St. Florentius, a holy Bishop of Utrecht, afterwards of Münster, when remonstrated with for spending much time in prayer, as though hindering the discharge of his episcopal duties, returned an answer very becoming an
enlightened Bishop: 'What! do you account me mad because, having so many sheep under my charge, I bestow so much time on prayer?'—implying that it was only by prayer he could hope to perform his episcopal duties effectually and obtain a blessing upon them.

Such are the duties of ecclesiastics. And if they are conscious of neglect in this matter they may use these simple instructions, which in the main are suitable enough for them, if they eliminate certain particulars which peculiarly concern religious.
CHAPTER II

THESE INSTRUCTIONS PROFITABLE TO SECULARS

As regards lay persons. Much in these instructions will be found applicable to all who are invited by God to aspire to contemplation, for we must not suppose, as was said before, that religious only tend to perfection. There are devout-minded souls in the world who do not feel called to embrace the religious life. Some are married or are otherwise hindered. Others are incapable of the religious life or have no inclination to it. Still all, whatever their age or condition, may be invited by God to enter the ways of contemplation. To all such, with slight modification, these instructions will afford useful help. With this object they will do well to take into consideration the following advice:

A devout soul drawn by God to contemplation in a secular state should consider herself bound, though not so strictly as a religious, to practise these essential duties: (1) to have a strong resolution to pursue the ways tending to contemplation; (2) to take care to observe and obey inspirations, and dispose herself so as to perceive them more and more clearly; (3) to practise the internal and external mortifications sent her by God or which belong to her state; (4) to pursue internal prayer in its various degrees according to the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit. In these general duties there is little or no difference between a lay person and a religious.

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There are instructions in this book which belong peculiarly to the religious state, such as advice applying to a life of solitude or of strict enclosure. But even from these a secular tending to perfection may derive profit by applying to his own use so much of the spirit of the religious life as discretion shall show to be beneficial.

To illustrate this: First, though a secular person is not obliged to retire into a solitude as strict as that of a religious, still he must allow himself daily sufficient solitude and silence for an adequate practice of internal prayer. He should not engage in distracting business or solicitudes that do not belong necessarily to his state of life. Even necessary business he must perform with the utmost internal quietness and recollection, carefully avoiding anxiety of mind or a desire to multiply riches. And as for idle conversations, complimentary visits, or dinner-parties, he must not indulge in them as freely as others or as he did formerly. He should set a greater value on his time, and what he can borrow from his employments should be devoted to the advancement of his soul in contemplation. Indeed he will soon find how great is the hindrance of idle conversations, dissipation of mind, engagement in unnecessary affairs or sensuous friendships, so that he will carefully avoid them.

Secondly, such a soul should studiously imitate the internal solitude belonging to a religious, withdrawing her spirit from affection to outward things—riches, pleasures, the thought of creatures, or worldly objects. She should, therefore, perform her external duties in reference to God and in subordination to her principal design, which is to perfect her spirit in divine love. She should not account herself absolute mistress of her worldly goods, but as God’s steward, to manage them so as to promote His glory. While possessing wealth she should exercise poverty of spirit, renouncing proprietorship and affection for her riches;
nor should she use them for sensible enjoyment or for mere display. Internal solitude, introversion, detachment of spirit she should constantly practise till they grow to be habitual with her; without them she will never be in a disposition to attend to Divine inspirations and to exercise internal prayer—practices essential to a state tending to contemplation.

Thirdly, in imitation of religious obedience, she should conduct herself towards those whom God has placed over her with profound submission of spirit, obeying them—or rather God in them—with much purity of intention. At first she should place herself under the guidance of a spiritual director to teach her how to discover the exercises of prayer and mortification suitable for her. She should exercise the utmost prudence in making choice, and should commend the matter to God in her prayers, begging of Him to provide her with one of sufficient knowledge and virtue, and especially one who is experienced in these interior ways so much exalted above the exercises of prayer commonly taught and practised. And when God has found her a director, she should obey him with sincerity and humility, yet without prejudice to the obedience she should give principally to her interior Master, for she owes Him obedience as much as any religious.

Fourthly, although the soul is not bound by vow to any rule, still she should reduce her life to some order and regularity, arranging her retirements, reading, prayer, refection, sleep, and the rest, as prudence and her director shall determine. A rule observed with discretion, not in a narrow, wooden manner, is requisite in an interior life. The soul unrestrained by any rule or custom will be unstable and uncertain in the discharge of even necessary duties.

Similarly reflections may be drawn from the other instructions peculiar to the religious state; and if the soul pursue internal prayer diligently, God will not fail to
INSTRUCTIONS PROFITABLE TO SECULARS

provide her with sufficient light and spiritual strength. And though God has not given her a vocation to religious life, He has enabled her to enjoy in the world one of its principal advantages. She may, therefore, reasonably think that for her particular good God did not call her to the religious state.

And let not such souls fear inconvenience by renouncing worldly anxiety and temporal riches. As the author of the Cloud of Unknowing confidently asserts, those whom God calls from worldly solicitudes to an interior life may safely rely on the special care of Divine Providence over them and all that belongs to them. For though He should call the soul into a desert, where there is no visible means of subsistence, or bid her lead an abstracted life in the midst of a city, let her not fear, but refer the care of her maintenance to Divine Providence, who by some means, ordinary or extraordinary, will provide for her; and if at times means of subsistence should be scarce, He will abundantly recompense her with interior celestial delicacies far more desirable. Examples of God’s wonderful care over such souls as are peculiarly His are to be found in abundance in ecclesiastical history, ancient and modern. So that to the end of time the words of the Psalmist will have their fulfillment: ‘The rich of the world have been brought to want and hunger; but such as truly seek the Lord shall not go unprovided of any good thing;’
CHAPTER III

THE ACTIVE AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

Although all Christians should aspire to perfection, lead spiritual lives, and sanctify their actions and employments by prayer, yet the effectual practice of this obligation is so rare that, in ordinary speech, those only are said to aspire to perfection who have been called by God from the solicitude of worldly affairs to make the love and service of Him the only business of their lives. In a state of adequate abstraction and solitude they pass their days in serving, adoring, loving, meditating, and praying to God, and endeavour to attend to and follow His Divine inspirations. This is ordinarily and perfectly accomplished in the religious state, but if attempted by others, then it should be in a course of life, as we have said, in a measure separated from the world.

In all souls there seems to remain even naturally a certain propensity to seek God, though not for Himself, but for the satisfaction of nature and of self-love. It is a kind of natural devotion, and is found in heretics, Jews, and even heathens, more or less according to their several dispositions and characters, the variety of which is astonishing and almost incredible. When grace unites itself to such propensities, it promotes and increases them, rectifies what is amiss, and especially purifies the intention, causing the soul to seek God for Himself alone. It in no