



The Imitation of Christ

Thomas A Kempis

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The Imitation of Christ is a cherished treasure of the Christian world and is the most widely read devotional work next to the Bible. Apart from the Bible no book has been translated into more languages than the Imitation of Christ. It was first composed in Latin ca.1418-1427. It is a handbook for spiritual life. The text is divided into four books, which provide detailed spiritual instructions: "Helpful Counsels of the Spiritual Life", "Directives for the Interior Life", "On Interior Consolation" and "On the Blessed Sacrament". The approach taken in the Imitation is characterized by its emphasis on the interior life and withdrawal from the world. The book places a high level of emphasis on the devotion to the Eucharist as key element of spiritual life.

This great book was written by a Roman Catholic monk. "Written", perhaps, is not the proper word. It would be more appropriate to say that each letter of the book is marked deep with the heart's blood of the great soul who had renounced all for his love of Christ. That great soul whose words, living and burning, have cast such a spell for the last four hundred years over the hearts of myriads of men and women; whose influence today remains as strong as ever and is destined to endure for all time to come; before whose genius and spiritual effort, hundreds of crowned have bent down in reverence; and before whose matchless purity the jarring sects of Christendom, whose name is legion, have sunk their differences of centuries in common veneration to a common principle—that great soul, strange to say, has not thought fit to put his name to a book such as this. Posterity, however, has guessed that the author was Thomas à Kempis, a Roman Catholic monk. How far the guess is true is known only to God. But be he who he may, that he deserves the world's adoration is a truth that can be gainsaid by none.

Thomas Haemmerlein, also known as Thomas à Kempis, from his native town of Kempen, near the Rhine, about forty miles north of Cologne. Haemmerlein, who was born in 1379 or 1380, was a member of the order of the Brothers of Common Life, and spent the last seventy years of his life at Mount St. Agnes, a monastery of Augustinian canons in the diocese of Utrecht. Here he died on July 26, 1471, after an uneventful life spent in copying manuscripts, reading, and composing, and in the peaceful routine of monastic piety.

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