

Entertainment, Recreation & Desire

Yes. The *Imitation* is very severe; useful at times when one is tempted to be too easily satisfied with one's progress, but certainly not at times of discouragement. And of course it is written for monks and not people living in the world like us.

A good book to balance it is Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations*, wh. I expect you know. (*Not* to be confused with his poems, which I don't recommend.) There is all the gold & fragrance!

Midway between the two I'd put the anonymous *Theologia Germanica* (Macmillan's in the little blue Golden Treasury series). This is curiously like the sort of letters we used to write 45 years ago!

This is a letter from C. S. Lewis to his old friend Arthur Greves, late in life—12 November, 1961. The last sentence is probably a reference to their largely literary early correspondence, not to the *Theologia Germanica*. This early correspondence was filled with the savoring of books and editions, comparisons between authors and works, and a keen delight in all the aspects of reading.

In this letter you have a whole spectrum of spiritual writing, complete with some trenchant spiritual advice. The first paragraph contains the advice. Anybody familiar with the various states of the soul and with the contents of Thomas à Kempis's work, will understand the nature of the advice. Anybody who has made any progress in sanctification will realize that it is good advice. We are prone, when less downcast about our spiritual progress, to require something severe. Perhaps you are not familiar with the *Imitation of Christ*. The severity of this book is on the level with the severity of something like *A Serious Call*, except that à Kempis' severity is monastic severity. One does not think of William Law as the sort of person who allows concessions, but the disparity of the audience will make Law seem to have a few more concessions than à Kempis will admit.

Back to the letter. Do you see what C. S. Lewis has done with his letter? Lewis is a man whose life is in the study of books. He knows books, many books; and he knows them better than most people. He has an intimate knowledge of the contents of the books of many centuries; he writes books in which these other books are explained and examined; he talks about books with his closest friends. To hold so many different whole books (whole worlds, whole arguments, whole systems of variety and complexity) in his mind he has to catalog them. He has to be able to manipulate them in chunks, to have an order in which to arrange them so that they can be examined. The order of his mind is here revealed, for the proper arrangement of these three works is explained: à Kempis, *Theologia*, Traherne.

At once—without a disquisition about Traherne's life and times—you have a sense of his book. A sense that depends on your knowledge of the literature in which this book finds itself, but one that can impart to you a very good understanding of the work. The ordering that Lewis provides is not cold or expressed in numbers, nor is it the bare recitation of facts. The ordering is achieved through the operation of two principles: love and understanding. The love is a love of books (a love that must extend to authors and readers: it is not a love of paper and ink but through paper and ink, as it were) and the understanding is an understanding of humanity (the condition, and also the disposition of the very authors and readers). This letter is fundamentally literary. It is the expression of a literary mind, the manifestation of a literary desire, the satisfaction of a literary question.

Let me leave this last conclusion for a while, but save it in your mind.

Now, the juxtaposition of the *Imitation* and the *Centuries* is deliberate and raises the question I would like to concentrate on.

À Kempis advocates a radical rejection of the world and all its pleasures for the sake of being a follower of Christ. He urges a life devoid of self-indulgence, even the indulgence of taking pleasure in the landscape or in food. No pleasures save those which are explicitly Christian are encouraged. For him, the Christian must allow no other delight than the delight of prayer, meditation, worship, and other explicitly Christian practices. The imitation of Christ consists in eliminating every distraction that is not explicitly Christological from all of life. You can understand Lewis's hesitation. It is hardly possible for people in secular employment, with the cares of life so constantly before them, to do this.

But it is useful for more than monks and nuns. This sort of thing might not be helpful for those who are discouraged and need encouragement; it can only serve to cast down and draw on those whose confidence is not so frail. Those who are spiritually fat, lazy, and disorganized all because of their self-indulgent complacency may most profit from this book (and which of us has none of these failings?). The natural self-indulgence of such a reader will balance out the work.¹

Traherne's theme is not a radical rejection of the world, but an expanded awareness of the glory of God in creation. He wants us to wake up each morning in heaven. Rather than excluding the natural glories in our pursuit of one glory, he would like us to see in all the multifarious excellencies of the created order the glory of the One who displays the wonders of his being in ways manifold but all connected to the source. The deeper connection of all the varieties of creation to their source is the real source of enjoyment and pleasure that Traherne believes we ought to have. You can see why this sort of thing will animate a person. It will turn one with enthusiasm to the consecration, not of oneself away from an awareness of the world, but of the world to God in one's awareness.

For Thomas à Kempis the work of spirituality is to narrow the focus of consciousness down to something always explicitly Christological. For Thomas Traherne the work of spirituality is to expand (or redirect) one's consciousness to see the glory of God everywhere in creation. I think both are valuable and even necessary. Still, you can see the abuse toward which each position is prone. Traherne would seem to deny original sin—our own corruption—in his quest to find God in all the world—if only we were aware as God made us to be aware, he seems to say; à Kempis would seem to deny life in his quest to flee the world. But both of them do it because their desire for heaven is such that they want to bring it down and have all of it now. They both desire our attention to be turned entirely toward the Lord, one by moving inward, and the other by moving outward. And, of course, I exploit the semantic range of the word 'world'.

Traherne puts it well when he says,

To contemn the world and to enjoy the world are things contrary to each other. How, then can we contemn the world, which we are born to enjoy? Truly there are two worlds. One was made by God, the other by men. That made by God was great and beautiful. Before the Fall it was Adam's joy and the Temple of his Glory. That made by men is a Babel of Confusions: Invented Riches, Pumps and Vanities, brought in by Sin: Give all (saith

¹This is not to say this is the only sort of reader who can profit from the work. I think the crucial thing to have is confidence, and I do not think the confidence is always false.

Thomas à Kempis) for all. Leave the one that you may enjoy the other (I. 7).

In this way we may bring Traherne and à Kempis together. It is in this region, with these ideas in mind I would like to talk about Entertainment, Recreation and Desire. I want to work through an explanation of the difference between entertainment and recreation and then illustrate by picking up the thought of literature, and literary desire that I brought up earlier.

The statement of Traherne that always sticks with me is this one: “Can you take too much delight in your Father’s world?” It is a rhetorical question; it expects no answer, or at least no affirmative answer. It is not possible, knowing the created order manifests its Creator, to take too much delight, for such delight is a proper delight in God himself. I think this statement defines all re-creation, all legitimate recreation.² We ought to pause and take delight in our Father’s world. This delight is not without effort, but it is obviously not without enjoyment either. The more we can take delight in our Father’s world, the better. If we can take delight and even express this delight while we are doing our duties—hoeing the garden or cleaning the house or laboring through some theologian’s quite unnecessary and pedantical locutions—we ought to do so.

For example: you can hoe badly, I suppose, or hoe intelligently. Your delight in our Father’s world does not have to be limited to your appreciation of the weather or the smell of the earth. It can be a delighting in his ways, a hoeing that accomplishes the purposes of hoeing better because it is more thoughtful than a rushed and perfunctory hoeing, or a casual and sloven hoeing while dreaming of other things. It can be a delight in hoeing as a pure act (turning the soil over, preparing it in the best way for the wonder of sowing and reaping), you see.

Or you might clean the house by simply arranging the disorganized piles of junk in a more recondite place rather than imposing on them a proper order by distributing them to various and logical places where you will be sure to find them the next time you need them. But if you delight in cleaning, which is ordering, as a pure act, as it were, you think about how things go together, you show consideration for the people living with you (you ought to show consideration for your family), and you might even start thinking about the essences of things.

In both of these mundane instances I have tried to show that there is more than efficiency involved in the job. You can think what you are doing. The level I fancy one should aim for is the level of organization: how things are distributed or arranged, distinction and hierarchy, similarity of use or of enjoyment.

In the last of my examples we have a *via negativa*. Ought you to enjoy some theologian’s quite unnecessary and pedantical locutions? No, but our proper disgust is a way of taking delight in our Father’s works, for you cannot love that which is orderly and sensibly arranged, and fail to hate whatever falls short. You will not usually seek out a *via negativa*, but these are sometimes unavoidable. What is avoidable is the failure to delight, or to experience negative delight when that is what the object should excite.

That broadens out the scope of legitimate recreation, perhaps, beyond what we are used to

²I think of it as sub-creation, or associated with it. Somehow they are connected, although enjoying a work of sub-creation is not sub-creation but clearly re-creation (or is it a vicarious sub-creation, enjoying the work of the sub-creator as the sub-creator enjoys the work of the Creator by means of his sub-creations?). I do not have the space to start exploring those connections explicitly, but the idea wanders in the back of my head . . . vaguely.

thinking. It may be I am co-opting the term in order to make it suit my purposes. (I only do it because it suits my purposes.) I think some of the difficulty that people have with my ideas of entertainment, as I have expressed them in the past, lie in the scope they assign to what is left over. They see a world turned grey, bled of all the color of possibilities and enjoyment. Although there is some truth to this idea, to which I want to return, it is not true enough; this is not the way I think of recreation. And as you can tell, my illustrations above were all of work, not recreation.

If recreation is a way of paying attention to the things to which we ought to pay attention, then I would like to suggest that entertainment is a form of distraction. I do not want to say that entertainment is just satisfying desires, while recreation renders our desires secondary. I want to say that entertainment stifles and destroys desire, turning it aside, mitigating it, bleeding out of the world the color of possibility and enjoyment. Entertainment, not work.

There is a deadly sin, among the seven deadly sins, called sloth. I have alluded to it earlier when I spoke of those who were complacent. The deadly sin of sloth describes a spiritual torpor, a lack of desire for spiritual things. Paul calls it a grieving, or sorrow, over spiritual matters in 2 Cor 7.10-11. At its weakest, this sorrow is an aversion or a reluctance.

You can readily see how à Kempis would understand this, right? This spiritual torpor would war against devotion and the duties of religion. If you are familiar with John Owen's great trilogy on temptation and sin you will recognize something he speaks of, something that must be mortified, a craving the principle of indwelling sin keeps alive in believers. Sloth is that aversion to spiritual things which the Christian must daily resist. I think this is how à Kempis would take it. (Now I am tempted to say a few things about sloth and work, but I will refrain since I must return to Traherne.)

Can you see how Traherne would understand this business of sloth? It is not a love of God's world which works worldly sorrow, but a love of man's world that makes us sorrow, for it turns us from what is real to what is counterfeit, it takes our attention from truth to a lie. Do you see the difference? I do not say Traherne would deny what à Kempis and Owen would say, but that he can be taken along with it. (And I do not think any of them would agree with the deluded Milton when he joins pale reluctance to the ingredients of virtue. Such meeting is a mere oppugnancy.)

I want to elaborate on this and see if we can distinguish recreation and devotion without separating them. In my mind the distinction is similar to the distinction that exists between the living out of our life all to the glory of God, and those times of explicit worship, both secret and public. Devotion is this concentration of ourselves onto one thing explicitly. And yet we were not made for constant devotion. The other activities of life, the full scope of human affairs must take up the time of responsible human beings. (We are leaving out work from our considerations at present.) These require a sort of devotion of their own (without separating them), and this different devotion is a sort of consecration. The consecration of devotion is explicit and overt, the consecration of recreation is implicit and more subtle. It is an interior sort, one of looking within. I do not say that worship does not involve a looking within things, but that recreation is more exploratory. And this exploration is the *via Traherniana*.

Entertainment and amusement partake of the deadly sin of sloth. Recreation does not, by the *via Traherniana*. Entertainment and amusement turn away desire, squandering rather than cultivating or enriching it, debasing rather than ennobling us. Here are pleasant sounds of music without the substance of true meaning which is necessary to proper order; here the trappings of great things without the great things trapped inside. Desire is vitiated, flung away, dried up. In contrast, recreation is a turning to take delight in something because it broadens our desire. As when the palate is cultivated and refined the taste of food is not decreased, although limited; it is

intensified and made more apt to subtleties and opened to new worlds of flavor, I imagine. Recreation seeks to understand God's delight in his works, what he means by them, how they are to be properly enjoyed.

Here is the condition of a man I know and have observed: he is rather well educated and intelligent, by modern standards; he is a reader of history, a listener of good music, one who enjoys conversation on the great events of the day; he likes many things that are good, and he likes them very much, but his liking for them shows a lack of discernment for their ends. He likes not literature for the sake of literature, but because of the historical flavors he sucks out of it; he is the audience at the concert featuring the bizarrely juxtaposed music of Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky (only someone as thoughtless as a musician would perpetrate such a program); he has managed to find great things interesting while missing their point; he has followed after this or that adornment merely, has looked at a great tapestry of the last judgment and said he found the colors pleasing. Nor are we any better, we who pay money to pass away the time at a play by Oscar Wilde. We are a generation of dogs. We even use delicate objects as blunt instruments of unrighteousness.

Perhaps because of this, because we misuse things by habit, when we think of recreation and entertainment, we usually side with à Kempis and fail to take Traherne into consideration. (In our zeal, you understand, in our better moments and perhaps even to our credit.) Or it may be that we are repelled by à Kempis, or the notion that we might end up in a world bled of the colors of enjoyment and end up with the tedious life of hermits, or worse, puritans.³ Then we look on Traherne with relief.

The great thing about Traherne, the relief he provides is when he points out that we do not only need to focus our attention, but that we also need to expand our awareness. This is why, I think, C.S. Lewis told Arthur Greves that Traherne would balance out à Kempis. We do not well to neglect either of them. Some may find the severity of à Kempis more attractive. Most will find the broader scope of Traherne more welcome.

I remember once having a conversation with two very intellectual young ladies. The situation they wanted to consider had to do with these two impulses: the one toward a narrower focus and the other toward an expanded awareness. Sometimes the liberal arts and piety seem in conflict. Look at the great St. Augustine (I believe he was the specific example in view). How could he have written such exquisite works, how could he have had the religious sensibilities he displayed without the benefit of his education? And yet he seemed to disparage his liberal education later in life. Then the great St. C.S. Lewis came up in our conversation. He seemed to have a similar idea written down somewhere disparaging liberal education and rather praising unaided, but concentrated piety. Well, the two intellectual young ladies fell to their knees before me and begged me, with tears, to help them understand. (This sort of thing happens to me all the time.)

What could I say? What St. Augustine and C.S. Lewis really objected to, I ween, was all the pagan influence, the broadness of corruption to which a liberal education would expose one. One chap I know has put it well when he asked whether it was better to learn piety from the

³I always think of Sarah Edwards when the puritans come up (although I have my fun at their expense). She was married to The Puritan. And yet she sought to flee away from what meager and rustic enjoyments she had, living on the edge of the wilderness. She sought to finish serving her guests and scorned news and conversation so that she could lock herself away to savor the delight of her raptures, the sweetness of Christ.

pagans or impiety from the Christians. St. Augustine and C.S. Lewis lamented learning piety from the pagans, because they were not left uninfluenced by the pagan elements. The thing is, those pagans seemed to take greater delight in our Father's world than the Christians did. But what St. Augustine and C.S. Lewis knew was that the pagans were not the only ones who should take delight; that they did not have a monopoly on liberal education; that in the pursuit of piety, taking delight in our Father's world would have its proper place.

In the end, our problem is not that we need more brilliance, it is that we are too dull to realize what things we desire. What a shame that we need pagans (although they were many of them great men) to wake us, to show us how to take delight in our Father's world. In this work, those boys have not been slothful or complacent. On the other hand we need less distractions so that we can be alive to the true glory. We need to grow better at being able to taste and touch and scent and hear and see holy things, for these things are better and ultimate. If we have in our lives those things that make us alive to something and at the same time make us dull to the delights of prayer and meditation, things that dull our yearning for communion with God, what good to us is other delight or finery? I think it was the taint that retarded, however slightly, the progress of St. Augustine and C.S. Lewis that they lamented. There ought to be, one feels, a purer way of approach.

It is time to put Traherne to work again (I was, after all, supposed to talk about him):
 As pictures are made curious by lights and shades, which without shades could not be: so is felicity composed of wants and supplies; without which mixture there could be no felicity. Were there no needs, wants would be wanting themselves, and supplies superfluous: want being the parent of Celestial Treasure. It is very strange; want itself is a treasure in Heaven: and so great an one that without it there could be no treasure. God did infinitely for us, when He made us to want like Gods, that like Gods we might be satisfied. The heathen Deities wanted nothing, and were therefore unhappy, for they had no being. But the Lord God of Israel the Living and True God, was from all Eternity, and from all Eternity wanted like a God. He wanted the communication of His divine essence, and persons to enjoy it. He wanted Worlds, He wanted Spectators, He wanted Joys, He wanted Treasures. He wanted, yet He wanted not, for He had them (I. 41).

God has not created us undesiring, as Traherne points out, but has made desire the very sinew of the universe, that which holds all things together. Did you notice what he said about un-wanting heathen deities? Do you know who wanted? The pagan men, for they were made by the God of Traherne, and are infinitely more to be esteemed than their gods. I wonder if the answer to the question those intellectual young ladies spent so many sleepless nights considering can be considered in this way. Could we say the pagans teach us wanting in general? For the liberal arts can give us questions, if not the answers. And this wanting is something Christians should have in greater measure than they, since Christians desire a greater object than the pagans ever conceived. It is in the greatness of their wanting, another *via negativa*, that we can appropriate the *via Traherniana*, a way of wanting, better.

But enough of pagans, and intellectual young ladies, and all that jazz. It is time to speak again of recreation and work and sloth.

It will not be entirely lost on the discerning among you that in the connection of my earlier meanderings on recreation I used some examples that were strikingly drawn from activities more usually associated with work. And if you were paying close attention, you probably noticed some other statements about work, and sloth and all that jazz. You see, I think recreation is of the same kidney as work.

Work, as you know, was not originally so bad. Whether it was worship and service or keeping and tilling, whatever Adam was told to busy himself with in Eden was not a tedious business. Think of the recreations that we enjoy: how many of them that are worthwhile do not come with their own sort of work? Does reading not require perseverance, the labor of the eyes, the engagement of the mind? (I do all my work at work in the same position that I read, slumped over in a chair.) Does listening to music not require that you pay attention continuously and rather intently for a while? It is a sort of work—at least the best listening is. Taking walks requires walking, paddling a canoe comes not without some effort of the muscles. And how about more strenuous things like skiing, or mountain climbing, or swimming, or playing chess?

Nor do I think it will do to try to distinguish work from recreation by saying the former is more and the latter less intense. The people who think that way, it seems to me, are not only lazy about their recreations, they are probably also lazy at their work. This objection will only sway those who do things with half a heart, whose notions of recreation are mostly indolent. We would do better, it seems to me, if our notion of play were more molded to the meaning we use when we talk of playing instruments. Recreation is not for the casual.

Heaven and hell, life and death, blessing and damnation are attached to life. Life is not for the casual: not work, not worship, not even recreation. That is the *via Traherniana*. It is also the way of à Kempis in his intensity. But it is peculiarly Traherne's in its wider scope.

Remember the literary introduction? Remember the letter? I said the letter was the answer to a literary question. It was also the answer to a spiritual question. The two have become inseparable in the letter. Without the one, he would not have so well answered the other. If Lewis's letter had not been so much a literary letter he would not have given as deft an answer to the spiritual question which we must suppose Arthur Greeves had posed, "Is not the *Imitation* a severe book?"

In an attempt to discourage me from reading it, someone once remarked to me that the *Imitation* was too mystical. Something similar seems to be in Greeves's question. He wants an evaluation and proposes a cautiously negative judgment. The question of severity is hardly a disinterested question; it carries with it the evaluation of its relative usefulness—we do not, as a general rule, relish a book for its severity. We are reluctant for severity: who likes to dole it out or to receive it? And Lewis's reply makes one surmise that Arthur Greeves did not relish severity any more than we would.

I do not think it is saying too much to understand Lewis's reply as spiritual advice. You can see that Lewis had thought about the uses to which different kinds of books might be put. He understood the uses of books about spirituality in this instance. How many in the contemporary church would be able to turn an aversion into something that has profit for the soul by putting the thing into a system of classification—an orderly arrangement—that showed it to best advantage and at the same time encouraged further reading?

The literary and the spiritual are twined together in this letter, and it is a vindication of the *via Traherniana*. I do not think what Lewis did was casual. It almost seems inadvertent that he should ramble on in the old way about these sorts of books. It seems inadvertent (after you have been reading along in his letters) because it was his habit to handle books this way. But it also has the usefulness, a usefulness that almost seems intent, concentrated, as spiritually minded as à Kempis might wish it to be. Lewis's work had become his recreation, and his recreation his work: both were serious, bringing faculties and knowledge to bear with the ease of habit.

The business of spirituality is the work of growing in proper habits. It is hard work: the hard work of delighting ourselves in what is not a natural delight. It is the labor in which we

labor that we may enter into our rest. We do not always want to work at what is not a natural delight. But I do not think the rest toward which we labor will be the rest of indolence. It will be rest when all our work is recreation, not because it is no longer serious, but because it is all delight, and we will have no thought of entertainment any more.

Desire

For giving me Desire,
 An Eager Thirst, a burning Ardent fire,
 A virgin Infant Flame,
 A Love with which into the World I came,
 An Inward Hidden Heavenly Love,
 Which in my Soul did Work and move,
 And ever ever me Enflame,
 With restless longing Heavenly Avarice,
 That never could be satisfied,
 That did incessantly a Paradise
 Unknown suggest, and som thing undescried
 Discern, and bear me to it; be
 Thy Name for ever praised by me.

My Parchd and Witherd Bones
 Burnt up did seem: My Soul was full of Groans:
 My thoughts Extensions were:
 Like Paces Reaches Steps they did appear:
 They somewhat hotly did persue,
 Knew that they had not all their due;
 Nor ever quiet were:
 But made my flesh like Hungry Thirsty Ground,
 My Heart a deep profound Abyss,
 And evry Joy and Pleasure but a Wound,
 So long as I my Blessedness did miss.
 O Happiness! A Famine burns,
 And all my Life in Anguish turns!

Where are the Silent Streams,
 The Living Waters, and the Glorious Beams,
 The Sweet Reviving Bowers,
 The Shady Groves, the Sweet and Curious Flowers,
 The Springs and Trees, the Heavenly Days,
 The Flowry Meads, the Glorious Rayes,
 The Gold and Silver Towers?
 Alass, all these are poor and Empty Things,
 Trees Waters Days and Shining Beams
 Fruits, Flowers, Bowers, Shady Groves and Springs,
 No Joy will yeeld, no more then Silent Streams.

These are but Dead Material Toys,
And cannot make my Heavenly Joys.

O Love! Ye Amities,
And Friendships, that appear abov the Skies!
Ye Feasts, and Living Pleasures!
Ye Senses, Honors, and Imperial Treasures!
Ye Bridal Joys! Ye High Delights;
That satisfy all Appetites!
Ye Sweet Affections, and
Ye high Respects! What ever Joys there be
In Triumphs, Whatsoever stand
In Amicable Sweet Societie
Whatever Pleasures are at his right Hand
Ye must, before I am Divine,
In full Proprietie be mine.

This Soaring Sacred Thirst,
Ambassador of Bliss, approached first,
Making a Place in me,
That made me apt to Prize, and Taste, and See,
For not the Objects, but the Sence
Of Things, doth Bliss to Souls dispense,
And make it Lord like Thee.
Sence, feeling, Taste, Complacency and Sight,
These are the true and real Joys,
The Living Flowing Inward Melting, Bright
And Heavenly Pleasures; all the rest are Toys:
All which are founded in Desire,
As Light in Flame, and Heat in fire.

Appendix: From *Theologia Germanica* (So that, if it may be, you might also have a desire for this middle book.)

CHAPTER XLIV

How nothing is contrary to God but Self-will and how he who seeketh his own Good for his own sake, findeth it not; and how a Man of himself neither knoweth nor can do any good Thing.

Now, it may be asked; is there aught which is contrary to God and the true Good? I say, No. Likewise, there is nothing without God, except to will otherwise than is willed by the Eternal Will; that is, contrary to the Eternal Will. Now the Eternal Will willeth that nothing be willed or loved but the Eternal Goodness. And where it is otherwise, there is something contrary to Him, and in this sense it is true that he who is without God is contrary to God; but in truth there is no Being contrary to God or the true Good.

We must understand it as though God said: "He who willeth without Me, or willeth not what I will, or otherwise than as I will, he willeth contrary to Me, for My will is that no one

should will otherwise than I, and that there should be no will without Me, and without My will; even as without Me, there is neither Substance, nor Life, nor this, nor that, so also there should be no Will apart from Me, and without My will.” And even as in truth all beings are one in substance in the Perfect Being, and all good is one in the One Being, and so forth, and cannot exist without that One, so shall all wills be one in the One Perfect Will, and there shall be no will apart from that One. And whatever is otherwise is wrong, and contrary to God and His will, and therefore it is sin. Therefore all will apart from God’s will (that is, all self-will) is sin, and so is all that is done from self-will. So long as a man seeketh his own will and his own highest Good, because it is His and for his own sake, he will never find it; for so long as he doeth this, he is not seeking his own highest Good, and how then should he find it? For so long as he doeth this, he seeketh himself, and dreameth that he is himself the highest Good; and seeing that he is not the highest Good, he seeketh not the highest Good, so long as he seeketh himself. But whosoever seeketh, loveth, and pursueth Goodness as Goodness and for the sake of Goodness, and maketh that his end, for nothing but the love of Goodness, not for love of the I, Me, Mine, Self, and the like, he will find the highest Good, for he seeketh it aright, and they who seek it otherwise do err. And truly it is on this wise that the true and Perfect Goodness seeketh and loveth and pursueth itself, and therefore it findeth itself.

It is a great folly when a man, or any creature, dreameth that he knoweth or can accomplish aught of himself, and above all when he dreameth that he knoweth or can fulfil any good thing, whereby he may deserve much at God’s hands, and prevail with Him. If he understood rightly, he would see that this is to put a great affront upon God. But the True and Perfect Goodness hath compassion on the foolish simple man who knoweth no better, and ordereth things for the best for him, and giveth him as much of the good things of God as he is able to receive. But as we have said afore, he findeth and receiveth not the True Good so long as he remaineth unchanged; for unless Self and Me depart, he will never find or receive it.

CHAPTER XLV

How that where there is a Christian Life, Christ dwelleth, and how Christ’s Life is the best and most admirable Life that ever hath been or can be.

He who knoweth and understandeth Christ’s life, knoweth and understandeth Christ Himself; and in like manner, he who understandeth not His life, doth not understand Christ Himself. And he who believeth on Christ, believeth that His life is the best and noblest life that can be, and if a man believe not this, neither doth he believe on Christ Himself. And in so far as a man’s life is according to Christ, Christ Himself dwelleth in him, and if he hath not the one neither hath he the other. For where there is the life of Christ, there is Christ Himself, and where His life is not, Christ is not, and where a man hath His life, he may say with St. Paul, “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” (Galatians 2:20.) And this is the noblest and best life; for in him who hath it, God Himself dwelleth, with all goodness. So how could there be a better life? When we speak of obedience, of the new man, of the True Light, the True Love, or the life of Christ, it is all the same thing, and where one of these is, there are they all, and where one is wanting, there is none of them, for they are all one in truth and substance. And whatever may bring about that new birth which maketh alive in Christ, to that let us cleave with all our might and to nought else; and let us forswear and flee all that may hinder it. And he who hath received this life in the Holy Sacrament, hath verily and indeed received Christ, and the more of that life he hath received, the more he hath received of Christ, and the less, the less of Christ.