

*The Cloud
of
Unknowing*

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The Cloud of Unknowing

Introduction

The Cloud of Unknowing, a masterpiece of simplicity that distills a complex mystical epistemology and discipline into engagingly readable prose, embodies a paradox. It offers a method by which the suitably disposed reader may practice an advanced and even austere form of contemplation — the divesting of the mind of all images and concepts through an encounter with a “nothing and a nowhere” that leads to the mysterious and unfathomable being of God Himself. Yet as the account of this exercise unfolds, the genial and hospitable tone of the author humanizes the austerity of the method and persuasively draws the reader into what Evelyn Underhill calls “the loving discernment of Reality” (*Sequence*, p. 81).

We can begin to understand the meaning of the *Cloud* by looking at what may be the most famous quotation in Western mysticism, the passage in the *Confessions*, IX, 10, where Augustine muses upon the ecstasy at Ostia, an experience that he had in a final conversation with his mother, Monica (McGinn, p. 234). By its similarities and contrasts with the ideas of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, this brief classical statement of the contemplative ascent can introduce us to the whole mystical tradition:

If to any man the tumult of the flesh grew silent, silent the images of earth and sea and air: and if the heavens grew silent, and the very soul grew silent to herself and by not thinking of self mounted beyond self: if all dreams and imagined visions grew silent, and every tongue and every sign and whatsoever is transient — for indeed if any man could hear them, he should hear them saying with one voice: We did not make ourselves, but He made us who abides forever: but if, having uttered this and so set us to listening to Him who made them, they all grew silent, and in their silence He alone spoke to us, not by them but by Himself: so that we should hear His word, not by any tongue of flesh nor the voice of an angel nor the sound of thunder nor in the darkness of a parable, but that we should hear Himself whom in all these things we love, should hear Himself and not them: just as we two had but now reached forth and in a flash of the mind attained to touch the eternal Wisdom which abides over all: and if this could continue, and all other visions so different be quite taken away, and this one should so ravish and absorb and wrap the beholder in inward joys that his life should eternally be such as that one moment of understanding for which we had been sighing — would not this be: Enter Thou into the joy of Thy Lord? (*Confessions*, trans. Sheed, pp. 200–01).

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What is striking about this passage is the combination of two movements: a sweeping review of nature, human psychology, and the world of signs, followed by the “silencing” or negation of everything that is not God. These two movements present us with affirmation and negation; or, in terms more proper to mystical discourse, with the kataphatic and apophatic phases of the mystical ascent. Moreover, the passage from Augustine, which is richly affirmative, is a fine example of illumination and union, which, together with purgation, are the mystic’s three traditional types of experience. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, by contrast, is essentially apophatic in its emphasis and focuses almost entirely on the “silencing” described by Augustine: it collapses the meditation on nature to brief allusion, and discusses the soul’s activities only in the most practical manner. Perhaps most important, whereas Augustine refers to “that one moment of understanding” (*intelligentia*), the method of the *Cloud* emphasizes the movement described earlier when, as all things grew silent, “the very soul grew silent to herself and by not thinking of self mounted beyond self.”

Mystical union takes place by means of the highest, best, or most suitable human faculty, but whether that faculty primarily involves the heart or the mind varies with different writers. In the Augustinian tradition, the role of the mind has considerable emphasis, but the activity of the spiritual heart, the will, is by no means neglected. Similarly in the accounts of those writers who seem to favor an affective approach almost exclusively, there is a final celebration of the mind as well.

The *Cloud*’s de-emphasis on the activity of the intelligence represents a seemingly archetypal impulse hinted at even in Platonic texts: that the ultimate reality which the mystic seeks to experience is finally beyond the grasp of the intellect (Louth, p. 13). On the other hand, it seems that since in Platonism there is a kinship (*syngeneia*) between the soul and the Ideas, the search for knowledge of the forms is a homecoming, the return of the soul to its proper nature. Such an ontological bond does seem to result in a significant continuity between the initial and later stages of Platonic contemplation. Platonism conceived the contemplative ascent as a process that required successive purifications until the soul regained its pristine condition, although the final vision of the supreme Forms of the Good and the Beautiful is outside the soul’s capacity and is simply given or revealed (Lees, p. 271; Louth, pp. 2–13).

An important concept in the *Cloud* — “the sovereinneste pointe” of the spirit or of contemplation (see lines 15; 36–37; 1371) — can suggest the richness of traditional elements present in the work, and can serve to focus both the continuities and the differences in the tradition of contemplation. The concept begins in Stoic philosophy as a reference to the “single faculty of the soul from which all others were held to derive” (Lees, p. 271) — *to anataton meros* — the topmost part, the Latin equivalent of which is *apex mentis*, the summit of the mind. In association with what is considered to be this highest part, the intellectual and affective views of contemplative experience come into focus and interact. But in the main tradition followed by the *Cloud*, the intellect and the imagination, which initiate

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the human ascent to God, must be abandoned so that contemplation may proceed by negation, or the apophatic method.

By contrast, a competing term from Augustine — *ratio superior*, “the superior reason” — entailed a significantly different view of the mystical ascent, espoused especially by the twelfth-century Victorines, Hugh and Richard. Augustine believed that “an intellectual ‘vision’ of God is the goal of mystical contemplation” (TeSelle, p. 32). For Augustine, the superior reason is fulfilled by wisdom, just as the inferior reason is completed by knowledge. The wisdom that belongs to the upper part of reason is itself the image of God and contemplates the divine reasons. Later medieval writers refined these insights, but, although it undergoes subtle variations, Augustinian wisdom, or *sapientia*, persists. Human wisdom participates in Divine Wisdom, which, for Augustine, is God Himself (*De Trinitate*, XV, 7, V).

Given the wide range of Augustine’s views, however, the emphasis on the intellect must be qualified by his observation that the best experience of God is to be found not in knowledge but in love, a view that signals his major influence on the affective mysticism of the Middle Ages as well. In fact, his treatment of the will and the affections is so central to his mystical thought that he could affirm, with considerable controversial impact, that the act of loving one’s neighbor is an experience of God (TeSelle, p. 29). Nevertheless, continuity and “the efficacy of the purified intellect . . . remained characteristic principles of the Augustinian concept of the contemplative way” (Lees, p. 272). Consequently, a principal mark of the Augustinian tradition is illumination, the second stage of the mystical ascent, the one that, according to Evelyn Underhill (*Mysticism*, p. 238), is the most densely populated, since for her it characterizes the mysticisms of nature and poetry. In the later Middle Ages, the two different emphases in mysticism take their place in a more widely debated controversy as to whether the intellect or the will is the primary or most noble human power. This is a difference that Dante attempts to reconcile in the *Paradiso*, XI, 37–39, by celebrating as complementary both the *splendore* that illuminates the intellect and the *ardore* that inflames the will.

At the Council of Nicaea in 325, the clarification of the doctrine that God created the world out of nothing, *ex nihilo*, had a profound impact on another strain of the Christian mystical tradition. The doctrine denies the soul’s natural kinship with the divine and affirms an uncrossable ontological gap between the creator and created human nature, an opposition that does not occur in the teachings of Plato and Plotinus. In the Platonic tradition, the most important ontological distinction is between the spiritual and the material, the soul and the body. In the Nicaean view, the most important distinction is between creator and creation, with the soul having a special kinship with the body (Louth, p. 77), a view that, I believe, has a special place in *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Because of this radical difference, the Christian mystical ascent, as influenced by Gregory of Nyssa, is unlike the Platonic in that it puts greater restrictions on the use of the intellect, which has no natural kinship with divinity. Ultimate reality, in this tradition, is more emphatically beyond the grasp of the human mind. Most significant, however, is the key event that bridges this gap and makes union with God possible — the Incarnation of the Word. Athanasius seems to have

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responded to the Council of Nicaea by rejecting the Platonic tenet that the soul can reach the divine by the *theoria* of contemplation. But Gregory of Nyssa, taking up a somewhat undeveloped pattern in Origen, presented three overlapping stages of the mystical ascent which eventually develop into the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive (Lees, p. 51). In the unitive phase, Gregory eliminates the activity of the intellect entirely and depicts a darkness in which the mystic feels the presence of God through love; and it is this tradition to which *The Cloud of Unknowing* belongs primarily. Affirming the image and likeness of God in the human person, but denying any identity, Gregory insisted that man can never grasp the divine nature as it is in itself by means of the intelligence, so that final union with God must take place by a kind of unknowing, although the intellect is intensely active in the early stages of the ascent (Louth, p. 82). Together with love, this unknowing, or negation of knowledge in the ordinary sense, is the main activity of the apophatic method, although affirmation, the kataphatic movement, is frequently present.

Gregory of Nyssa's insistence that God cannot be grasped by the mind enters into the thought of the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a mysterious, sixth-century Syrian monk. Denis, as he is simply designated by the author of the *Cloud* (line 2371), was thought in the Middle Ages to have been the disciple of St. Paul mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles 17:34, and consequently his works were considered immensely authoritative. He was, however, a formidable thinker in his own right, and Aquinas in the thirteenth century quotes him about 1700 times (Pelikan, p. 21). A central tenet for Denis, as it was for Gregory of Nyssa, is the abandonment of the understanding in order to enter the final stage of mystical contemplation in favor of the will and the affectivity. In fact, in this tradition, God is beyond even personhood as we know it: in *Deonise Hid Divinité*, the *Cloud* author's version of Denis's *Mystical Theology*, the phrase, "not sonship nor fatherhood" (Hodgson p. 28, lines 5–6) highlights this key negation; and, a happy respite from contemporary controversy, concerns with gender become as irrelevant as any other analogical designation.

The mysticism of Denis the Areopagite provides a system that becomes paradigmatic for the West. He works out a three-fold analogy between modes of being, modes of apprehension, and types of theology. That is, there are the ontological dimensions of the sensible, the intelligible, and the divine. Apprehending these dimensions are the imagination, the intellect, and a faculty "above mind." Finally, there are three modes of theology: sensible, intelligible, and mystical. The first two are kataphatic: they affirm God "by assigning to him names derived from the properties of creatures"; the third, mystical theology, is apophatic and denies that any of these names can be validly applied to God, who absolutely transcends nature and the human mind. Mystical theology then, entering the darkness that is above mind, "ascends to the creator himself" (Emery, p. 55). Denis does not say what the apprehension above mind is, but the *Cloud* author speaks for the tradition when he asserts that the contemplative rises through love ("entren with affeccioun into derknes" Hodgson p. 122, lines 15–16), a view that goes back to Gregory of Nyssa (Louth, p. 81). This transcendent power of love, however, is by no means unique to the Dionysian tradition,

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because it plays a principal role not only in Augustine, but also in Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, and the Victorines, Hugh and Richard.

The hierarchical ascent through the faculties, which is described in our initial quotation from Augustine and which is almost universal in the mystical tradition, appears in an elaborated yet concise way in one of the most attractive mystical treatises of the Middle Ages, the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (*The Mind's Journey unto God*), by Bonaventure. Both Bonaventure's *Mind's Journey* and the *Cloud* are relatively short and come close to being about the same length. Bonaventure's treatise is a kind of medieval devotional *summa*, in that he provides a compendium of symbolism, epistemology, metaphysics, theology, and prayerful exhortation. It is almost a handbook of medieval thought in its succinct offering of diverse information within what might be called a mystical ontology. Covering the three categories of the Dionysian tradition, he begins with a symbolic examination of the sensible vestiges of God in the universe, proceeds to the intelligible realm in the image of the Trinity reflected in the workings of the mind, and concludes with the divine names of being and goodness as they apply to the Trinity itself. *The Mind's Journey unto God* contains seven chapters, but interestingly, only the last alludes to the experience addressed by the whole of the *Cloud*. This contrasting proportion illustrates a central difference in scale and emphasis between the *Cloud* and the *Mind's Journey*, a difference that can also serve to distinguish the *Cloud* from its more immediate sources and clarify its own simplicity and power. Most important, the *Cloud* has, as a determining principle of structure, a practical technique for moving beyond illumination to union, a transitional praxis virtually absent from Bonaventure's treatise. On the other hand, the *Cloud's* references to union as such are spelled out only in brief statements at the end of the work.

Yet even though the *Cloud* skips the vigorous and explicit exercise of the imagination and reason that make Bonaventure's treatise so compelling and vital, it conveys, indirectly and by allusion, much incidental insight and information about the role of the senses, imagination, and intellect. The reason for this is that in order to define precisely what this non-conceptual focusing and its effects are, he must, with adequate detail, clarify what it is not. In other words, although the main concern of the *Cloud* is apophatic, kataphatic affirmations, although brief and allusive, occur in a persistent dialectic.

The achievement of the *Cloud* in directness and persuasiveness becomes dramatically clear when compared to the methods of two of its more immediate sources, the works of the Victorine, Thomas Gallus, and the Carthusian, Hugh of Balma. Moreover, the often subtle relationships between the faculties of knowing and loving further qualify these differences. Thomas Gallus, who influenced Bonaventure as well as the *Cloud* author, ultimately derives the different stages in the progress towards union from Denis (Lees, p. 275). For "the devoted rather than the highly educated" (Walsh, in Lees, p. 185), Gallus wrote a paraphrase of several Dionysian works, which he called the *Extractio*. The combination was a more usable text than the translation made by John Scotus Eriugena in the ninth century, or John Saracenus in the twelfth century. Gallus's attempt to make the teaching of

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Denis as accessible and as clear as possible (Théry, in Lees, p. 182) represents an intention that seems to govern the *Cloud* as well.

Since Gallus follows Denis quite closely and since he influenced Bonaventure, a somewhat detailed look at his thought can provide a sense of the tradition in a form that directly influenced the *Cloud of Unknowing* and at the same time convey the intellectual calm of its contrasting simplicity. As in Denis's treatises and in Bonaventure's *The Mind's Journey unto God*, there are a somewhat overwhelming nine levels of ascent. This elaboration of the three phases of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, though it comes from Denis, probably owes something to Augustine's festival of triads in the *De Trinitate*. The multiplication of triads exists also in Proclus, who is the immediate Neoplatonic source of Denis himself and who extensively develops the traditional threefold ontology of the One, the Intelligence, and the Soul (Louth, p. 162). More precisely, in Gallus there are three groups of levels, or mansions, and each group itself contains three subdivisions. Paralleling each of the nine levels in Gallus are the nine orders of the Celestial Hierarchy — angels, archangels, principalities, powers, virtues, dominations, thrones, cherubim, and seraphim. The justification of such an elaborate schema, which occurs also in Bonaventure's mystical treatise, would seem to lie in how effectively it presents the transcendence of God, and its insistence that the ascent does not take place all at once, but by deliberate and careful gradations, a point suggested by the use of the Latin *passus* in Bonaventure. Interestingly, this term also describes the stages of the Middle English poem, *Piers Plowman*. In startling contrast is the simplicity of the *Cloud*, where avoiding such complexities seems to be a principal aim.

In spite of the numerical complexity of these schemas, the pattern is fundamentally and even simply determined by a dialectical emphasis on nature and grace, reason and affectivity. In the first mansion of the Temple of God which is the soul, understanding and affectivity operate naturally in the natural sphere, although helped by illuminating grace. In the second mansion, nature and grace work together. In the third mansion, the understanding and affectivity are illuminated and supported by grace alone.

This final mansion is governed by *synderesis*, a widely used term “given to intellect and will as they work together in the way of contemplation” (Walsh, in Lees, p. 326). Historically synonymous with two other Stoic terms for the principal part of the soul, *to hegemonikon* and *to anotaton meros*, it becomes in the Christian tradition “the natural impulse by virtue of which the soul is the image of the Sovereign Good and naturally adheres to it. This impulse, when perfectly purified by the love of God, is called the *scintilla*, or ‘spark’ of the *synderesis* — a phrase used by Bonaventure also, for it flies above the soul like the spark above the fire” (Walsh, in Lees, p. 326). A similar image is used in the *Cloud* (line 385) and Book Three, poem 9, of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, where the First Mover calls back the souls scattered throughout the universe “like leaping flames” (trans. Green, p. 61).

This final stage of union, which is where much of the diversity in the tradition comes, is subdivided into three further gradations, once more determined by a dialectical emphasis on

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grace, affectivity, and types of understanding: the first, corresponding to those angels called Thrones, is the reception of infused grace and the divine attraction of the intellect. The second, a point on which Hugh of Balma will strongly disagree with Gallus, is the perfection of intellectual knowledge by infused illumination. In Hugh of Balma, by contrast, the intellect exercises no initiative at all in what corresponds to these last three subdivisions. The third gradation of the last stage in Gallus is the perfection of union in the *apex affectus*, the “summit of the emotions” (Lees, p. 277).

Although the loving power is non-conceptual, Gallus insists that it is nevertheless cognitive. He makes his point by an analogy with the senses. The powers of sight and hearing apprehend their objects without becoming intimately involved with them. Knowledge through love, however, is experiential and, like taste, touch, and smell, involves contact between receiver and received (Lees, p. 279), a point that recalls how the mind attains to “touch the eternal Wisdom,” in Augustine’s account of the experience at Ostia. For Gallus, as opposed to Hugh of Balma, the intellectual faculty achieves its peak in the second movement of this last stage of union; but the affective faculty remains dominant in the final phase. “The unitive experience is thus achieved through the power of love, in the *apex affectus*” (Lees, p. 279). Nevertheless, Gallus continues to stress the cognitive power of love: “the very removal of intellectual cognition in a certain way leads into superintellectual cognition” (Lees, p. 283; my translation). The soul apprehends God ecstatically in the unitive wisdom of *sapientia* or “knowledge-in-love” (Lees, p. 280), an essential concept in Gallus which seems to have an Augustinian coloring. In fact, the language of Augustine is echoed throughout the whole tradition, especially his use of touch imagery (Poque, p. 199) and the word *sapientia*.

In a persuasive interpretation of Thomas Gallus (Lees, pp. 281, 287), the dualism of intellect and love disappears, and the soul becomes a simple “élan,” a “towards God” (*ad Deum*), a simplification that dilates the spirit for a richer contemplation and that anticipates the *Cloud*’s “naked intent” towards God.

For Gallus, this transintellectual union encounters God “more deeply than the mind because it unites the soul to the whole plenitude of desire . . . by a proportion beyond understanding” (Lees, p. 284; my translation). The “negative dialectic of Dionysian theology as a whole does not dominate Gallus’s works” and is everywhere qualified by “the positive devotional language” expressed in “loving aspirations to union” and “knowledge-in-love” (Lees, p. 286), as is the case with the *Cloud*.

It is significant that Gallus explicitly distinguishes his own superintellectual account of the unitive experience from that of his fellow Victorine, Richard. For Richard, who in contemplation, as Dante says in *Paradiso* X, 132, was more than man, the case is different. In his treatise, *Benjamin Minor*, which was translated by the *Cloud* author (Hodgson, pp. 129–45) and which owes more to Augustine than to Denis, union takes place through “the higher function of the intellect, the *intelligentia*.” For Richard’s *intelligentia*, Gallus substitutes *principalis affectio* as “the instrument of unitive knowledge” (Lees, pp. 280–81).

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Hugh of Balma, thoroughly influenced by Gallus and perhaps the most immediate source of the *Cloud*, stresses the importance of the intellect in the first two stages of the mystical ascent, like virtually everyone else in the tradition. For both Gallus and Balma, *sapientia* is the highest achievement of the contemplative (Lees, p. 293), which they both identify with the portion chosen by Mary, the sister of Martha (*Cloud*, line 927 ff.). *Sapientia* for Hugh of Balma is a “loving awareness of God which transcends the discursive knowledge achieved through the intellect” (Lees, p. 294). This wisdom rises in the affectivity, and no intelligence can thoroughly apprehend it. But even here the intellect is by no means excluded entirely, because in Balma’s first mystical stage, the mind is in any event disposed to learn this true wisdom (Lees, p. 294). It is an awareness that seems to begin at least in the illuminative stage, when the soul by meditation “begins somewhat to be moved towards [God] by sending forth sparks” (Lees, p. 294, my translation; *Cloud*, line 385). In the unitive stage, however, he denies any effective initiative to the intellect whatsoever, and differs from Thomas Gallus in this respect. However, the emphasis on affectivity that so characterizes these two writers moves, somewhat paradoxically and surprisingly, to a final celebration of the mind.

Hugh of Balma’s division between the illuminative and the unitive phases, although more pronounced than that of Thomas Gallus, can easily be overemphasized. That is, though the intellect ceases to function at the beginning of the unitive stage, it has been instrumental in stimulating love earlier; and the implication seems to be that the love evoked in the illuminative stage finally just takes over. But even Hugh of Balma is so far from being an anti-intellectual that his praise of the knowledge received by the mystic after the final union is somewhat breathtaking — and may have an echo in the *Cloud*. This experienced *sapientia*, which is operative in illumination, and for which the purgative stage prepares, achieves a final transformation: it becomes

more universal and more useful than other sciences, cognitions and apprehensions. It not only elevates the affection above itself and unites the creature perfectly with the most high spouse by ecstatic love, but it also so elevates the intellect that it is much more illumined by every prudence and knowledge through the divine lightnings than it could have been by any exercise of natural ability. (Lees, p. 307, my translation; compare Hodgson, p. xxv)

The Cloud of Unknowing emphatically de-emphasizes the role of the intellect and, in this apophatic mode, differs markedly from Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, and the Victorines. However, the *Cloud* author seems to realize just where he stands in the tradition. Although he resolutely proceeds by negation, his appreciation of the mind and imagination appears in a memorable image (lines 2007 ff.). Just as there are some who will foolishly break a fair cup after drinking from it, some contemplatives will show disrespect for the imagery and intellection of the first stages, an attitude that the author deplores. Or there is the image of the tree whose fruit is the imageless and non-conceptual focusing on God — fruit, however, which grows out of the trunk, branches, and leaves of imaginative

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meditation (*Cloud*, lines 2025 ff.; *The Epistle of Prayer*, Hodgson 103/6). It is instructive in this context to remember that most of the writings of Denis himself employ the intellect and imagination extensively; or, as William Johnston (p. 32) observes, Denis “never denies the power of discursive reason to come to the knowledge of God,” although he clearly privileges the exercise of mystical unknowing.

The Cloud of Unknowing is at once simple, subtle, and profound. While avoiding an extensive, technical epistemology, or the elaborate, angelically coordinated stages, the *Cloud* author provides the reader with a persuasively modest discipline that is at the same time a deeply authentic spiritual experience. Moving the reader’s focus with care and ease from the sensible world, where time, the senses, and spatial direction dominate, he provides a realization of the spirit’s independence of these modes. Some sense of how this happens can be gotten from a closer look at the text itself.

Analysis of *The Cloud of Unknowing*

Although the structure of the text’s seventy-five chapters is by no means as systematized as its sources, the very importance of focusing the mind on God without imagery or concepts creates a discernible order (Hodgson, p. 155). The author states his whole method of contemplation briefly in Chapter Three: the contemplative must lift up his heart in love to God, “mene” God and none of his goods, forget every created thing and its associations (lines 274–79), and feel in his will a naked intent unto God (line 290). This is the core of the mystical contemplation enjoined in the *Cloud*, and the author gradually illuminates and clarifies this activity from different points of view. The characteristic structure of the book is generally circular or perhaps that of a spiral, in that it comes back again and again to the same points in widening courses that include further insights and information important to the “blinde beholdyng unto the nakid beyng of God Himself only” (lines 565–66). But with each return, the author imagines more circumstances, warns against more pitfalls, and explores the experience in greater depth. Important concepts and motifs weave throughout the book and provide a unifying pattern that is both conceptual and verbal. Paradoxically, the role of negation in the *Cloud* introduces a richly existential dimension to the progress of the work (Myles, 1986, p. 141). This specific pattern, in my view, interacts with bodily imagery to provide a blend of the metaphysical and the concrete that may be at least rhetorically unique to the mystical tradition. In effect, like a good medieval teacher, the author of the *Cloud* begins with the more known — the experience of the senses — and proceeds to the less known and even incomprehensible — the being of God as He is in Himself.

In the first chapter of the book, at lines 235–36, the reference to creation from *nothing* (*nought*), paralleled in the same chapter by the word *something* (*oughtes*, line 243), introduces a founding theological pattern. Although creation itself remains an implied background, the word *nought* (“nothing”) becomes an important meditational instrument, even the gate to final mystical union in the *Cloud*. In Chapter Three, *ought* and *nought*, some-

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thing and nothing, occur once more in meditational antithesis (lines 275–76). *Nought* occurs also in Chapter Eighteen, lines 884–85, as a term derogatorily applied to contemplation by those who do not understand it; and, in Chapter Forty-four, by recommending to the contemplative a sorrow connected with the fact that he simply exists or *is* (line 1555), the author evokes a deeply ontological variation of this “nothing” that suggests the longing of contingency for absolute being. In Chapter Sixty-seven, the brief account of union with God is contrasted to the *nought* of the contemplative before his creation and after sin (line 2277). In Chapter Sixty-eight, a final negation of spatial direction, which we will discuss later at some length, invokes a bodily “nowhere” that is spiritually “everywhere,” and is followed by an exhortation to let be the sensible everywhere and something in favor of a nowhere and a nothing. But the *nought* of the *Cloud* author does not denote an absolute nothingness. On the contrary, this *nought* can be actually felt, although not seen because of the abundance of spiritual light that prevents vision (line 2312), a fact that recalls the stress put by Thomas Gallus on the senses that involve physical contact. Finally, it is the outer man that calls it nothing: the inner man calls it Al (line 2314).

As I have said, what seems to me a distinctive characteristic of the *Cloud* is the way in which the author, in moving towards the spiritual goal of the apophatic way (i.e., the seeking of knowledge of God by way of negation or denial), makes extensive and paradoxical use of bodily imagery — even beyond the uses that John Burrow (p. 144) has noted. This procedure, a key example of the author’s humanity and literary skill, not only delineates the possibilities for profound harmony between body and soul, but also renders comprehensible the otherwise prohibitively abstract stages of the apophatic way.

In the *Cloud*, the very spirituality of the author endows the human body with a unique grace. God forbid, he says in Chapter Forty-eight, that he should part what God has coupled, the body and the spirit, which, together in service, are together in reward and the joy of heaven (lines 1687–90). Many exhortations occur which enjoin the reader to keep from straining the imagination or body in any way. In Chapter Twelve, for example, the importance of the central contemplative act markedly subordinates the role of bodily penance. The unpretentious affirmation of love, he insists, removes the ground and the root of sin much more effectively than fasting, abstaining from sleep, early rising, or uncomfortable beds. Again in Chapter Forty-five, the author points out that those who understand words in a bodily rather than in a spiritual way actually experience adverse repercussions in the senses themselves. Consequently they “streyne here veynes” (line 1594) or chafe their complexions into an unnatural heat and their bodily powers in such a crude and beastly way that they fall into a weariness and listless feebleness in body and soul. This is a false feeling which produces a false knowing (line 1608). Such an observation proffers a freedom to the reader who feels physically relieved and dispensed from meditational calisthenics or any “unordeynd streyning of the fleschely herte” (line 1702). Such “fleschlines of bodely fe-lyng” (lines 1627–28) injures the soul and festers in the imagination.

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In Chapter Fifty-one, he continues to probe how the attempt to understand spiritual matters in a physical way affects the body. Those caught up in this misunderstanding turn their physical senses inward and strain themselves as if they would see there with their bodily eyes. Going against the course of nature, they turn their brains in their heads (lines 1812–14). One result is that they feel light, sound, smells, strange heats and burnings in their bodily breasts, bowels, backs, kidneys, and privy members (lines 1816–17). Such a catalogue evokes a concise, but detailed anatomical consciousness and allows the reader to unbend, breathe easily, and achieve transcendence through relaxation as well as negation. In Chapter Fifty-three, this corporeal self-consciousness provides an opportunity for comic relief, as the author satirizes the eccentric postures, grimaces, and physical bearing of some misguided contemplatives.

His discussion of the word *up* (line 1977) in Chapter Fifty-seven introduces the next stage in his account of how contemplation should relieve the body of stressful anxieties. Since his technique is mainly apophatic, he sets forth what is essential to the contemplative act by negating, at this point, the value of spatial directions, which are taken up again later when he introduces the triad of without, within, and above (lines 2259–68). Giving a concrete, narrative form to his exposition, he introduces three instances of upward movement: the vision of St. Martin who, looking up, saw Christ clothed in the half-mantle given to the poor beggar; the vision of St. Stephen, who, while he was being stoned, turned his gaze upwards and saw Christ in glory; finally, and most important, the vision of the disciples who beheld Christ ascending into heaven. In his analysis of the Ascension, he employs an affirmative strategy of empathy by evoking a sense of bodily weightlessness; then, having induced this physical lightness, he negates it in his resolute progress towards apophatic experience. His intermediate goal is to have the reader feel the bodily effects of spiritual experience and then, by negating these effects, ease the movement into the divine darkness.

Before his final comments on the Ascension, in Chapter Fifty-nine, the author introduces a doctrine that further investigates the relations between contemplation and physical, spatial direction — the belief in the risen body, the participation of the just in the resurrection of Christ. At lines 2073–74, he refers to the traditional belief that the glorified human body can move physically to wherever the mind directs it. By briefly imagining this supernatural gift, the contemplative encounters the ultimate power of mind over matter. But the *Cloud* author follows this positive use of imagery with its practical relevance to apophatic contemplation: in the present life, you cannot come to heaven bodily, but only spiritually. The quest for God cannot proceed in a manner that is physical, neither upwards nor downwards, nor on one side nor on another, behind nor before. By undercutting the sense of space that is primordially rooted in the body, he releases the reader and prepares him for spiritual experience. Moreover, the deftly antithetical wordplay in his analysis of the relationship between body and soul reinforces and, in a sense, helps to effect the movement of the consciousness away from discursive thought towards “meaning God” without images and concepts.

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The discussion of sense experience in Chapter Sixty-six, which makes use of a specific category of medieval psychology, forms a kind of bridge passage from meditation on the spiritually perfected body to the final emphasis on the apophatic act. Addressing bodily pleasure and pain, he takes up “sensualité,” the power that complains when the body lacks any needful or pleasurable thing and is delighted when they are present. It complains at unpleasurable things and is pleased in their absence. The short analysis of this power makes the reader aware of his own state of comfort or discomfort as a means of tempering this bodily consciousness. Before man sinned, this faculty was in perfect harmony with the will and never presented to it any disordered pleasure or complaining towards any bodily creature. But after the Fall, sensuality, unless ruled by grace to endure the pain felt in the absence of pleasure or in the presence of useful complaining, wallows in self-indulgence. The short meditations on the glorified risen human body and the body of Christ in the Ascension, by preceding this passage in the treatise, make the discipline of sensuality easier, and even entreat a special grace for the temperate calm enjoined in this passage. Virtually the only ascetical passage in the work, along with the brief account of the Seven Deadly sins in Chapter Ten, this exposition comes late in the treatise and places the role of physical self-denial in the most meaningful and integrated context. The analysis of tempered sensuality, motivated by reflections on the resurrection and ascension, is the author's last treatment of the powers of the soul, knowledge of which keeps the contemplative from being deceived in his effort to understand spiritual language and experience (lines 2281–87).

The account of the final stages of union begins with the *Cloud* author's own variation on the traditional threefold structure of the mystical ascent, which for him becomes without/beneath, within/even, and above. Although his third level is Dionysian — “when thou felist thi mynde occupied with no maner of thyng that is bodeyly or goostly, bot only with the self substaunce of God, as it is and may be in the preof of the werk of this book . . .” (lines 2265–68) — it also closely echoes the motif of silence in the Augustinian passage with which we began. In a brief allusion to mystical union (lines 2272–74), just when the greatest strain could occur, there is no dissonant opposition between body and spirit; and the antithesis rather is between the Created and the Uncreated, a legacy of Nicaean theology. Moreover, although the *Cloud* author insists upon pre-creational nothingness, he boldly affirms, with scriptural warrant (Ps. 81 [82], 6) that through grace the contemplative, in union with God, becomes a god (lines 2272–74; Hodgson 67/14).

At the beginning of Chapter Sixty-eight, the triad of without/beneath, within/even, above, once more engages spatial directions which are gradually denied literal status, a method followed earlier with the word *up* (lines 1977 ff.). He says that although some advise the contemplative to gather his powers and wits entirely within himself (the whole mystical tradition seems to recommend this), the *Cloud* author quite surprisingly does not. Nor, by contrast, does he advise the contemplative to be outside of himself — nor above, nor behind, nor on one side, nor on another. “Where then,” asks the reader? He would have the

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contemplative to be “nowhere” — “For whi noghwhere bodey is everywhere goostly” (line 2296–97).

With this section, we have reached the climax of the work. I had rather be *nowhere* in this way bodily, he says, wrestling with that blind *nothing*, than to be so great a lord that I might, when I would, be *everywhere* bodily, merrily playing with all this *something*, as a lord with his own possession. Although this is a crucial apophatic moment, the author, by ruling out an imaginative meditation on the whole of creation, has already briefly engaged in it. But the passage is also an excellent example of the *Cloud* author's preference for brief allusion over imaginative dilation. Our outer man calls this absence of imagery nothing; but our inner man calls it everything. Moreover, despite the often opposing strands of the intellectual and the affective in the mystical tradition, the mind is explicitly at play here, for the contemplative is well taught by the All to grasp the reason (“*kon skyle*”) of all things, bodily or spiritual, without special focus on any one thing by itself (lines 2314–15). This brief passage is reminiscent of the apotheosis of the intellect that Hugh of Balma describes as occurring after the affective union with God (see Introduction, p. 8). In Chapter Sixty-nine, he says that the “nothing” encountered is first a reflection of one's personal sins. Sometimes this nothing seems to be hell; then not hell but purgatory. Sometimes it seems to him that it is paradise because of the sweetness, comfort, joys, and virtues found there. Finally, it seems to be God Himself, for the peace and rest found there. But it is always a “cloude of unknowyng” (line 2341).

There is a Dionysian coda in Chapter Seventy, a last meditational exercise followed by two explicit references to Denis himself (lines 2369, 2371). It is, so to speak, a bodily valediction, made less threatening at this stage, and even welcomed, because of his persistent concern to remove all physical stress and tension. In a detailed summary aimed at demonstrating the limitations of sense experience, we meet a final blend of affirmation and negation, of the kataphatic and the apophatic. You cannot conceive of anything by your eyes without length and breadth, smallness and greatness, roundness and squareness, farness and nearness, and color. Nor by your ears, but by some sound. Nor by your nose, but by stench or savor. Nor by taste, but by sour or sweet, salt or fresh, bitter or pleasant. Nor by touch, but by hot or cold, hard or tender, soft or sharp. Contemplatives, or spiritual workers, must not expect to see, hear, smell, or taste spiritual realities, but by the very failure of the senses, we are made aware of the spiritual. Similarly, we have knowledge of created spiritual realities, but by no means can we know an “unmade” spiritual reality, or God. But again, in this very failure of understanding, in the Dionysian formula, we know by unknowing.

Although he mentions the ecstasy (*ravischung*, line 2383) of the unitive phase, he does not describe it at any length. In Chapter Seventy-one, he focuses on an allegory of the ark of the covenant, which appears to gather up several governing motifs: the grace of contemplation and *this werk* (line 2397); *this lityl love put* (line 2399); and *the perfeccion of this werk* (line 2412). Lastly, he observes that the feeling of this activity is sometimes with-

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drawn for various reasons, but if it comes back with greater fervor and longing, that is a sign that the reader is called to this work. Capping the whole treatise is a final optimistic and encouraging exhortation: Think not upon what you are, or have been, but upon what you would be.

Having looked summarily at the whole *Cloud of Unknowing*, we might note in conclusion the remarkable fact that in the Middle Ages, mysticism is one of the most important sources for aesthetics, the analysis of the nature and manifestations of beauty. The treatise on the *Divine Names* by Denis the Areopagite discusses both beauty and the value of the widely differing types of imagery that can be applied to God. The beauty of the universe is where Augustine begins his account of mystical experience in the quotation with which we began; and this preoccupation with the beautiful continues in Bonaventure and the Victorines. The disappointment of Umberto Eco (p. 91) in the absence of aesthetic reflection in the mystical writers of the late Middle Ages, a disappointment shared by A. J. Minnis (p. 172), while understandable and even valid in some respects, finally misses the point of the whole mystical quest, for which Bernard McGinn has magisterially provided a modern context (pp. 265–343). Many of these writers we have looked at, including Thomas Gallus and Hugh of Balma, do begin with sensible and intellectual beauty; but, as even Augustine says, all of these beautiful things are signs that must grow silent in order to allow that which is most beautiful, the source and cause of all beauty, to speak from the depths of the divine darkness. *The Cloud of Unknowing* says nothing of beauty, but rather invites the reader immediately into this darkness. And yet the literary qualities of the *Cloud* have a clear aesthetic appeal, as contemporary scholars such as Hodgson, Burrow, and Riehle have shown. Moreover, the *Cloud* has attracted the keen interest of readers as different as Robert Bateman, an influential seventeenth-century Baptist who owned a manuscript of the *Cloud* (Hodgson xvii); the novelist, Aldous Huxley; and the psychologist, Ira Progoff (Johnston, pp. 20–22). Quite recently, the enduring interest in *The Cloud of Unknowing* appears in a study of “intimacy and spiritual development” by John W. Flesey. Perhaps one source for further consideration of this issue is the medieval teaching that the word *beautiful* refers to the same reality as the words *good* and *true*. They are simply different names for one Being, towards whom the *Cloud* uncompromisingly directs the reader, beyond any human capacity to name.

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HERE BYGYNNITH A BOOK OF CONTEMPLACYON, THE WHICHE IS CLEPYD THE CLOWDE OF UNKNOWYNG, IN THE WHICHE A SOULE IS ONYD WITH GOD.

Here biginneth the preyer on the prologue.

God, unto Whom alle hertes ben open, and unto Whom alle wille spekith, and unto Whom no privé thing is hid: I beseche Thee so for to clese the entent of myn hert with the unspeakable gift of Thi grace that I may parfiteliche love Thee, and worshilich preise Thee. Amen.

Here biginneth the prolog.

In the name of the Fader and of the Sone and of the Holy Goost.

I charge thee and I beseche thee, with as moche power and vertewe as the bonde of charité is sufficient to suffre, whatsoever thou be that this book schalt have in possession, outhier bi propirté outhier by keping, by bering as messenger or elles bi borrowing, that in as moche as in thee is by wille and avisement, neither thou rede it, ne write it, ne speke it, ne yit suffre it be red, wretyn, or spokyn, of any or to any, bot yif it be of soche one or to soche one that hath (bi thi supposing) in a trewe wille and by an hole entent, purposed him to be a parfite folower of Criste, not only in actyve leving, bot in the sovereinest pointe of contemplatif leving the welche is possible by grace for to be comen to in this present liif of a parfite soule yit abiding in this deedly body; and therto that doth that in him is, and bi thi supposing, hath do longe tyme before, for to able him to contemplative levyng by the virtuous menes of active levyng. For elles it acordeth nothing to him.

Title: clepyd, called; **onyd**, “one-ed,” joined. **2 wille**, desires. **3 privé**, secret; **entent**, intention. **4 parfiteliche**, completely. **4–5 worthilich**, fittingly. **8 charge**, exhort. **9 suffre**, allow. **10 outhier**, either; **propirté**, ownership; **keping**, having in charge. **11 by wille and avisement**, of set purpose and forethought. **12 suffre**, allow; **red**, read. **14 hole**, undivided, whole; **parfite**, perfect. **15 leving**, living; **sovereinest**, highest, ultimate, absolute. **16 deedly**, mortal. **18 able him to**, make himself capable of; **menes**, means. **19 acordeth nothing**, is not at all suitable.

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20 And, over this, I charge thee and I beseche thee, bi the autorité of charité, that yif
any soche schal rede it, write it, or speke it, or elles here it be red or spokin, that thou
charge hem, as I do thee, for to take hem tyme to rede it, speke it, write it, or here it,
al over. For, paraventure, ther is som mater therin, in the beginnyng or in the middel,
the whiche is hanging and not fully declared ther it stondeth; and yif it be not there, it
25 is sone after, or elles in the ende. Wherfore, yif a man saw o mater and not another,
paraventure he might lightly be led into errour. And therfore, in eschewing of this
errour bothe in thiself and in alle other, I preye thee par charité do as I sey thee.

25 Fleschely janglers, opyn preisers and blamers of hemself or of any other, tithing
tellers, rouners and tutilers of tales, and alle maner of pinchers, kept I never that thei
30 sawe this book. For myn entent was never to write soche thing unto hem. And ther-
fore I wolde that thei medel not therwith, neither thei ne any of thees corious letted
or lewed men. Ye, though al that thei be ful good men of active levyng, yit this mater
acordeth nothing to hem; but yif it be to thoo men the whiche, though al thei stonde
35 in actyveté bi outward forme of levyng, nevertheless yit bi inward stering after the
privé sperit of God, Whos domes ben hid, thei ben ful graciously disposid, not con-
tynowely as it is propre to verrey contemplatyves, bot than and than to be parceners
in the hieghst pointe of this contemplative acte: yif soche men might se it, thei schuld
by the grace of God be greetly counforted therby.

40 This book is distingwid in seventy chapitres and five. Of the whiche chapitres, the
last chapitres of alle techeth som certeyn tokens by the whiche a soule may verrely
preve whether he be clepid of God to be a worcher in this werk or none.

Here biginneth a table of the chapitres.

The first chapitre. Of foure degrees of Cristen mens leving; and of the cours of
his cleping that this book was maad unto.

20 charge, exhort; **autorité**, authority. **22** hem, them. **23** al over, all through; **paraventure**,
possibly. **24** hanging, left in the air. **25** sone, soon; o, one; **mater**, matter. **26** eschewing,
avoiding. **27** par charité, for charity's sake. **28** Fleschely, Sensual, unregenerate; janglers,
babblers; opyn, public. **28–29** tithing tellers, newsmongers. **29** rouners, gossips, whisperers;
tutilers, whisperers, scandal-mongers; pinchers, carpers, detractors; **kept I never that thei**, I
would prefer that they did not. **31** medel, get mixed up with; corious, curious (see note). **32**
lewed, uneducated. **33** thoo, those; **though al**, although. **34** stering, prompting, impulse,
touch of grace. **35** privé, secret, mysterious; domes, judgments. **35–36** contynowely, con-
tinually, incessantly. **36** is propre to, belongs to; than and than, occasionally; parceners,
sharers. **39** distingwid, divided. **40** certeyn, sure; tokens, signs. **41** preve, test; clepid, called;
worcher, worker. **43** cours, successive progress.

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- 45 **The secound chapitre.** A schort stering to meeknes and to the werk of this book.
- The thrid chapitre.** How the werk of this book schal be wrought, and of the wortunes of it bifore alle other werkes.
- The feerthe chapitre.** Of the schortnes of this werk, and how it may not be comen to by the coriousee of witte, ne by ymagination.
- 50 **The fifthe chapitre.** That in the tyme of this werk alle the cretures that ever have ben, ben now, or ever schal be, and alle the werkes of thoo same creatures, scholen be hid under the clowde of forgetyng.
- The six chapitre.** A schort conceyte of the werk of this book, tretid by questyon.
- The seventh chapitre.** How a man schal have him in this werk agens alle thoughts, and nameli agens alle thoo that risen of his owne coriousté of kunning and of kyndely witte.
- The eight chapitre.** A good declaryng of certain doutes that may falle in this werk, tretid bi questyon: in distroeing of a mans owne coriousté of konnyng and of kyndely wit; and in distyng of the degrees and the partyes of actyve levyng and contemplative.
- 60 **The ninthe chapitre.** That, in the tyme of this werk, the minde of the holiest creature that ever God maad letteth more then it profiteth.
- The teenthe chapitre.** How a man schal knowe when his thoght is no sinne; and, yif it be synne, when it is deedly and when it is venial.
- 65 **The eleventh chapitre.** That a man schuld charge iche thought and iche stering after that it is, and alweis eschewe rechelesnes in venial synne.
- The twelfthe chapitre.** That by vertewe of this werk sinne is not only distroied, bot also vertewes ben getyn.
- The thriteenth chapitre.** What meeknes is in itself, and when it is parfite and when it is inparfite.
- 70 **The fourtene chapitre.** That withoute inparfite meeknes coming before, it is impossible a sinner to come to the parfite vertewe of meeknes in this liif.
- The fiftene chapitre.** A schort profe agens theire error that seien that ther is no parfiter cause to be mekid under then is the mynde of a mans owne wretchednes.
- 75 **The sixtene chapitre.** That bi vertewe of this werk, a sinner trewly turned and clepid to contemplacion cometh sonner to perfeccion than bi any other werk; and bi it sonnest may gete of God forgevenes of synnes.

45 stering to, spiritual motion toward. 49 witte, intellect. 51 thoo, those. 53 conceyte, conception. 55 kunning, learning, intelligence. 56 kyndely witte, natural intelligence. 57 doutes, uncertainties. 59 distyng, classifying; partyes, parts. 61 letteth, hinders. 64 charge, attach importance to; iche, each. 65 rechelesnes, carelessness. 72 profe, proof; seien, says. 73 parfiter, more perfect; mekid, humbled. 74–75 turned and clepid, converted and summoned.

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- 80 **The seventene chapitre.** That a verrey contemplatiif list not medel hym of active liif, ne of anything that is doon or spoken abouthe him, ne yit to answe to his blamers in excusing of himself.
- 85 **The eightene chapitre.** How that yit into this day alle actyves pleynen hem of contemplatyves, as Martha did on Mary; of the whiche pleynng ignoraunce is the cause.
- 90 **The ninetene chapitre.** A schort excusacion of him that maad this book, teching how alle contemplatives schuld have alle actyves fully excusid of theirie pleinyng wordes and dedes.
- 95 **The twenty chapitre.** How Almighty God wil goodly answe for alle thoo that, for the excusing of hemself, list not leve the besines abouthe the love of Hym.
- 100 **The on and twenty chapitre.** The trewe exposicion of this Gospel worde: Mary hath chosen the best partye.
- 105 **The two and twenty chapitre.** Of the wonderful love that Crist had to Mari, in persone of alle sinners treuly turned and clepid to the grace of contemplacion.
- 110 **The thre and twenty chapitre.** How God wol answe for hem in sperite, that for besines abouthe his love list not answe ne purvey for hemself.
- 115 **The foure and twenty chapitre.** What charité is in itself, and how it is sotely and parfitely contened in the werk of this book.
- 120 **The five and twenty chapitre.** That in the tyme of this werk a parfite soule hath no special beholding to any o man in this lif.
- 125 **The six and twenty chapitre.** That withoute ful specyal grace, or longe use in comoun grace, the werk of this book is right travelous; and in this werk, whiche is the werk of the soule holpen by grace, and whiche is the werk of only God.
- 130 **The seven and twenty chapitre.** Who schuld worche in the gracious werk of this book.
- 135 **The eight and twenty chapitre.** That a man schuld not presume to worche in this werk before the tyme that he be lawfully clensed in conscience of alle his specyal dedes of synne.
- 140 **The nine and twenty chapitre.** That a man schuld bidingly travaile in this werk, and suffre the pine therof, and deme no man.

77 list, desires; **medel hym of**, involve himself in. 80 **pleynen hem**, complain. 83 **excusacion**, justification. 87 **hemself**, themselves; **besines abouthe**, preoccupation with. 90–91 **in persone of**, representative of. 92 **purvey**, provide. 93 **sperite**, spirit. 94 **sotely**, subtly. 95 **parfitely**, perfectly. 97 **beholding**, regard; o, one. 98 **ful**, very. 99 **travelous**, burdensome. 100 **holpen**, helped. 101 **gracious**, dependent on grace. 106 **bidingly**, persistently; **travaile**, labor. 107 **pine**, pain; **deme**, judge.

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- 110 **The thritty chapitre.** Who schuld blame and reprove other mens defautes.
The one and thritty chapitre. How a man schuld have hym in beginning of this
werk agens alle thoughtes and steringes of sinne.
- 115 **The two and thritty chapitre.** Of two goostli sleightes that ben helpli to a goostli
beginner in the werk of this book.
The thre and thritty chapitre. That in this werk a soule is clensid bothe of his
special sinnes and of the pine of hem, and yit how ther is no parfite rest in this liif.
- 120 **The four and thritty chapitre.** That God geveth this grace freely withouten any
mene, and that it may not be comen to with menes.
The five and thritty chapitre. Of three menes in the whiche a contemplatiif pren-
tise schuld be occupied: in reding, thinkyng, and preiing.
The six and thritty chapitre. Of the meditacions of hem that contynuely travailen
in the werk of this book.
- 125 **The seven and thritty chapitre.** Of the special preiers of hem that ben con-
tynowel worchers in the werk of this book.
The eight and thritty chapitre. How and whi that schort preier perceth heven.
The nine and thritty chapitre. How a parfite worcher schal preie, and what preier
is in itself; and yif a man schal preie in wordes, whiche wordes acorden than moste
to the propirté of preier.
- 130 **The fourt chapitre.** That in the tyme of this work, a soule hath no special be-
holding to any o vice in itself ne to any o vertew in itself.
The on and fourt chapitre. That in alle other werks binethe this, men schuld
kepe discretion; bot in this, none.
- 135 **The two and fourt chapitre.** That by indiscretion in this men schal kepe discre-
tion in alle other things; and sekerly elles never.
The thre and fourt chapitre. That alle wetyng and felyng of a mans owne being
must nedelynges be lost, yif the perfeccion of this werk schal verreyly be felt in any
soule in this liif.
- 140 **The four and fourt chapitre.** How a soule schal dispose it on the owne partie
for to distroie alle wetyng and feling of the owne being.

108 defautes, faults. 109 have hym, behave. 110 agens, against; steringes, impulses. 111
goostli, spiritual; sleightes, strategies, stratagems; helpli, helpful. 114 pine of hem, penalty
for them, punishment; parfite, perfect. 115–16 withouten any mene, directly. 116 menes,
means, conscious devices. 117–18 prentise, apprentice, beginner. 119 travailen, labor. 125
acorden than most, are most suitable 126 propirté, special quality. 128 o, one. 129 on, one.
132 sekerly, certainly. 133 wetyng, knowing; felyng, feeling. 134 nedelynges, of necessity;
verreyly, truly, genuinely. 136 the owne partie, its own part. 137 wetyng, knowing; the owne
being, its own being.

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- 140 **The five and fourty chapitre.** A good declaring of somme certaine disseites that mowen falle in this werk.
- 140 **The six and fourty chapitre.** A good teching how a man schal flee thees disseites, and wirche more with a listines of spirite then with any boistousnes of body.
- 145 **The seven and fourty chapitre.** A sleigh teching of this werk in purté of spirite; declaryng how that on o maner a soule schuld schewe his desire unto God, and on the contrary unto man.
- 145 **The eight and fourty chapitre.** How God wol be servid bothe with body and with soule, and reward men in bothe; and how men schul knowe when alle thoo sounes and swetnes that fallen into the body in tyme of preier ben bothe good and ivel.
- 150 **The nine and fourty chapitre.** The substaunce of alle perfecccion is not elles bot a good wile; and how that alle sounes, counfortes, and swetnes, that mowe falle in this liif, ben to it bot as it were accidentes.
- 150 **The fifty chapitre.** Whiche is chaste love; and how in som creatures soche sensible counfortes ben bot seelden, and in som right ofte.
- 155 **The one and fifty chapitre.** That men schuld have grete warnes, so that thei understande not bodili thing that is ment goostly; and namely it is good to be war in understanding of this worde IN and of this worde UP.
- 155 **The two and fifty chapitre.** How theese yong, presumtuous dissipples misunderstanden this worde IN; and of the deseites that folowen theron.
- 160 **The thre and fifty chapitre.** Of diverse unseemly continuaunes that folowen hem that lacken the werk of this book.
- 160 **The foure and fifty chapitre.** How that bi vertewe of this werk a man is governid ful wisely and maad ful seemly, as wel in body as in soule.
- 160 **The five and fifty chapitre.** How thei ben disseived, that folowen the fervour of spirite in reprovyng of sinne withouten discrecion.
- 165 **The six and fifty chapitre.** How they ben disseived that lenen more to the coriousté of kyndely witte, and of clergie leerned in the scole of men, than to the comoun doctrine and counsel of Holi Chirche.
- 165 **The seven and fifti chapitre.** How thees yong, presumtuous dissipples misunderstanden this other worde UP; and of the deseites that folowen theron.

138 disseites, deceptions. 139 mowen, may, are able to. 141 listines, eager longing; boistousnes, brute force. 142 sleigh, wise, strategic; purté, purity. 146 thoo sounes, those sounds. 149 wile, will; mowe, may. 150 accidentes, non-essentials. 151 Whiche, What. 152 seelden, seldom; right, very. 153 warnes, caution. 154 goostly, spiritually. 157 deseites, deceits. 158 continuaunes, bearing, behavior. 161 seemly, fitting, decorous. 165 kyndely witte, natural intelligence; clergie, learning.

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170 **The eight and fifty chapitre.** That a man schal not take ensaumple of Seinte Martyn and of Seinte Steven, for to streine his yimaginacion bodily upwarde, in the tyme of his preier.

175 **The nine and fifty chapitre.** That a man schal not take exsaumple at the bodily assencion of Criste, for to streine his yimaginacion upwardes bodily in the tyme of preier; and that tyme, stede, and bodi, theese thre schulden be forgeten in alle goostly worching.

The sixty chapitre. That the heighe and the next wey to heven is ronne bi desires, and not bi pases of feet.

The on and sixty chapitre. That alle bodili thing is soget unto goostli thing, and is rewlid therafter bi the cours of kinde, and not agensward.

180 **The two and sixty chapitre.** How a man may wite when his goostly werk is bineeth him or withouten him, and when it is even with him or withinne him, and when it is aboven him and under his God.

185 **The thre and sixty chapitre.** Of the mightes of a soule in general; and how minde in special is a principal might, comprehending in it alle the other mightes and alle thoo things in the whiche thei worchen.

The four and sixty chapitre. Of the other two principal mightes, reson and wil; and of the werk of hem bifore sinne and after.

The five and sixty chapitre. Of the first secondary might, yimaginacion bi name; and of the werkes, and of the obedience of it unto reson bifore sinne and after.

190 **The six and sixty chapitre.** Of the other secondari might, sensualité bi name; and of the werkes, and of the obedience of it unto wille bifore sinne and after.

The seven and sixty chapitre. That whoso knoweth not the mightes of a soule and the maner of here worching may lightly be disseived in understanding of goostly wordes and of goostly worching; and how a soule is maad a god in grace.

195 **The eight and sixty chapitre.** That noghwhere bodili is everywhere goostly; and how oure utter man clepith the werk of this book nowght.

The nine and sixty chapitre. How that a mans affeccion is merveylosly chaunged in goostly felyng of this nought, when it is noghwere wrought.

200 **The seventy chapitre.** That right as bi the defailing of oure bodely wittes, we bigine redeliest to kom to knowing of goostli thinges, so by the defailing of oure

174 **stede,** place. 175 **worching,** working. 176 **next,** nearest. 177 **pases,** paces, steps. 178 **soget,** subject. 179 **kinde,** nature; **agensward,** contrarily. 180 **wite,** know. 181 **withouten,** outside; **even with,** on a level with. 183 **mightytes,** powers. 190 **sensualité,** bodily knowing. 195 **goostly,** spiritually. 196 **utter man,** outer, physical man; **clepith,** calls; **nowght,** nought, nothing. 198 **wrought,** performed, done. 199 **defailing,** failing. 200 **redeliest,** most quickly.

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goostly wittes we biginne moste redeliest to com to the knowing of God, soche as is possible bi grace to be had here.

205 **The on and seventy chapitre.** That som may not come to fele the perfeccion of this werk bot in tyme of ravisching, and som mowe have it when thei wil, in the co-moun state of mans soule.

The two and seventy chapitre. That a worcher in this werk schuld not deme ne think of another worcher as he feleth in himself.

210 **The thre and seventy chapitre.** How that after the licnes of Moyses, of Beseelel, and of Aaron, medeling hem aboute the Arke of the Testament, we profite on thre maners in this grace of contemplacion; for this grace is figured in that Arke.

The foure and seventy chapitre. How that the mater of this book is nevermore red or spoken, ne herde red or spoken, of a soule dispositid therto, withouten feling of a verrey acordaunce to the effecte of the same werk; and of rehersing of the same charge that is wretin in the prolog.

215 **The five and seventy chapitre.** Of somme certain tokenes bi the whiche a man may prove whether he be clepid of God to worche in this werk.

And here eendeth the table of the chapitres.

220 Goostly freende in God, I preie thee and I beseche thee that thou wilt have a besi beholding to the cours and the maner of thi sleeping. And thank God hertely, so that thou maist thorow help of His grace stonde stifyly agens alle the sotil assailinges of thi bodily and goostly enemyes, and winne to the coroun of liif that evermore lasteth. Amen.

Here biginneth the first chapitre.

225 Goostly freende in God, thou schalt wel understande that I fynde, in my boistous beholding, foure degrees and fourmes of Cristen mens levyng; and ben theese: Comoun, Special, Singuler, and Parfite. Thre of theese mow be bigonnen and eendid in this liif; and the ferthe may bi grace be bigonnen here, bot it schal ever laste withouten eende in the blis of heven. And right as thou seest how thei ben set here in ordre, ilch one after other, first Comoun, than Special, after Syngulere, and last Parfite:

201 goostly wittes, intellectual faculties. 204 ravisching, ecstasy. 206 deme, judge. 209 medeling hem aboute, concerning themselves with. 213 acordaunce, harmony. 214 charge, imposition of responsibility. 216 clepid, called. 218 besi, earnest. 219 sleeping, calling. 220 stifyly, firmly; sotil, subtle. 224 boistous, rudimentary. 225 beholding, examination. 226 Parfite, Perfect; mow, may, can. 229 ilch, each.

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230 right so me thinketh that, in the same ordre and in the same cours, oure Lorde hath of His grete mercy clepid thee and ledde thee unto Him bi the desire of thin herte.

For first thou wote wel that when thou were levynge in the comoun degree of Cristen mens levynge in companie of thi wordely freendes, it semeth to me that the everlasting love of His Godheid, thorow the whiche He mad thee and wrought thee when thou were nought, and sithen bought thee with the prise of His precious blood when thou were loste in Adam, might not suffre thee be so fer fro Him in forme and degree of levynge. And therfore He kyndelid thi desire ful graciously, and fastnid bi it a lyame of longing, and led thee by it into a more special state and forme of levynge, to be a servaunt of the special servauntes of His; where thou mightest lerne to live more specialy and more goostly in His servise than thou dedist, or mightest do, in the comoun degree of levynge bifore. And what more? Yit it semeth that He wolde not leve thee thus lightly, for love of His herte, the whiche He hath evermore had unto thee sith thou were oughtes. Bot what did He? Seest thou nought how lystly and how graciously He hath pulled thee to the thrid degré and maner of leving, the whiche hight Singuleer? In the whiche solitari forme and maner of levynge thou maist lerne to lift up the fote of thi love and step towardes that state and degré of levynge that is Parfite, and the laste state of alle.

Here biginneth the secound chapitre.

Look up now, weike wreche, and see what thou arte. What arte thou, and what hast thou deserved thus to be clepid of oure Lorde? What weri wrechid herte and sleping in sleuthe is that, the whiche is not waknid with the drawght of this love and the voise of this cleping? Bewar now, wreche, in this while with thin enemye; and holde thee never the holier ne the beter for the worthines of this cleping and for the singuler fourme of levynge that thou arte in; bot the more wrechid and cursid, bot yif thou do that in thee is goodly, bi grace and bi counsel, to lyve after thi cleping. And insomochel thou schuldest be more meek and lovyng to thi goostly spouse, that He, that is the Almighty God, King of kynges and Lorde of lordes, wolde meek Hym so lowe unto thee, and amonges alle the flok of His scheep, so graciously wolde chese thee to be one of His speciales, and sithen set thee in the stede of pasture, where thou maist be fed with the swetnes of His love, in erles of thin heritage, the kingdome of heven.

230 me thinketh, it seems to me. **232 wote**, know. **233 wordely**, worldly. **235 prise**, price, excellence. **237 kyndelid**, kindled. **238 lyame**, leash. **241 leve**, leave. **243 oughtes**, of any account; lystly, vigorously. **244 leving**, living. **249 weike**, weak; **wreche**, sinner. **251 sleuthe**, sloth; **drawght**, pulling, attraction. **252 cleping**, calling; **Bewar . . . with**, Be on guard against. **257 meek Hym**, humble Himself. **259 stede**, place. **260 in erles of**, as a foretaste of.

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Do on than, I preie thee, fast. Look now forwardes, and lat be bacwardes. And see what thee faileth, and not what thou haste: for that is the rediest getyng and keping of meeknes. Alle thi liif now behoveth algates to stonde in desire, yif thou schalt profite in degré of perfeccion. This desire behoveth algates be wrought in thi wille bi the honde of Almighty God and thi consent. Bot oo thing I telle thee: He is a gelous lover and suffreth no felawship, and Him list not worche in thi wille bot yif He be only with thee bi Hymself. He asketh none helpe, bot only thiself. He wil thou do bot loke on Hym and late Him alone. And kepe thou the windowes and the dore for flies and enemies assailyng. And yif thou be willy to do this, thee thar bot meekly put apon Him with preier, and sone wil He help thee. Put on than: lat see how thou berest thee. He is ful redy, and doth bot abideth thee. Bot what schalt thou do, and how schalt thou put?

Here biginneth the thrid chapitre.

Lift up thin herte unto God with a meek steryng of love; and mene Himself, and none of His goodes. And therto loke thee lothe to thenk on ought bot on Hymself, so that nought worche in thi witte ne in thi wille bot only Himself. And do that in thee is to forgete alle the creatures that ever God maad and the werkes of hem, so that thi thought ne thi desire be not directe ne streche to any of hem, neither in general ne in special. Bot lat hem be, and take no kepe to hem.

This is the werk of the soule that moste plesith God. Alle seintes and aungelles han joie of this werk, and hasten hem to helpe it in al here might. Alle feendes ben wood whan thou thus doste, and proven for to felle it in alle that thei kun. Alle men levynge in erthe ben wonderfuli holpen of this werk, thou wost not how. Ye, the soules in purgatori ben esed of theirre peine by vertewe of this werk. Thiself arte clensid and maad vertewos by no werk so mochel. And yit it is the lightest werk of alle, when a soule is holpen with grace in sensible liste, and sonnest done. Bot elles it is hard and wonderful to thee for to do.

261 fast, firmly. **262 thee faileth**, you are missing; **haste**, have. **263 behoveth algates**, must in every possible way. **266 Him list not**, it does not please Him. **269 thee thar bot**, you have only to; **put**, press on. **271 abideth**, await. **274 steryng**, impulse, prompting; **mene**, focus intently on, intend, “mean.” **275 lothe**, loathe; **ought**, anything. **278 directe**, directed; **streche**, extended. **279 take no kepe**, pay no heed. **281 here**, their; **wood**, mad. **282 proven for to felle**, try to put a stop to. **283 holpen of**, helped by. **286 sensible**, that can be felt, perceptible; **liste**, zest, desire. **287 wonderful**, miraculous.

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290 Lette not therfore, bot travayle therin tyl thou fele lyst. For at the first tyme when thou dost it, thou fyndest bot a derknes, and as it were a cloude of unknowyng, thou wost never what, savyng that thou felist in thi wille a nakid entent unto God. This derknes and this cloude is, howsoever thou dost, bitwix thee and thi God, and letteth thee that thou maist not see Him clearly by light of understanding in thi reson, ne fele Him in swetnes of love in thin affeccion. And therfore schap thee to bide in this derknes as longe as thou maist, evermore crieng after Him that thou lovest; for yif ever schalt thou fele Him or see Him, as it may be here, it behoveth alweis be in this cloude and in this derknes. And yif thou wilte besily travayle as I bid thee, I triste in His mercy that thou schalt come therto.

295

Here beginneth the feerthe chapitre.

300 But forthi that thou schalt not erre in this worching, and wene that it be otherwise then it is, I schal telle thee a lityl more therof, as me thinketh.

This werk asketh no longe tyme er it be ones treulich done, as sum men wenē; for it is the schortest werke of alle that man may ymagyn. It is neither lenger ne schorter than is an athomus; the whiche athomus, by the diffinicion of trewe philisophres in the sciens of astronomye, is the leest partie of tyme; and it is so litil that, for the littlenes of it, it is undepartable and neighonde incomprehensible. This is that tyme of the whiche it is wretyn: Alle tyme that is goven to thee, it schal be askid of thee how thou haste dispendid it. And skilful thing it is that thou geve acompte of it; for it is neither lenger ne schorter, bot even acording to one only steryng that is withinne the principal worching might of thi soul, the whiche is thi wille. For even so many willinges or desiringes — and no mo ne no fewer — may be and aren in one oure in thi wille, as aren athomus in one oure. And yif thou were reformid bi grace to the first state of mans soule, as it was bifore sinne, than thou schuldest evermore, bi help of that grace, be lorde of that stering or of thoo sterynges; so that none yede forby, bot alle thei schulde streche into the soverein desirable and into the highest wilnable thing, the whiche is God.

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288 Lette, Desist; **travayle**, labor; **lyst**, zest, desire. **290 entent**, intention, directing of the mind, aspiration. **291 letteth**, hinders. **293 schap thee**, dispose yourself; **bide**, stay. **296 travayle**, labor. **299 forthi that**, in order that; **wene**, imagine. **300 me thinketh**, it seems to me. **301 ones**, once. **303 athomus**, moment, twinkling of an eye. **305 undepartable**, indivisible; **neighonde**, almost. **306 goven**, given. **307 skilful**, reasonable; **geve**, give. **308 even acording**, exactly corresponding; **steryng**, impulse, movement. **309 principal worching might**, main operating power. **310 oure**, hour. **313 stering**, impulse; **yede forby**, went astray. **314 streche**, extend; **wilnable**, that can be willed.

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For He is even mete to oure soule by mesuring of His Godheed; and oure soule even mete unto Him bi worthines of oure creacion to His ymage and to His licesnes. And He by Himself withouten moo, and none bot He, is sufficient at the fulle, and mochel more, to fulfille the wille and the desire of oure soule. And oure soule, bi vertewe of this reformyng grace, is mad sufficient at the fulle to comprehend al Him by love, the whiche is incomprehensible to alle create knowable might, as is aungel and mans soule. (I mene by theire knowyng and not by theire lovyng, and therfore I clepe hem in this caas knowable mightes).

Bot seth: alle resonable creatures, aungel and man, hath in hem, ilchone by hemself, o principal worching might, the whiche is clepid a knowable might, and another principal worching might, the whiche is clepid a lovyng might: of the whiche two mightes, to the first, the whiche is a knowyng might, God, That is the maker of hem, is evermore incomprehensible; and to the secound, the whiche is the lovyng myght, in ilchone diversly He is al comprehensible at the fulle, insomochel that o lovyng soule only in itself, by vertewe of love, schuld comprehend in it Hym that is sufficient at the fulle — and mochel more, withoute comparison — to fille alle the soules and aungelles that ever may be. And this is the eendles merveilous miracle of love, the whiche schal never take eende; for ever schal he do it, and never schal he seese for to do it. See, who bi grace see may, for the felyng of this is eendles blisse; and the contrary is eendles pyne.

And therfore whoso were refourmyd by grace thus to continow in keping of the sterynges of the wille, schuld never be in this liif — as he may not be withouten thees sterynges in kynde — withouten som taast of the eendles swetnes; and in the blisse of heven withouten the fulle food. And therfore have no wonder thof I stere thee to this werk. For this is the werk, as thou schalt here after, in the whiche man schuld have contynowed yif he never had synned, and to the whiche worching man was maad, and alle thing for man, to help him and forther him therto, and by the whiche a man schal be reparailed agein. And for the defaylyng in this worching a man falleth depper and depper in synne, and ferther and ferther fro God. And by kepyng and contynowl worching in this werk only, withouten mo, a man evermore riseth hier and hier fro synne, and nerer and nerer unto God.

And therfore take good keep into tyme, how that thou dispendist it. For nothing is

316 mete, measured (having the proper dimensions made to fit). **321 create knowable might**, created intellectual faculty, created power of knowing. **324 Bot seth**, Only see; **ilchone**, each one. **325 might**, faculty, power. **333 seese**, cease. **335 pyne**, pain. **336 in keping of**, in control of. **339 fulle**, complete; **stere**, incite, prompt. **340 here**, hear. **343 reparailed**, restored. **346 hier**, higher.

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more precious than tyme. In oo litel tyme, as litel as it is, may heven be wonne and lost. A token it is that time is precious: for God, That is gever of tyme, geveth never two tymes togeder, bot ichone after other. And this He doth for He wil not reverse the ordre or the ordinal cours in the cause of His creacion. For tyme is maad for man, and not man for tyme. And therfore God, That is the rewler of hy kynde, wil not in the gevynge of tyme go before the steryng of kynde in a mans soule; the whiche is even acordyng to o tyme only. So that man schal have none excusacion agens God in the Dome and at the gevynge of acompte of dispendyng of tyme, seiing: "Thou gevest two tymes at ones, and I have bot o steryng at ones."

Bot soroufuly thou seist now: "How schal I do? and sith this is soth that thou seist, how schal I geve acompte of iche thing seerly. I that into this day, now of foure and twenty yere age, never toke hede of tyme? Yif I wolde now amende it, thou wost wel, bi verrey reson of thi wordes wretyn before, it may not be after the cours of kynde ne of comoun grace, that I schuld mowe kepe or elles make aseeth to any mo tymes than to thoo that ben forto come. Ye, and moreover wel I wote, bi verrey proef, that of thoo that ben to come I schal on no wise, for habundaunce of freelté and slownes of sperite, mowe kepe one of an hondred; so that I am verrely conclude in theese resonis. Help me now, for the love of Jhesu!"

Right wel hast thou seide "for the love of Jhesu." For in the love of Jhesu there schal be thin help. Love is soche a might that it makith alle thing comoun. Love therfore Jhesu, and alle thing that He hath it is thin. He by His Godheed is maker and gever of tyme. He bi His Manheed is the verrey keper of tyme. And He, bi His Godheed and His Manheed togeders, is the trewest domesman and the asker of acompte of dispendyng of tyme. Knyt thee therfore to Him bi love and by beleve; and than by vertewe of that knot thou schalt be comoun parcener with Him and with alle that by love so be knittyd unto Him; that is to sey, with oure Lady Seinte Mary, that ful was of alle grace in kepyng of tyme with alle the aungelles of heven that never may lese tyme, and with alle the seintes in heven and in erthe, that by the grace of Jhesu kepen tyme ful justly in vertewe of love.

Loo! here lith counforte; construe thou cleerly and pike thee sum profite. Bot of oo thing I warne thee amonges alle other: I cannot see who may trewliche chalenge

349 **token**, mark, sign. 351 **ordinel**, regular. 352 **hy kynde**, celestial nature. 354 **even acordyng**, exactly corresponding. 355 **Dome**, Last Judgment. 356 **steryng**, impulse, stirring. 358 **seerly**, separately. 361 **mowe kepe**, be able to attend to; **make aseeth to**, deal adequately with. 362 **wote**, know. 364 **conclude**, confounded. 365 **resons**, arguments. 370 **domesman**, judge. 371 **Knyt**, Tie; **beleve**, faith. 372 **parcener**, partner. 374 **lese**, lose. 376 **ful justly**, in perfect justice (Walsh, p. 125). 377 **lith**, lies; **construe**, construe, interpret; **pike**, gather. 378 **chalenge**, claim.

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380 comunité thus with Jhesu and His just Moder, His highe aungelles and also with His seyntes, bot yif it be soche one that doth that in hym is, with helping of grace, in kepyng of tyme; so that he be seen to be a profiter on his partie, so litil as is, unto the comunité, as ichone of hem doth on his.

385 And therfore take kepe to this werk and to the merveylous maner of it withinne in thi soule. For yif it be trewlich conceyved, it is bot a sodeyn steryng, and as it were unavisid, speedly springing unto God as sparcle fro the cole. And it is merveylous to noumble the sterynges that may be in one oure wrought in a soule that is dispositid to this werk. And yit, in o steryng of alle theese, he may have sodenly and parfitely forgotten alle create thing. Bot fast after iche steryng, for corpcion of the flesche, it falleth doun agein to som thought or to some done or undone dede. Bot what therof? for fast after, it riseth agen as sodenly as it did bifore.

390 And here mowe men schortly conceyve the maner of this worching, and cleerly knowe that it is fer fro any fantasie, or any fals yimaginacion, or queynte opinion; the whiche ben brought in, not by soche a devoute and a meek blynde stering of love, bot by a proude, coryous, and an yimaginatif witte. Soche a proude, corious witte behoveth algates be born doun and stifyl troden doun under fote, yif this werke schal trewly be conceyvid in pureté of spirite.

400 For whoso herith this werke outhir be red or spoken, and weneth that it may or schuld be comen to by travayle in their wittes (and therfore thei sitte and sechin in their wittes how that it may be, and in this coriouste thei travayle their yimaginacion, paraventure, agens cours of kynde, and thei feyne a maner of worching, the whiche is neither bodily ne goostly): trewly this man, whatsoever he be, is perilously disseyyvid; insomochel that, bot yif God of His grete goodnes schewe His mercyful myracle and make hym sone to leve werk and meek him to counsel of provid worchers, he schal falle outhir into frenesies, or elles into other grete mischeves of goostly sinnes and devels disseites; thorow the whiche he may lightly be lorne, bothe liif and soule, withouten any eende. And therfore, for Goddes love, beware in this werk, and travayle not in thi wittes ne in thin yimaginacion on no wise. For I telle thee trewly, it may not be comen to by travaille in theim; and therfore leve theim and worche not with theim.

410 And wene not, for I clepe it a derknes or a cloude, that it be any cloude congelid of the humours that fleen in the ayre, ne yit any derknes soche as is in thin house on

385 unavisid, without warning; **sparcle**, spark. **386 oure**, hour. **388 fast**, quickly. **392 queynte**, fanciful, strange. **394 coryous**, curious. **395 algates**, always, in every way; stifyl, firmly, resolutely. **397 weneth**, think. **398 travayle**, labor. **399 wittes**, intellectual faculties. **402 insomochel that**, to such a degree that. **404 frenesies**, wild follies. **405 lorne**, lost. **410 congelid**, amassed. **411 fleen**, fly.

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nightes, when thi candel is oute. For soche a derknes and soche a cloude maist thou ymagin with coriouste of witte, for to bere before thin ighen in the lightest day of somer; and also, agenswarde, in the derkist night of wynter thou mayst ymagin a 415 cleere schinyng light. Lat be soche falsheed; I mene not thus. For when I sey derknes, I mene a lackyng of knowyng; as alle that thing that thou knowest not, or elles that thou hast forgetyn, it is derk to thee, for thou seest it not with thi goostly ighe. And for this skile it is not clepid a cloude of the eire, bot a cloude of unknowyng, that is bitwix thee and thi God.

420 **Here beginneth the fifthe chapitre.**

And yif ever thou schalt come to this cloude, and wone and worche therin as I bid thee, thee byhoveth, as this cloude of unknowyng is aboven thee, bitwix thee and thi God, right so put a cloude of forgetyng bineth thee, bitwix thee and alle the cretures that ever ben maad. Thee thinketh, paraventure, that thou arte ful fer from God, forthi 425 that this cloude of unknowing is bitwix thee and thi God; bot sekirly, and it be wel conseyyved, thou arte wel ferther fro Hym when thou hast no cloude of forgetyng bitwix thee and alle the creatures that ever ben maad. As ofte as I sey "alle the creatures that ever ben maad," as ofte I mene, not only the self creatures, bot also alle the werkes and the condicions of the same creatures. I oute take not o creature, whether 430 they ben bodily creatures or goostly, ne yit any condicion or werk of any creature, whether they be good or ivel; bot schortly to sey, alle schuld be hid under the cloude of forgetynng in this caas.

For thof al it be ful profitable sumtyme to think of certeyne condicions and dedes of sum certain special creatures, nevertheles yit in this werke it profiteth lityl or nought. For why mynde or thinkyng of any creature that ever God maad, or of any of their dedes 435 outhir, it is a maner of goostly light; for the ighe of thi soule is openid on it and even ficchid therapon, as the ighe of a schoter is apon the prik that he schoteth to. And o thing I telle thee, that alle thing that thou thinkest apon it is aboven thee for the tyme, and bitwix thee and thi God. And insomochel thou arte the ferther fro God, that ought is in thi mynde bot only God.

Ye, and yif it be cortesye and semely to sey, in this werk it profiteth litil or noght

414 agenswarde, conversely. **418 skile**, reason. **421 wone**, stay. **422 thee byhoveth**, you must. **424 Thee thinketh**, It seems to you. **424–25 forthi that**, because. **425 sekirly**, certainly; **and it**, if it. **428 the self creatures**, the creatures themselves. **429 oute take**, except. **433 thof al**, although. **435 For why**, Wherefore, because of this. **436 ighe**, eye. **437 ficchid**, fixed; **schoter**, archer; **prik**, target. **439 insomochel**, to such a degree. **440 ought**, anything.

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to think of the kyndenes or the worthines of God, ne on oure Lady, ne on the seintes or aungelles in heven, ne yit on the joies in heven: that is to say, with a special beholding to hem, as thou woldest bi that beholding fede and encrees thi purpos. I trowe that on no wise it schuld be so in this caas and in this werk. For thof al it be good to think upon the kindenes of God, and to love Hym and preise Him for hem: yit it is fer betyr to think upon the nakid beyng of Him, and to love Him and preise Him for Himself.

Here biginnith the sixthe chapitre.

But now thou askest me and seiest: "How schal I think on Himself, and what is Hee?" And to this I cannot answer thee bot thus: "I wote never."

For thou hast brought me with thi question into that same derknes, and into that same cloude of unknowyng that I wolde thou were in thiself. For of alle other creatures and theire werkes — ye, and of the werkes of God self — may a man thorou grace have fulheed of knowing, and wel to kon thinke on hem; bot of God Himself can no man thinke. And therfore I wole leve al that thing that I can think, and chese to my love that thing that I cannot think. For whi He may wel be loved, bot not thought. By love may He be getyn and holden; bot bi thought neither. And therfore, thof al it be good sumtyme to think of the kyndnes and the worthines of God in special, and thof al it be a light and a party of contemplacion, nevertheless in this werk it schal be casten down and keverid with a cloude of forgetyng. And thou schalt step aboven it stalworthly, bot listely, with a devoute and a plesing stering of love, and fonde for to peerse that derknes aboven thee. And smyte upon that thicke cloude of unknowyng with a scharpe darte of longing love, and go not thens for thing that befalleth.

Here beginnith the seventh chapitre.

And yif any thought rise and wil prees algates aboven thee, bitwix thee and that derknes, and asche thee seiing: "What sekist thou, and what woldest thou have?" sey thou that it is God that thou woldest have. "Him I coveite, Him I seche, and noght bot Him." And yif he ascke thee what is that God, sey thou that it is God That maad

443–44 **beholding**, attention. 445 **thof al**, although. 451 **wote**, know. 455 **fulheed**, fulness; **wel to kon thinke**, be well able to think. 457 **For whi**, Because. 460 **light**, illumination. 462 **stalworthly**, resolutely; **listely**, with eager longing. 463 **fonde**, strive. 464 **darte**, dart. 467 **algates**, always, in every way. 468 **asche**, ask. 469 **coveite**, want.

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thee and bought thee, and That graciously hath clepid thee to His love. And in Him sei thou kanst no skile. And therfore sey: "Go thou down agein." And treid him fast doun with a steryng of love thof he seme to thee right holy, and seme to thee as he wolde help thee to seke Hym.

475 For, paraventure, he wil bryng to thi minde diverse ful feire and wonderful pointes of His kyndnes, and sey that He is ful swete and ful lovyng, ful gracious and ful merciful. And yif thou wilt here him, he coveiteth no beter; for at the last he wil thus jangle ever more and more til he bring thee lower to the mynde of His Passion. And there wol he lat thee see the wonderful kyndnes of God; and if thou here him, he 480 kepereth no beter. For sone after he wil lat thee see thin olde wreichid leving; and paraventure, in seing and thinkyng therof, he wil bryng to thi mynde som place that thou hast wonid in before this tyme. So that at the last, er ever wite thou, thou schalt be scaterid thou wost never where. The cause of this scateryng is that thou herddist him first wilfully, answeredist him, resceivedist him, and letest him allone.

485 And yit, nevertheles, the thing that he seide was bothe good and holy; ye, and so holy that what man or womman that wenith to come to contemplacion withoutyn many soche swete meditacions of theire owne wreichidnes, the Passion, the kyndenes and the grete goodnes and the worthynes of God comyng before, sekirly he schal erre and faile of his purpos. And yit, nevertheles, it behoveth a man or a womman, 490 that hath longe tyme ben usid in theese meditacions, algates leve hem, and put hem and holde hem fer doun under the cloude of forgetyng, yif ever schal he peerse the cloude of unknowyng bitwix him and his God.

Therfore, what tyme that thou purposest thee to this werk, and felest bi grace that thou arte clepid of God, lift than up thin herte unto God with a meek steryng of love. 495 And mene God love That maad thee, and bought thee, and That graciously hath clepid thee to this werk; and resseive none other thought of God. And yit not alle theese, bot thee list; for it suffiseth inough a naked entent direkte unto God, withouten any other cause then Himself.

And yif thee list have this entent lappid and foulden in o worde, for thou schuldest have betir holde therapon, take thee bot a litil worde of o silable; for so it is betir then of two, for ever the schorter it is, the betir it acordeth with the werk of the spirite.

472 skile, knowledge, understanding. **473 thof**, though. **478 jangle**, chatter. **480 kepereth**, seeks. **482 wonid**, stayed; **wite**, know. **483 scaterid**, distracted, scattered. **484 letest**, permit. **486 wenith**, expects. **488 sekirly**, certainly. **490 algates**, completely, in every way; **put**, thrust. **494 clepid**, called. **495 mene**, focus attention, intend, "mean"; **God love**, God's love. **497 thee list**, as it pleases you. **499 lappid and foulden**, wrapped and folded up.

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And soche a worde is this worde *God* or this worde *love*. Cheese thee whether thou wilt, or another as thee list: whiche that thee liketh best of o silable. And fasten this worde to thin herte, so that it never go thens for thing that bifalleth.

505 This worde schal be thi scheeld and thi spere, whether thou ridest on pees or on werre. With this worde thou schalt bete on this cloude and this derknes aboven thee. With this worde thou schalt smite doun al maner thought under the cloude of forgetting; insomochel that yif any thought prees apon thee to aske thee what thou woldest have, answer him with no mo wordes bot with this o worde. And yif he profre thee of his grete clergie to expoune thee that worde and to telle thee the condicions of that worde, sey him that thou wilt have it al hole, and not broken ne undon. And yif thou wilt holde thee fast on this purpose, sekir be thou he wil no while abide. And whi? For thou wilt not late him fede him on soche swete meditacions touchid before.

Here biginnith the eighte chapitre.

515 But now thou askest me: "What is he, this that thus preesith apon me in this werk?" And whether it is a good thing or an ivel? "And yif it be an ivel thing, then have I merveyle," thou seist, "whi that he wil encrees a mans devocion so mochel. For sumtyme me think that it is a passing counforte to listen after his tales. For he wil sumtyme, me think, make me weep ful hertly for pité of the Passion of Criste, somtyme for my wretchednes, and for many other skiles that, me thinketh, ben ful holy, and that done me mochel good. And therfore me thinkith that he schuld on no wise be ivel. And yif he be good, and with his swete tales doth me so moche good withal, than I have greet merveyle whi that thou biddist me put him doun and awey so fer under the cloude of forgetyng."

525 Now sekirly me thinketh that this is a wel movid questyon, and therfore I think to answereth therto so febeli as I can. First, when thou askest me what is he, this that preseth so fast apon thee in this werk, profryng to help thee in this werk: I sey that it is a scharp and a clere beholding of thi kindely witte, preentid in thi reson withinne in thi soule. And where thou askist me therof whether it be good or ivel, I sey that it behoveth algates be good in his kynde, for whi it is a beme of the lices of God. Bot the use therof may be bothe good and ivel. Good, when it is openid bi grace for to see thi wretchednes, the Passion, the kyndnes, and the wonderful werkes of God in His creatures bodily and goostly; and than it is no wonder thof it encrees thi devocion so

508 **insomochel**, to the degree. 510 **clergie**, learning. 518 **passing**, exceeding. 522 **withal**, moreover. 525 **sekirly me thinketh**, assuredly it seems to me. 526 **so febeli as I can**, as well as my feebleness permits. 528 **beholding**, sight; **kindely**, natural. 530 **algates**, in every way; **for whi**, because.

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535 mochel as thou seist. Bot then is the use ivel, when it is swollen with pride and with coriouste of moche clergie and letterly conning as in clerkes, and maketh hem prees for to beholden not meek scolers and maystres of devinité or of devocation, bot proude scolers of the devel and maysters of vanité and of falsheed. And in other men or wommen, whatso thei be, religious or seculers, the use and the worching of this kyn-dely witte is than ivel, whan it is swollen with proude and corious skyles of wordly thinges and fleschely conceites, in covetyng of wordly worschipes and havyng of richesses and veyne plesaunce and flateringes of other.

540
545 And where that thou askest me whi that thou schalt put it doune under the cloude of forgetyng, sithen it is so that it is good in his kynde, and thereto when it is wel used, it doth thee so mochel good and encreseth thi devocation so mochel, to this I answere and sey that thou schalt wel understande that ther ben two maner of lives in Holy Chirche. The tone is active liif, and the tother is contemplative liif. Actyve is the lower, and contemplative is the hier. Active liif hath two degrees, a hier and a lower; and also contemplative liif hath two degrees, a lower and a higher. Also theese two lives ben so couplid togeders, that thof al thei ben divers in som party, yit 550 neither of hem may be had fully withouten som party of the other; for whi that party that is the heigher party of actyve liif, that same party is the lower party of contemplative liif. So that a man may not be fully active, bot yif he be in party contemplative; ne yit fully contemplative (as it may be here), bot yif he be in partie actyve. The condicion of actyve liif is soche, that it is bothe bygonne and eended in this liif. Bot 555 not so of contemplative liif; for it is bigonne in this liif, and schal last withouten eende, for whi that partie that Mary chees schal never be taken awey. Active liif is troublid and travailid aboute many thinges; bot contemplative sitteth in pees with o thing.

560 The lower party of active liif stondeth in good and honeste bodily werkes of mercy and of charité. The hier party of active liif and the lower party of contemplative liif lith in goodly goostly meditacions, and besy beholding — unto a mans owne wretchednes with sorow and contricion, unto the Passion of Crist and of His servauntes with pité and compassion, and unto the wonderful giftes, kyndnes, and werkes of God in alle His creatures, bodili and goostly, with thankynge and preising. Bot the higher partie of contemplacion (as it may be had here) hongeth al holy in this derknes and in this cloude of unknowyng, with a loyng steryng and a blinde beholding unto the nakid beyng of God Himself only.

535 **letterly conning**, erudite knowledge. 539 **skyles**, arguments; **wordely**, worldly. 540 **fleschely conceites**, carnal thoughts, worldly considerations; **worschipes**, honors. 543 **sithen**, since. 546 **The tone . . . the tother**, The one . . . the other. 549 **thof al**, although; **party**, part. 550 **for whi**, because. 557 **travailid**, busied.

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In the lower partye of active liif a man is withouten himself and bineeth himself. In
the higher party of actyve liif and the lower party of contemplative liif, a man is
570 withinne himself and even with himself. Bot in the higher partie of contemplative
liif, a man is aboven himself and under his God. Aboven himself he is, for whi he
purposeth him to wynne theder bi grace, whether he may not come bi kynde; that is
to sey, to be knit to God in spirite, and in oneheed of love and accordaunce of wile.

And right as it is impossible to mans understandyng a man to come to the higher
575 party of actyve liif, bot if he seese for a tyme of the lower party: so it is that a man
schal not mowe com to the higher party of contemplative liif, bot yif he seese for a
tyme of the lower partie. And as unlefeul a thing as it is, and as moche as it wolde
lette a man that sat in his meditacions, to beholde thanne to his outward bodily
580 werkes, the whiche he had done or elles schul do, thof al thei were never so holy
werkes in hemself: sekirly as unlicly a thing it is, and as moche wolde it let a man,
that schuld worche in this derknes and in this cloude of unknowing with an affectuous
stering of love to God for Himself, for to late any thought or any meditacion of
Goddes wonderful giftes, kyndnes, and werkes in any of His creatures, bodily or
goostly, rise apon him to prees bitwix him and his God, though al thei be never so
holy thoughtes, ne so liking, ne so counfertable.

585 And for this skile it is that I bid thee put doun soche a scharp sotil thought, and
kever him with a thicke cloude of forgetyng, be he never so holy, ne hote he thee
never so weel for to help thee in thi purpos. For whi love may reche to God in this
liif, bot not knowing. And al the whiles that the soule wonith in this deedly body,
evermore is the scharpnes of oure understanding in beholding of alle goostly thinges,
590 bot most specialy of God, medelid with sum maner of fantasie; for the whiche oure
werk schuld be unclene, and, bot if more wonder were, it schuld lede us into moche
errour.

Here biginnith the ninthe chapitre.

And therfore the scharp steryng of thin understandyng, that wile alweis prees apon
595 thee when thou settest thee to this werk blynd, behoveth always be born doun; and

572 knit, united; **acordaunce**, harmony. **574 seese**, cease. **575 mowe**, be able to. **576 unlefeul**, unlawful. **577 lette**, hinder. **578 thof al**, although. **579 sekirly**, certainly. **580–81 affectuous**, ardent. **581 late**, permit. **584 liking**, pleasant; **counfertable**, comforting. **585 skile**, reason. **586 kever**, cover; **hote**, promise. **587 For whi**, Because; **reche**, reach. **588 wonith**, dwells. **590 medelid**, mixed; **fantasie**, image, imagination. **591 unclene**, obstructed; **bot if more wonder were**, unless it were most exceptional.

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bot thou bere him doun, he wile bere thee doun; insomochel that whan thou wenest
best to abide in this derknes, and that nought is in thi mynde bot only God, and thou
loke witterly thou schalt fynde thi mynde not occupied in this derknes, bot in a cleer
beholdingyng of som thing beneath God. And yif it thus be, sekirly then is that thing
600 aboven thee for the time, and bitwix thee and thi God. And therfore purpose thee to
put doun soche clere beholdinges, be thei never so holy ne so likyng.

For o thing I telle thee: it is more profitable to the helthe of thi soule, more worthi
in itself, and more plesing to God and to alle the seintes and aungelles in heven —
ye! and more helply to alle thi freendes, bodily and goostly, quik and dede — soche
605 a blynde steryng of love unto God for Himself, and soche a privé love put upon this
cloude of unknowyng; and beter thee were for to have it and for to fele it in thin af-
feccion goostly, then it is for to have the ighe of thi soule openid in contemplacion or
beholding of alle the aungelles or seyntes in heven, or in hering of alle the mirthe and
the melody that is amonges hem in blisse.

610 And loke thou have no wonder of this, for mightest thou ones se it as clearly as
thou maist bi grace com to for to grope it and feele it in this liif, thou woldest think
as I say. Bot seker be thou that cleer sight schal never man have here in this liif, bot
the felyng mowe men have thorow grace whan God vouchethsaaf. And therfore lift
615 up thi love to that cloude. Bot yif I schal sey the sothe, lat God drawe thi love up to
that cloude; and prove thou thorou help of His grace to forgete alle other thing.

620 For sithen a nakid minde of any thing under God, presyng agens thi wille and thi
wetyng, putteth thee ferther fro God than thou schuldest be, nere it were, and letteth
thee, and makith thee inasmoche more unable to fele in experiance the frute of His
love: what trowest thou than that a mynde wetyngly and wilfuly drawnen apon thee
wil hindre thee in thi purpos? And sithen a mynde of any special seinte or of any
625 clene goostly thing wil hindre thee so moche, what trowest thou than that the mynde
of any man levynge in this wrechid liif, or of any maner of bodely or wordely thing,
wil hinder thee and let thee in this werk?

I say not that soche a nakid sodein thought of any good and clene goostly thing
625 under God, presyng agens thi wille or thi wetyng, or elles wilfuly drawnen apon thee
with avisement in encresing of thi devucion, though al it be lettyng to this maner of
werk, that it is therfore ivel. Nay, God forbede that thou take it so. Bot I say, thof al it

596 insomochel that, to the degree that; **wenest**, expect. **598 witterly**, truly. **601 likyng**,
pleasant. **604 quik**, living. **605 privé love put**, secret love thrust. **607 ighe**, eye. **611 grope**,
try to find. **613 vouchethsaaf**, grants. **616 minde**, remembrance. **617 wetyng**, understanding;
nere it were, if it were not the case; **letteth**, hinders. **619 wetyngly**, knowingly. **620 sithen**,
since. **622 wordely**, worldly. **623 let**, hinder. **626 avisement**, deliberation.

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be good and holy, yit in this werk it letteth more then it profiteth — I mene for the tyme. For whi sekirly he that sekith God parfitely, he wil not rest him finaly in the mynde of any aungel or seinte that is in heven.

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Here bygynnith the tenth chapitre.

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But it is not thus of the mynde of any man or womman levyng in this liif, or of any bodili or wordly thing, whatsoever that it be. For whi a nakyd sodein thought of any of hem presing agens thi wile and thi wetyng, thof al it be no sinne arettid unto thee — for it is the pyne of the original sinne presing agens thi power, of the whiche sinne thou arte clensed in thi baptyme — nevertheles yit, yif this sodein steryng or thought be not smetyn sone doun, as fast for freelté thi fleschly herte is streynid therby, with sum maner of likyng yif it be a thing that pleseth thee or hath plesid thee bifore, or elles with sum maner of gruching yif it be a thing that thee think greveth thee or hath greved thee before. The whiche fastning, thof al it may be in fleschly levyng men and wommen that ben in deedly sinne before, deedly, nevertheles in thee, and in alle other that han in a trewe wile forsaken the woreld, soche a likyng or a gruching fastnyng in the flescheli herte is bot venial synne. The cause of this is the grounding and the rotyng of youre entent in God, maad in the biginnynge of youre levyng in that state that ye stonde in. Bot yif it so be that this likyng or gruching fastnyng in thi fleschly herte and theires be suffred so longe to abide unreproved, that than at the last it is fastnid to the goostly herte (that is to sey the wile) with a ful consent: than it is deedly synne.

And this befalleth when thow, or any of hem that I speke of, wilfuly drawen apon yow the mynde of any man or womman levyng in this liif, or of any bodily or worwdly thing outhier; insomoche that yif it be a thing the whiche greveth or hath grevid thee before, ther riseth in thee a teenful passion and an appetite of vengaunce, the whiche is clepid Wrath; or elles a fel dedein and a maner of wlatsonnes of theirre persone with dispitous and reprovyng thoughtes, the whiche is clepid Envye; or elles a werines and an unlistines of any good ocupacion, bodily or goostly, the whiche is clepid Slewth. And yif it be a thing that plesith thee, or hath plesid thee before, ther riseth in thee a passaunt delite for to think on that thing whatso it be, insomochel that thou restest thee in that thought, and finaly fastnist thin herte and thi wille thereto, and fedest thi fleschely herte therwith, so that thee think for the tyme that thou coveitest

633 **wordly**, worldly. 634 **arettid**, attributed. 639 **gruching**, grumbling, complaining; **thee think**, it seems to you. 644 **rotyng**, taking root. 646 **theires**, theirs; **suffred**, allowed. 652 **teenful**, wrathful. 653 **fel dedein**, cruel contempt; **wlatsonnes**, loathing. 654 **dispitous**, malevolent. 655 **unlistines**, listlessness. 657 **passaunt**, immoderate. 659 **coveitest**, want.

The Cloud of Unknowing

660 none other welthe, bot to live ever in soche a pees and rest with that thing that thou thinkest apon. Yif this thought that thou thus drawest apon thee, or elles resceyvest when it is put unto thee, and that thou restest thee thus in with delite, be worthines of kynde or of knowyng, of grace or of degree, of favour or of faireheed, than it is Pride. And yif it be any maner of worldy good, riches or catel, or what that man may have or be lorde of, then it is Covetyse. Yif it be deinteuous metes and drinke, or any maner of delites that man may taast, then it is Glotenie. And yif it be love or pleasaunce, or any maner of fleschly daliaunce, glosing or flateryng of any man or womman levynge in this liif, or of thiself outhere, than it is Lecherye.

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Here biginnith the elleven chapitre.

670 I say not this for I trowe that thou, or any other soche as I speke of, ben gilty and combrid with any soche synnes; bot for I wolde that thou chargedist iche a thought, and iche a steryng after that it is, and for I wolde that thou travailedist besily to distroie the first steryng and thought of thees thinges that thou maist thus synne inne. For o thing I telle thee: that who chargeth not, or setteth litil bi the first thought — ye, though al it be no sinne unto him — he, that whosoever that he be, schal not eschewe rechelesnes in venial sinne. Venial synne schal no man utterly eschue in this deedly liif. Bot rechelesnes in venial synne schuld alweis be eschewed of alle the dissiples of perfeccion; and elles I have no wonder thof thei sone sinne deedly.

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Here biginnith the twelfthe chapitre.

680 And therfore, yif thou wilt stonde and not falle, seese never in thin entent, bot bete evermore on this cloude of unknowyng that is bitwix thee and thi God with a scharpe darte of longing love. And lothe for to think on ought under God. And go not thens for thing that befalleth. For this is only bi itself that werk that distroioeth the grounde and the rote of synne. Fast thou never so mochel, wake thou never so longe, rise thou never so eerly, ligge thou never so harde, were thou never so scharp, ye, and yif it were leveful to do — as it is not — putttest thou oute thin yghen, cuttest thou oute thi tongue of thi mouth, stoppedest thou thin eren and thi nose never so fast, though thou

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665 Covetyse, avarice, inordinate desire; **deinteuous metes**, dainty foods. **667 daliaunce**, conversation; **glosing**, blandishment, adulmentation. **670 trowe**, believe. **671 combrid**, encumbered; **chargedist**, attach importance to. **672 travailedist**, labored. **675–76 eschewe**, avoid. **676 rechelesnes**, carelessness, indifference. **685 ligge**, lie down; **harde**, on a hard surface; **were thou never so scharp**, wear you never so prickly a haircloth.

The Cloud of Unknowing

schere awei thi prevé membres and dedest al the pine to thi body that thou mightest think: alle this wolde help thee right nought. Yit wil stering and rising of synne be in thee.

Ye, and what more! Wepe thou never so moche for sorrow of thi sinnes or of the Passion of Criste, or have thou never so moche mynde of the joies of heven, what may it do to thee? Serkirly moche good, moche helpe, moche profite, and moche grace wol it gete thee; bot in comparison of this blinde steryng of love, it is bot a litil that it doth, or may do, withouten this. This bi itself is the best partie of Mary, withouten thees other. Thei withouten it profiten litel or nought. It distroith not only the grounde and the rote of sinne, as it may be here, bot therto it geteth vertewes. For and it be treuly conceyvid, alle vertewes scholen be sotely and parfitley conceyvid and felid comprehendid in it, withouten any medeling of the entent. And have a man never so many vertewes withouten it, alle thei ben medelid with sum crokid entent, for the whiche thei ben inparfite.

For vertewe is not elles bot an ordeinde and a mesurid affeccion, pleinly directe unto God for Himself. For whi He in Himself is the clene cause of alle vertewes; insomochel that yif any man be sterid to any o vertewe by any other cause medelid with Him — ye thof al it be the cheef — yit that vertewe is than inparfite. As thus, bi ensaumple, may be seen in o vertewe or two in stede of alle the other. And wel may theese two vertewes be meeknes and charité, for whoso might gete theese two, clearly him nedid no mo: for whi he had alle.

Here byginnith the thritteneth chapitre.

Now lat see first of the vertewe of meeknes: how that it is inparfite when it is caused of any other thing medelid with God thof al it be the cheef; and how that it is parfite when it is caused of God by Himself. And first it is to weten what meeknes is in itself, yif this mater schal clearly be seen and conceyvid; and therafter may it more verrely be conceyvid in trewth of sperite whiche is the cause therof.

Meeknes in itself is not ellis bot a trewe knowyng and felyng of a mans self as he is. For sekirly whoso might verrely see and fele himself as he is, that he schuld verrely be meek. Two thinges ther ben the whiche ben cause of this meeknes, the whiche ben theese: on is the filthe, the wrecchidnes, and the frelte of man, into the whiche he is fallen by synne, and the whiche algates him behoveth to fele in sum partie the whiles he levith in this liif, be he never so holy. Another is the overabounding love and the worthines of God in Himself, in beholding of the whiche alle

703 For whi, Because; **clene,** entire. **712 weten,** know. **719 algates,** in every way.

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kynde quakith, alle clerkes ben foles, and alle seintes and aungelles ben blynde; in-somoche that ne were thorow the wisdam of His Godheed that He mesurid theire beholdyng after theire abilnes in kynde and in grace, I defaile to say what schuld falle of hem.

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This secound cause is parfite, for whi it schal last withouten eende. And the tother bifore is inparfite, for whi it schal not only faile at the ende of this liif. Bot ful ofte it may befalle that a soule in this deedly body, for abundaunce of grace in multipling of his desire, as ofte and as longe as God vouchethsaaf for to worche it, schal have sodenly and parfitely lost and forgetyn alle wetyng and felyng of his beyng, not lokyng after whether he have ben holy or wretched. Bot whether that this falle ofte or seeldom to a soule that is thus disposid, I trowe that it lasteth bot a ful schort while. And in this tyme it is parfitely mekyd, for it knoweth and felith no cause bot the cheef. And ever whan it knoweth and felith the tother cause comounyng therwith, thof al this be the cheef, yit it is inparfite meeknes. Nevertheless yit it is good and al-gates must be had, and God forbede that thou take it in any other maner then I say.

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Here biginnith the fourtene chapitre.

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For thof al I clepe it inparfite meeknes, yit I had lever have a trewe knowyng and a felyng of myself as I am, and sonner I trowe that it schuld gete me the parfite cause and vertewe of meeknes bi itself, then it scholde and alle the seintes and aungelles in heven, and alle the men and wommen of Holy Chirche levynge in erthe, religious or seculers in alle degrees, weren set at ones alle togeders to do not elles bot to prey to God for me to gete me parfite meeknes. Ye, and yit it is impossible a sinner to gete, or to kepe when it is getyn, the parfite vertewe of meeknes withouten it.

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And therfore swink and swete in al that thou canst and mayst, for to gete thee a trewe knowyng and a feling of thiself as thou arte. And than I trowe that sone after that thou schalt have a trewe knowyng and a felyng of God as He is; not as He is in Hymself, for that may no man do bot Himself, ne yit as thou schalt do in blisse bothe body and soule togeders; bot as He is possible, and as He vouchethsaaf to be knownen and felid of a meek soule levynge in this deedly body.

And think not for I sette two causes of meeknes, one parfite and another inparfite, that I wil therfore that thou leve the traveile aboute inparfite meeknes and set the holy to gete the parfite. Nay, sekirly, I trow thou schuldest never bryng it so aboute.

722 **kynde**, nature. 724 **defaile**, am not able. 734 **comounyng**, associating. 738 **lever**, rather.

745 **swink and swete**, work and sweat. 749 **is possible . . . to be knownen**, can be known; **vouchethsaaf**, grants. 750 **deedly**, mortal. 752 **traveile**, labor. 753 **holy**, wholly.

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Bot herfore I do that I do; for I think to telle thee and late thee see the worthines of
755 this goostly excersise before al other excercise, bodili or goostly, that man kan or
may do bi grace; how that a prevé love put in clennes of spirite upon this derk cloude
of unknowyng bitwix thee and thi God sotely and parfite conteneneth in it the parfite
vertewe of meeknes, withouten any special or clere beholding of any thing under
760 God; and for I wolde that thou knewest whiche were parfite meeknes, and settist it as
a token before the love of thin herte, and dedist it for thee and for me; and for I
wolde bi this knowyng make thee more meek.

For oftymes it befalleth that lackyng of knowyng is cause of moche pride, as me
thinketh. For paraventure, and thou knewest not whiche were parfite meeknes, thou
schuldest wene, when thou haddest a lityl knowyng and a felyng of this that I clepe
765 inparfite meeknes, that thou haddest nighthond getyn parfite meeknes; and so schuld-
est thou deceyve thiself, and wene that thou were ful meek, whan thou were al be-
lappid in foule stinkyng pride. And therfore fonde for to travaile aboute parfite
meeknes; for the condicion of it is soche, that whoso hath it and the whiles he hath it,
he schal not sinne, ne yit mochel after.

770 **Here byginnith the fifteeneth chapitre.**

And trist stedfastliche that ther is soche a parfite meeknes as I speke of, and that it
may be comen to thorow grace in this liif. And this I sey in confusion of theirre
errour, that seyen that ther is no parfiter cause of meeknes then is that the whiche is
reysid of the mynde of oure wreichidnes and oure before-done synnes.

775 I graunte wel that to hem that han ben in customizable sinnes, as I am myself and
have ben, it is the moste needful and speedful cause: to be mekyd under the mynde
of oure wreichidnes and oure before-done synnes, ever to the tyme be that the grete
rust of oure sinne be in grete party rubbid awey, oure conscience and oure counsel to
witnes.

780 Bot to other that ben as it were innocentes, the whiche never sinned deadly with an
abidyg wil and avisement, bot thorou frelté and unknowyng, and the whiche setten
hem to be contemplatyves — and to us bothe, yif oure counsel and oure concience
witnes oure laweful amendment in contricion and in confession and in aseeth-
makyng after the statute and the ordinaunce of alle Holy Chirche, and, therto, yif we
785 fele us sterid and clepid bi grace to be contemplatives also — ther is than another

756 **prevé**, secret, personal; **put**, offered. 757 **sotely**, mysteriously. 759 **whiche**, what. 764
wene, imagine, think. 765 **nighthond**, almost. 766–67 **belappid**, enveloped. 767 **fonde**, strive.
775 **customable**, habitual. 776 **speedful**, profitable; **mynde**, remembrance. 781 **avisement**,
deliberation. 783–84 **aseeth-makyng**, satisfaction.

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cause to be mekyd under, as fer aboven this cause as is the levyng of oure Lady Seint Marye aboven the levyng of the sinfulest penaunt in Holy Chirche, or the levyng of Criste aboven the levyng of any other man in this liif, or elles the levyng of an aungel in heven, the whiche never felid — ne schal fele — freelté, is aboven the liif of the 790 frelest man that is here in this wорeld.

For yif it so were that ther were no parfite cause to be mekyd under, bot in seyng and felyng of wrechidnes, then wolde I wite at hem that seien so what cause thei ben mekid under, that never seen ne felen — ne never schal be in hem — wrechidnes ne steryng of synne, as it is of oure Lorde Jhesu Criste, oure Lady Seinte Marye, and alle the seintes and aungelles in heven. To this perfeccion, and alle other, oure Lorde Jesu Criste clepith us Himself in the Gospel, where He biddeth that we schuld be parfite by grace as He Hymself is by kynde. 795

Here biginnith the sixteeneth chapitre.

Loke that no man think it presumpcion that he that is the wrechidest sinner of this 800 liif dar take apon hym — after the tyme be that he have lawfully amendid hym, and after that he have felt him sterid to that liif that is clepid contemplative, by the assent of his counsel and his concience — for to profre a meke steryng of love to his God, prively putting apon the cloude of unknowyng bitwix him and his God. When oure Lorde seyde to Marye, in persone of alle sinners that ben clepid to contemplative liif: “Thi sinnes ben forgeven thee” — not for hir grete sorow, ne for the mynde of hir synnes, ne yit for hir meeknes that sche had in the beholdyng of hir wrechidnes only. Bot whi than? Sekirly for sche loved mochel — lo! here mowe men see what a privé 805 love put may purchase of oure Lorde, before alle other werkes that man may think.

And yit I graunte wel that scho had ful mochel sorow, and weep ful sore for hir synnes, and ful mochel sche was mekid in mynde of hir wrechidnes. And so schuld we do, that have ben wreches and customizable synners al oure liiftyme, make hidous and wonderful sorow for oure synnes, and ful mochel be mekid in mynde of oure wrechidnes. 810

Bot how? Sekirly as Mary did. Scho, thof al scho myght not unfele the depe hertly sorow of hir synnes — for whi al hir liiftyme sche had hem with hir whereso sche gede, as it were in a birthen bounden togeders and leide up ful prively in the hole of hir herte, in maner never to be forgeten — nevertheless yit it may be seide and 815

787 **penaunt**, penitent, one doing penance. 792 **wite**, know. 803 **puttyng apon**, pressing on. 808 **put**, thrust. 811 **customable**, habitual; **hidous**, intense. 814 **thof al**, although. 816 **gede**, went; **birthen**, burden; **hole**, recess, hidden depth.

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affermyd by Scripture that sche had a more hertly sorow, a more doelful desire, and a more deep sighing, and more sche languischid, ye! nighhonde to the deeth, for lackyng of love, thof al sche had ful mochel love — and have no wonder therof, for it is the condicion of a trewe lover that ever the more he loveth, the more him longeth for to love — than sche had for any mynde of hir synnes.

And yit sche wist wel, and felt wel in hirself, in a sad sothfastnes, that sche was a wreche moste foule of alle other, and that hir synnes had maad a devision bitwix hir and hir God, that sche loved so mochel; and also that thei were in grete party cause of hir langwisching sekenes for lakyng of love. Bot what therof? Cam sche therfore doun fro the height of desire into the depnes of hir sinful liif, and serched in the foule stynkyng fen and donghille of hir sinnes, serching theim up bi one and bi one, with alle the circumstaunces of hem, and sorowed and weep so upon hem ichone bi hemself? Nay, sekirly sche did not so. And whi? For God lete hir wite by his grace withinne in hir soule that sche schuld never so bryng it aboute. For so might sche sonner have reisid in hirself an abelnes to have eftre synnid, then to have purchasid by that werke any pleyn forgevenes of alle hir synnes.

And therfore sche heng up hir love and hir longing desire in this cloude of unknowing, and lernid hir to love a thing the whiche sche might not se clearly in this liif bi light of understandyng in hire reson, ne yit verely fele in swetnes of love in hir affeccion; insomochel that sche had oftetimes lityl specyal mynde whether that ever sche had ben a synner or none. Ye! and ful oftymes I hope that sche was so deeply affecte in the love of His Godheid that sche had bot right lityl specyal beholding unto the beuté of His precious and His blessid body, in the whiche He sate ful lovely, spekyng and preaching before hir; ne yit to anything elles, bodily or goostly. That this be soth, it semith by the Gospelle.

Here bygynneth the seventene chapitre.

In the Gospel of Seinte Luke it is wretyn that when oure Lorde was in the hous of Martha hir sistre, al the tyme that Martha maad hir besy abouthe the dightyng of His mete, Mary hir sister sat at His feet. And in heryng of His worde, sche beheeld not to the besines of hir sister, thof al hir besines was ful good and ful holy, for it is the first party of actyve liif; ne yit to the preciouste of His blessid body, ne to the swete voyce and the wordes of His Manheed, thof al it be beter and holier, for it is the secound party of actyve liif and the first of contemplatyve liif, bot to the sovereynest wisdom of His Godheid lappid in the derk wordes of His Manheed: theder beheeld sche with

830 wite, know. **845** dightyng, preparation. **846** mete, food. **851** lappid, contained.

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al the love of hir hert. For fro thens list hir not remowe for nothing that sche saw ne
herde spoken ne done aboutheir; bot sat ful stille in hir body, with many a swete
privé and a lysty love put upon that highe cloude of unknowyng bitwix hir and hir
God.

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For o thing I telle thee: that ther was never yit pure creature in this liif, ne never yit
schal be, so highe ravisched in contemplacion and love of the Godheid, that ther ne is
evermore a highe and a wonderful cloude of unknowyng bitwix him and his God. In
this cloude it was that Marye was occupied with many a prevé love put. And whi? For
it was the best and the holiest party of contemplacion that may be in this liif. And fro
this party hir list not remowe for no thing; insomochel that when hir sistre Martha
pleynid hir to oure Lorde of hir and bad Him bid hir sistre rise and help hir, and lat
hir not so worche and travayle by hirself, scho sat ful styllle and answerid not with o
worde, ne schewid not as moche as a gruccing contenaunce agens hir sistre for any
pleynete that scho couthe make. And no wonder: for whi scheo had another werk to
do that Martha wist not of. And therfore scheo had no leiser to listen to hir, ne to an-
swere hir at hir pleynte.

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Lo! freende, alle theese werkes, thees wordes, and theese contenaunces, that weren
schewid bitwix oure Lorde and theese two sistres, ben set in ensaumple of alle acty-
ves and alle contemplatyves that han ben sithen in Holy Chirche, and schal be to the
Day of Dome. For by Mary is understanden alle contemplatyves, for thei schuld con-
forme here levynge after hirs; and by Martha, actyves, on the same maner, and for the
same skil in licnes.

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Here bygynneth the eighttene chapitre.

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And right as Martha pleynid than on Marye hir sistre, right so yit into this day alle
actyves pleinen of contemplatyves. For and ther be a man or a womman in any com-
panye of this wореld — what companye soever it be, religious or seculers, I outetake
none — the whiche man or womman (whether that it be) feleth him sterid thorow
grace and bi counsel to forsake alle outward besines, and for to sette hym fully for to
lyve contemplatyve liif after theirre kunnyng and theirre concience, theirre counseyl
acordyng: as fast theirre owne brethren and theirre sistres, and alle theirre nexte

852 list hir not, she did not want; **remowe**, remove. **854 lysty**, full of eager longing. **859**
prevé love put, secret thrust of love. **862 pleynid**, complained. **863 travayle**, labor. **864**
gruccing, grumbling. **866 wist**, knew; **leiser**, leisure. **868 contenaunces**, behavior. **870**
sithen, since. **873 same skil in licnes**, self-same reason. **876 and**, if. **877–78 outetake none**,
make no exceptions. **880 kunnyng**, knowledge, intelligence. **880–81 counseyl acordyng**,
spiritual director in agreement.

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freendes, with many other that knownen not theire sterynges ne that maner of levynge
that thei set hem to, with a grete pleynyng spirite schal ryse apon hem, and sey
scharply unto hem that it is nought that thei do. And as fast thei wil reken up many
fals tales, and many sothe also, of fallyng of men and wommen that han goven hem
to soche liif before, and never a good tale of hem that stonden.

I graunte that many fallen and han fallen of hem that han in lices forsaken the
woreld. And where thei schuld have becomen Goddes servantes and His contem-
platyves, bicause that thei wolde not reule hem bi trewe goostly counseyle thei have
becomen the devels servantes and his contemplatyses, and tornen outherto to ypo-
crites or to heretykes, or fallen into frenesies and many other mescheves, in sclaun-
dre of alle Holy Chirche. Of the whiche I leve to speke of at this tyme, for troubling
of oure mater. Bot nevertheless hereafter, when God vouchethsaaf and yif nede be,
men mowe sey somme of here condicions and the cause of here fallinges. And ther-
fore no more of them at this tyme; bot forth of oure mater.

Here bygynneth the ninteneth chapitre.

Som might think that I do litil worschip to Martha, that specyal seinte, for I lickyn
hir wordes in pleining of hir sister unto theese wordly mens wordes, or theires unto
hirs. And trewly I mene none unworschip to hir ne to theim. And God forbede that I
schuld in this werk sey anything that might be taken in reprovyng of any of the ser-
vauntes of God in any degré, and namely of His specyal seynte. For me thinketh that
sche schuld be ful wel had excusid of hir pleinte, takyng reward to the tyme and the
maner that sche seyde it in. For that that sche seyde, hir unknowyng was the cause.

And no wonder thof sche knewe not that tyme how Marye was occupied; for I
trowe that before sche had lityl herde of soche perfeccion. And also, that sche seyde
it was bot curtesly and in fewe wordes. And therfore sche schuld always be had ex-
cusid.

And so me thinketh that thees wordly levynge men and wommen of actyve liif
schuld also ful wel be had excusid of theire pleyning wordes touchid before, thof al
thei sey boystously that thei sey, havyng beholdyng to theire ignoraunce. For whi
right as Martha wist ful lityl what Marye hir sister did when sche pleinid of hir to
oure Lorde: right so on the same maner theese folk nowondayes wetyn ful lityl, or
elles nought, what theese yong desiples of God menen, whan thei sette hem fro the

884 reken up, mention in turn. **885 goven**, given. **887 in lices**, to all appearances. **891 frenesies**, wild follies. **893 vouchethsaaf**, grants. **897 specyal**, outstanding. **898 wordly**, worldly. **899 unworschip**, dishonor. **902 ful**, very; **reward**, regard. **908 me thinketh**, it seems to me. **910 boystously**, crudely; **beholdyng**, regard. **912 wetyn**, know.

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besines of this woreld, and drawnen hem to be Godes special servauntes in holines
915 and righfulnes of spirit. And yif they wist, treuly I dar sey that thei wolde neither do
ne say as thei say. And therfore me thinketh alweis that thei schuld be had excused,
for whi thei knownen no betir levyngh then is that thei live in theimself. And also whan
I think on myne unnumerable defautes, the whiche I have maad myself before this
920 tyme in wordes and dedes for defaute of knowyng, me thinketh than yif I wolde be
had excused of God for myn ignoraunte defautes, that I schuld charitably and peteu-
ously have other mens wordes and dedes ignoraunte algates excusid. And sekirly
elles do I not to other as I wolde that other did to me.

Here byginnith the twenty chapitre.

And therfore me thinketh that thei that set hem to be contemplatyves schuld not
925 only have actyve men excusid of theirie pleynyng wordes, bot also me thinketh that
thei schuld be so occupied in spirite that thei schuld take litel kepe, or none, what men
did or seyde aboute hem. Thus did Marye, oure alther exsaumple, when Martha hir
sistre pleynid to oure Lorde. And yif we wil trewli do thus, oure Lorde wil do now
for us as He did than for Marie.

930 And how was that? Sekirly thus. Oure lovely Lorde Jhesu Crist, unto Whom no
privé thing is hid, thof at He was requerid of Martha as domesman for to bid Mary
rise and help hir to serve Hym, nevertheles yit, for He parceyvid that Mary was fer-
vently occupied in sperit aboute the love of His Godheed, therfore curtesly, and as it
935 was semely for Him to do bi the wey of reson, He answerid for hir, that for the ex-
cusing of hirself list not leve the love of Hym. And how answerid He? Sekirly not
only as domesman, as He was of Martha apelyd: bot as an advoket lawfully defendid
hir that Hym loved, and seide: "Martha, Martha!" Twies for spedē He nemnid hir
name; for He wolde that sche herd Him and toke hede to His wordes. "Thou arte ful
940 besy," He seyde, "and troubled aboute many thinges." For thei that ben actyves beh-
oven alweis to be besied and travaylid aboute many diverse thinges, the whiche
hem falleth first for to have to here owne use, and sithen in dedes of mercy to theire
even-Cristen, as charité asketh. And this He seide unto Martha, for He wolde lat hir
wetyn that hir besines was good and profitable to the helthe of hir soule. Bot forthi

915 **wist**, knew. 918 **defautes**, faults. 919 **for defaute of**, through default of. 920–21 **peteu-**
ously, compassionately. 921 **algates**, entirely; **sekirly**, certainly. 927 **alther**, of all. 931
domesman, judge. 935 **leve**, leave. 936 **apelyd**, invoked as judge. 937 **spede**, expediency;
nemnid, named. 939–40 **behoven**, must. 942 **even-Cristen**, fellow-Christians. 943 **wetyn**,
know; **besines**, activity.

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that sche schuld not think that it were the best werke of alle that man might do, therfore He echid to and seyde: "Bot o thing is nessessary."

And what is that o thing? Sekirly that God be loved and preysid by Himself, aboven alle other besines, bodily or goostly, that man may do. And forthi that Martha schuld not think that sche might bothe love God and preise Hym aboven alle other besines, bodily or goostly, and also therto to be besy abouthe the nessessaries of this liif, therfore to deliver hir of doute that sche might not bothe serve God in bodey besines and goostly togedir parfisely — inparfisely sche may, bot not parfisely — He echid to and seyde that Mary had chosen the best partye, the whiche schuld never be taken fro hir. For whi that parfite steryng of love that byginneth here is even of noumber with that that schal last withouten ende in the blis of heven; for al is bot one.

Here bygynneth the on and twenty chapitre.

What meneth this: "Marye hath chosen the best?" Wheresoever the best is set or nemnyd, it asketh bifore it theese two thinges — a good and a beter, so that it be the best, and the thryd in noumber. Bot whiche ben thees thre good thinges, of the whiche Marye chees the best? Thre lyves ben they not, for Holi Chirche makith no mynde bot of two — actyve liif and contemplatyve liif; the whiche two lyves ben privily understanden in the story of this Gospel by thees two sisters, Martha and Marye — by Martha actyve, by Marye contemplatyve. Withouten one of theese two lyves may no man be saaf; and where no mo ben bot two, may no man chese the best.

Bot thof al ther be bot two lyves, nevertheless yit in theese two lyves ben thre partyes, ichone betir then other. The whiche thre, ichone by hemself, ben specyaly set in their stedes before in this writyng. For as it is seide before, the first party stondeth in good and onest bodily werkes of mercy and of charité; and this is the first degree of actyve liif, as it is seyde bifore. The secound partye of thees two lyves liggeth in good goostly meditacions of a mans owne wreichidnes, the Passion of Criste, and of the joyes of heven. The first partye is good, and this partye is the betir, for this is the secound degree of actyve liif and the first of contemplatyve liif. In this partye is contemplatyve liif and actyve liif couplid togeders in goostly sibreden and maad sistres, at the ensample of Martha and Marye. Thus highe may an actyve come to contemplacion, and no higher; bot yif it be ful seeldom and by a specyal grace. Thus

945 echid to, added. 953–54 even of noumber, identical with. 958 nemnyd, named. 964 saaf, saved. 968 stedes, places. 970–71 liggeth, lies. 974 sibreden, relationship.

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lowe may a contemplatiif com towards actyve liif, and no lower; bot yif it be ful seeldom and in grete nede.

The thrid partye of thees two lyves hangeth in this derk cloude of unknowyng, with many a privé love put to God by Himself. The first partye is good, the secounde is betir, bot the thrid is alther beste. This is the beste partye of Marye. And herfore it is plainly to wite that oure Lorde seide not: "Marye hath chosen the best liif"; for ther ben no mo lyves bot two, and of two may no man chese the best. Bot of thees two lives "Marye hath chosen," He seyde, "the best partye, the whiche schal never be take from him." The first partye and the secounde, thof al thei ben bothe good and holy, yit thei eende with this liif. For in the tother liif, as now, schal be no nede to use the werkes of mercy, ne to wepe for oure wretchednes, ne for the Passion of Criste. For than, as now, schal none mowe hungre ne thirst, ne dighe for colde, ne be seeke, ne housles, ne in prison, ne yit nede beryelles, for than schal none mowe dighe. Bot the thryd party that Marye chees, chese who bi grace is clepid to chese; or yif I sothlier schal seye, whoso is chosen therto of God, lat him listely lene therto. For that schal never be taken awey; for yif it beginne here, it schal last withouten eende.

And therfore lat the voice of oure Lorde crie on theese actyves, as yif He seide thus now for us unto hem, as He did then for Marye to Martha, "Martha, Martha!" "Actyves, actyves! make yow as besi as ye kan in the first partye and in the secound, now in the tone and now in the tother; and, yif you list right wel and fele yow disposid, in bothe two boldely. And medel yow not of contemplatyses. Ye wote not what hem eyleth. Lat hem sit in here rest and in here pley, with the thrid and the best partye of Marye."

Here bygynneth the two and twenty chapitre.

Sweet was that love bitwix oure Lorde and Marye. Moche love had sche to Hym; moche more had He to hir. For whoso wolde utterly beholde alle the contynauunce that was bitwix Hym and hir (not as a treufeler may telle, bot as the story of the Gospel wil witnes, the whiche on no wise may be fals) he schulde fynde that sche was so hertly set for to love Hym, that no thing binethe Hym might counferte hir, ne yit holde hir herte fro Hym. This is sche, that same Marye, that whan sche sought Hym

981 alther, of all. **986** the tother, the other. **988** mowe, be able; dighe, die. **989** beryelles, burial. **991** listely lene therto, with eager longing incline towards. **997** the tone, the one; you list, it pleases you. **998** boldly, in physical activities and working with the bodily senses; medel yow not, don't interfere. **1003** contynauunce, bearing, behavior. **1004** treufeler, idle gossip.

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at the sepulcre with wepyng chere wolde not be counfortyd of aungele. For whan
1010 thei spak unto hir so sweetly and so lovely, and seide: "Weep not, Marye; for whi
oure Lorde wham thou sekist is resyn, and thou schalt have Him, and se Him lyve ful
feyre amonges His disciples in Galile, as He hight," sche wolde not leve for hem, for
whi hir thought that whoso sought verrelly the kyng of aungelles, hem list not leve for
aungelles.

1015 And what more? Sekirly whoso wil loke verrelly in the story of the Gospel, he
schal fynde many wonderful poynte of parfite love wreten of hir to oure ensaumple,
and as even acordyng to the werke of this writyng, as thei had ben set and wretyn
therfore. And sekirly so were they, take whoso take may. And yif a man list for to se
in the Gospel wretyn the wonderful and the special love that oure Lorde had to hir, in
1020 persone of alle customizable synners trewly turnid and clepid to the grace of contem-
placion, he shal fynde that oure Lorde might not suffre any man or womman, ye, not
hir owne sistre, speke a worde agens hir, bot yif He answerid for hir Hymself. Ye,
and what more! He blamid Symound Leprous in his owne hous, for he thought agens
hir. This was greet love; this was passing love.

Here byginnith the thre and twenty chapitre.

1025 And trewly and we wil listely confourme oure love and oure levynge, inasmuche as
in us is by grace and by conseil, unto the love and the levynge of Mary, no doute bot
He schal answere on the same maner now for us goostly, iche day, pryvely, in the
hertes of alle thoo that outher seyn or thinken agens us. I say not bot that evermore
sum men schul sey or think sumwhat agens us, the whiles we lyve in the travaile of
1030 this liif, as thei did agens Marye. Bot I say, and we wol geve no more kepe to their
seiing, ne to their thinkyng, ne no more leve of oure goostly prývē werk for their
wordes and their thoughts, than sche did — I sey than that oure Lorde schal an-
swere hem in spirite, yif it schal be wel with hem that so seyn and so thinkyn, that
thei schul withinne fewe dayes schame with their wordes and their thoughts.

1035 And as He wol answere for us thus in spirite, so wol He stere other men in spirite
to geve us oure needful thinges that longen to this liif, as mete and clothes with alle
theese other, yif He se that we wil not leve the werke of His love for besines aboute
hem. And this I sey in confusion of their error, that seyn that it is not leveful men to

1011 hight, promised. **1011–12 for whi hir thought**, because it seemed to her. **1016 even acordyng**, exactly corresponding. **1017 therfore**, for that purpose; **take**, understand. **1019 customizable**, habitual. **1022 Symound Leprous**, Simon the Leper. **1023 passing**, exceeding. **1025 and we**, if we; **listely**, vigorously; **confourme**, model. **1030 kepe**, attention. **1031 leve of**, leave off. **1033 hem**, them. **1035 stere**, stir, incite. **1038 leveful**, legitimate.

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sette hem to serve God in contemplatyve liif, bot yif thei ben sekir bifore of their
1040 bodily nessessaryes. For thei sey that God sendeth the kow, bot not by the horne.
And trewly thei sey wrong of God as thei wel kanne. For trist stedfastly thou, what-
soever that thou be that trewly tornest thee fro the woredl unto God, that one of the
two God schal sende thee, withouten besines of thiselv: and that is, outhar habun-
daunce of nessessaries, or strengthe in body and pacience in spirite to bere nede.
1045 What thar reche whether man have? For alle comen to one in verrey contemplatyves.
And whoso is in dwere of this, outhar the devel is in his brest and revith hym the
beleve, or elles he is not yit trewly turnyd to God as he schulde be, make he it never
so queinte, ne never so holy skiles schewe theragein, whatsoever that he be.
And therfore thou that settest thee to be contemplatiif as Marye was, chese thee
1050 rather to be mekyd under the wonderful heighth and the worthines of God, the
whiche is parfite, than under thine owne wretchednes, the whiche is inparfite: that is
to sey, loke that thi specyal beholding be more to the worthines of God then to thi
wretchednes. For to theime that ben parfitely mekid no thing schal defayle, neither
bodily thing ne goostly. For whi thei have God, in whom is alle plenté; and whoso
1055 hath Him — ye, as this book telleth — him nedith noght elles in this liif.

Here bygynnith the foure and twenty chapitre.

And as it is seyde of meeknes, how that it is sotely and parfitely comprehendid in
this lityl blynde love put, when it is betyng upon this derke cloude of unknowyng,
alle other thinges put down and forgeten: so it is to understanden of alle other
1060 vertewes, and namely of charité.
For charité is not ellis to bemene to thin understandyng bot love of God for Him-
self aboven alle creatures, and of man for God even with thiself. And that in this
werke God is lovyd for Hymself and aboven alle creatures it semith ryght wel. For,
as it is seide before, that the substauce of this werke is not elles bot a nakid entente
1065 direkte unto God for Himself. A nakid entente I clepe it, for whi in this werke a par-
fite prentis askith neither relesing of peyne, ne encresing of mede, ne (shortly to
sey) nought bot Himself; insomoche that nouther he rechith ne lokith after whether
that he be in peyne or in blisse, elles that His wille be fulfyllyd that he loveth. And
thus it semith that in this werke God is parfitely loved for Hymself, and that aboven

1039 sekir, sure, certain. 1041 kanne, know. 1045 **What thar reche**, What does it matter.
1046 **dwere**, doubt; **revith**, robs of. 1047–48 **make . . . queinte**, conceive . . . ingeniously.
1048 **skiles**, reasons. 1053 **defayle**, be lacking. 1057 **sotely**, inseparably, mysteriously. 1058
blynde love put, blind thrust of love. 1061 **bemene**, signify. 1065 **direkte**, directed. 1066
mede, reward. 1067 **rechith**, cares.

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1070 alle creatures. For in this werke a parfite worcher may not suffre the mynde of the holiest creature that ever God maad comoun with hym.

1075 And that in this the secound and the lower braunche of charité unto thine even Cristen is verrelly and parfitely fulfillid, it semith by the profe. For whi in this werke a parfite worcher hath no special beholdingy unto any man by himself, whether that he be sib or fremmyd, freende or fo. For alle men think hym iliche sib unto hym, and no man fremmid. Alle men him think ben his freendes, and none his foen; insomochel that hym think alle thoo that pynen him, and done hym dissesse in this liif, thei ben his ful and his specyal freendes, and hym thinketh that he is sterid to wilne hem as moche good as he wolde to the homliest freende that he hath.

1080 **Here biginnith the five and twenty chapitre.**

1085 I say not that in this werke he schal have a specyal beholdingy to any man in this liif, whether that he be freende or fo, sib or fremmyd. For that may not be yif this werke schal parfitely be done, as it is whan alle thinges under God ben fully forȝetyn, as fallith for this werke. Bot I sey that he schal be maad so vertuous and so charitable by the vertewe of this werke, that his wille schal be afterwardes, whan he condesendith to comoun or to pray for his even Cristen — not fro alle this werk, for that may not be withouten grete synne, bot fro the height of this werk, the whiche is speedful and needful to do sumtyme, as charité askith — as specially than directe to his foo as to his freende, his fremmyd as his sib. Ye! and somtyme more to his fo then to his freende.

1090 Nevertheles in this werk he hath no leyser to loke after who is his frende or his fo, his sib or his fremmid. I say not bot he schal fele somtyme — ye! ful ofte — his affeccion more homely to one, two, or thre, then to alle thees other; for that is leveful to be for many causis, as charité askith. For soche an homly affeccion felid Criste to Jhonn, and unto Marye, and unto Petre bifore many other. Bot I say that in the tyme of this werk schal alle be iliche homly unto hym; for he schal fele than no cause bot only God. So that alle schul be lovid pleinly and nakidly for God, and as wel as himself.

1100 For as alle men weren lost in Adam, and alle men, that with werke wil witnes theirre wille of salvacion, ben savid, and scholen be, by vertewe of the Passion of only Criste — not in the same maner, bot as it were in the same maner — a soule that

1071 **comoun**, share. 1073 **by the profe**, by this argument. 1075 **sib or fremmyd**, kin or stranger; **think hym iliche**, seem to him alike. 1076 **foen**, foes. 1079 **homliest**, most intimate. 1084 **fallith**, is fitting. 1086 **comoun**, associate with; **fro**, by departing entirely from, in desisting from. 1088 **speedful**, profitable, expedient. 1093 **leveful**, legitimate.

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is parfitely affecte in this werk, and onyd thus to God in spirit, as the preof of this werk witnessith, doth that in it is to maak alle men as parfite in this werk as itself is. For right as if a lyme of oure body felith sore, alle the tother lymes ben pined and 1105 disesid therfore, or yif a lyme fare wel, alle the remenaunt ben gladid therwith: right so is it goostly of alle the limes of Holy Chirche. For Crist is oure hede, and we ben the lymes, if we be in charité; and whoso wile be a parfite dissiple of oure Lordes, him behovith streyne up his spirite in this werk goostly for the salvacion of alle his brethren and sistren in kynde, as oure Lorde did His body on the Cros. And how? Not 1110 for His freendes and His sib and His homely lovers, bot generaly for alle mankynde, withouten any special beholdyng more to one then to another. For alle that wylen leve sinne and axe mercy scholen be savid thorow the vertewe of His Passion.

And as it is seyde of meeknes and charité, so it is to understanden of alle other vertues. For alle thei ben solely comprehendid in this litil love put touchid before.

1115 Here byginnith the six and twenty chapitre.

And therfore travayle fast awhile, and bete apon this highe cloude of unknowyng, and rest sithen. Nevertheless a travayle schal he have, whoso schal use hym in this werk; ye, sekirly! and that a ful grete travayle, bot yif he have a more special grace, or elles that he have of longe tyme usid him therin.

1120 Bot I pray thee, wherin schal that travayle be? Sekirly not in that devoute steryng of love that is contynuely wrought in his wille, not by himself bot by the hande of Almighty God, the whiche is evermore redy to wirche this werk in iche a soule that is disposid therto, and that doth that in him is, and hath do longe tyme before, to able him to this werk. Bot wherin than is this travayle, I pray thee? Sekirly this traveile is 1125 al in tredyng doun of the mynde of alle the creatures that ever God maad, and in holdyng of hem under the cloude of forgetyng namyd before. In this is alle the travayle; for this is mans travayle, with help of grace. And the tother aboven — that is to sey, the steryng of love — that is the werk of only God. And therfore do on thi werk, and sekirly I behote thee it schal not fayle on Hym.

1130 Do on than fast; lat se how thou berest thee. Seest thou not how He stondeth and abideth thee? For schame! Travayle fast bot awhile, and thou schalt sone be esid of the gretnes and of the hardnes of this travayle. For thof al it be hard and streyte in the byginnynge, when thou haste no devucion, nevertheless yit after when thou hast devo-

1102 affecte, disposed. 1104–05 pined and disesid, tormented and distressed. 1114 solely, mysteriously. 1116 fast, firmly, steadfastly. 1117 sithen, afterwards; travayle, labor. 1118 sekirly, certainly, truly. 1119 usid him, accustomed himself. 1125 mynde, mental awareness. 1129 behote, promise. 1130 fast, firmly. 1132 streyte, rigorous, narrow.

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cion, it schal be maad ful restful and ful light unto thee, that bifore was ful harde; and
1135 thou schalt have outhir litil travaile or none. For than wil God worche somtyme al by
Himself, bot not ever, ne yit no longe tyme togeders, bot when Him lyst, and as Hym
list. And than wil thee thenk it mery to late Hym alone.

Than wil He sumtyme paraventure seend oute a beme of goostly light, peersyng
this cloude of unknowing that is bitwix thee and Hym, and schewe thee sum of His
1140 priveté, the whiche man may not, ne kan not, speke. Than schalt thou fele thine af-
feccion enflaumid with the fiire of His love, fer more then I kan telle thee, or may, or
wile, at this tyme. For of that werke that fallith to only God dar I not take apon me to
speke with my blabryng fleschely tongue; and schortly to say, althof I durst, I wolde
not. Bot of that werk that falleth to man, whan he felith him sterid and holpin by
1145 grace, list me wel telle thee; for therin is the lesse peril of the two.

Here biginnith the seven and twenty chapitre.

First and formest, I wil telle thee who schuld worche in this werke, and when, and
by what menes, and what discrecion thou schalt have in it. Yif thou aske me who
1150 schuld worche thus, I answer thee: alle that han forsaken the world in a trewe wille,
and therto that geven hem not to actyve liif, bot to that liif that is clepid contem-
platyve liif. Alle thoo schuld worche in this grace and in this werk, whatsoever that
thei be, whether thei have ben customizable synners or none.

Here biginnith the eight and twenty chapitre.

But if thou aske me when thei schulen wirche in this werk, then I answer thee,
1155 and I sey that not er thei have clensid theirre concience of alle theirre special dedis of
sinne done bifore, after the comoun ordinaunce of Holi Chirche.

For in this werk a soule drieth up in it al the rote and the grounde of sinne that wil
alweis leve in it after confession, be it never so besy. And therfore whoso wil
travayle in this werk, lat him first clense his concience; and sithen, when he hath
1160 done that in him is lawefuly, lat him dispose him booldly bot meekly therto. And lat
him think that he hath ful longe ben holden therfro; for this is that werk in the whiche
a soule schuld travaile alle his liiftyme, thof he had never sinnid deedly.

And the whiles that a soule is wonyng in this deedly flesche, it schal evermore se

1137 **mery**, delightful. 1140 **priveté**, mystery. 1143 **blabryng**, babbling; **althof I durst**, even
if I dared. 1147 **formest**, foremost. 1152 **customable**, habitual. 1158 **leve**, live; **besy**, assiduous.
1159 **sithen**, afterwards, then. 1160 **lawefuly**, in accordance with the practice enjoined.
1163 **wonyng**, dwelling.

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and fele this combros cloude of unknowyng bitwix him and God. And not only that,
1165 bot in pyne of the original sinne it schal evermore see and fele that somme of alle the
creatures that ever God maad, or somme of their werkes, wilens evermore prees in
mynde bitwix him and God. And this is the rightwise dome of God, that man, when
he had sovereynté and lordschip of alle other creatures, forthi that he wilfuly maad
him underloute to the steryng of his sojettes, leyyng the bidding of God and his
1170 maker, that right so after whan he wolde fulfille the bidding of God, he see and fele
that alle the creatures that schuld be bineeth him proudly prees aboven hym, bitwix
him and his God.

Here biginnith the nine and twenty chapitre.

And therfore, whoso coveitith to come to clennes that he lost for synne, and to
1175 wynne to that welthe ther alle wo wantith, him bihovith bidingly to travayle in this
werke, and suffre the pyne therof, whatsoever that he be, whether he have ben a
customable sinner or none.

Alle men han travayle in this werke, bothe synners and innocentes that never syn-
nyd greetly. Bot fer gretter travayle haven thoo that have ben synners then they that
1180 have ben none; and that is greet skyle.

Nevertheless, oftymes it befallith that somme, that have ben orrible and customable
synners, comen sonner to the perfeccion of this werk then thoo that ben none. And
this is the merciful myracle of oure Lorde, that so specyaly gevith His grace, in
wondryng of alle this wored. Now trewly I hope that on Domesday schal be fayre,
1185 when that God schal be seen cleerly and alle His giftes. Thanne schal somme that
now ben dyspisid and sette at lytil or nought as comon synners, and paraventure
somme that now ben horrible synners, sitte ful seemly with seyntes in his sight; when
somme of thoo that semen now ful holy and ben worschepid of men as aungelles,
1190 and somme of thoo yit paraventure that never yit synned deedly, schul sitten ful sory
amonges helle calves.

Herby maist thou see that no man schuld be demyd of other here in this liif, for
good ne for yvel that they do. Nevertheless dede may levefully be demyd, bot not the
men, whether thei ben good or yvel.

1167 **rightwise**, just. 1169 **underloute**, subservient; **steryng**, prompting. 1175 **wantith**, is
lacking; **bihovith**, it is necessary; **bidingly**, patiently. 1180 **greet skyle**, very reasonable.
1184 **fayre**, just. 1188 **worschepid**, honored. 1189 **deedly**, mortally. 1190 **helle calves**,
spawn of hell, devils. 1192 **dede**, action; **levefully**, legitimately.

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Here byginnith the thritty chapitre.

1195 Bot, I preye thee, of whom schal mens dedis be demyd? Sekirly of hem that han power and cure of theirre soules, other geven in aperte by the statute and the ordinaunce of Holy Chirche, or elles prively in spirite at the specyal steryng of the Holy Goost in parfite charité. Iche a man beware that he presume not to take apon hym to blame and reprove other mens defautes, bot yif he fele verrelly that he be sterid of the Holy Goost withinne in his werke; for elles may he ful lightly erre in his domes. And therfore beware; deme thiself as thee list, bitwix thee and thi God or thi goostly fader, and lat other men allone.

Here biginnith the on and thritty chapitre.

1205 And fro the tyme that thou felist that thou hast done that in thee is lawefuly to amende thee at the dome of Holy Chirche, then schalt thou sette thee scharply to worche in this werk. And than, yif it so be that thi fordone specyal dedes wil alweis prees in thi mynde bitwix thee and thi God, or any newe thought or steryng of any synne outhier, thou schalt stalworthly step aboven it with a fervent steryng of love, and treed hem down under thi fete. And fonde to cover hem with a thicke cloude of forgetyng, as thei never had ben don in this liif of thee, ne of other man outhier. And yif thei ofte rise, ofte put them doun and, schortly to sey, as ofte as thei rise, as ofte put them doun. And yif thee think that the travyle be grete, thou mayst seek sleightes and wiles and privé sotiltees of goostly sleightes to put hem awey, the whiche sleightes ben betir lernyd of God by the profe then of any man in this liif.

1215 **Here byginnith the two and thritty chapitre.**

Nevertheles sumwhat of this sotylté schal I telle thee, as me think. Prove thou, and do betir yif thou betir maist.

1220 Do that in thee is to lat as thou wist not that thei prees so fast apon thee, bitwix thee and thi God. And fonde to loke as it were over theirre schuldres, seching another thing; the whiche thing is God, enclosid in a cloude of unknowyng. And yif thou do thus, I trowe that withinne schort tyme thou schalt be esid of thi travayle. I trowe that and this sleight be wel and trewly conceyvid, it is not elles bot a longing desire unto

1196 **in aperte**, publicly. 1201 **domes**, judgments; **deme**, judge. 1206 **fordone**, previously committed. 1208 **stalworthly**, vigorously. 1209 **fonde**, strive. 1210 **outhier**, either. 1213 **sleightes**, devices; **wiles**, wiles. 1214 **by the profe**, by experience. 1219 **seching**, seeking. 1221 **esid**, satisfied.

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God, to fele Hym and see Hym as it may be here. And soche a desire is charité; and it deservith always to be esid.

1225 Another sleight ther is; prove thou yif thou wilt. When thou felist that thou maist on no wise put hem doun, koure thou doun under hem as a cheitif and a coward overcomen in batayle, and think that it is bot a foly to thee to stryve any lenger with hem; and therfore thou yeeldest thee to God in the handes of thin enmyes. And fele than thiself as thou were fordone for ever. Take good kepe of this sleight, I prey thee; for me think in the profe of this sleight thou schuldest melt al to watre. And sekirly, me think, and this sleight be solely conceyvid, it is not elles bot a trewe knowyng and a felyng of thiself as thou arte, a wrecche and a filthe, fer wers then noughe, the whiche knowyng and felyng is meeknes. And this meeknes deserveth to have God Himself mightely descendyng to venge thee of thine enmyes, for to take thee up and cherischingly drie thine goostly ighen, as the fader doth the childe that is in poynte to perische under the mouthes of wilde swyne or wode biting beres.

Here byginnyth the thre and thritty chapitre.

1240 Moo sleights telle I thee not at this tyme; for and thou have grace to fele the profe of theese, I trow that thou schalt cun betir lerne me then I thee. For thof al it schuld be thus, trewly yit me think that I am ful fer therfro. And therfore I preye thee help me, and do thou for thee and for me.

1245 Do on than, and travayle fast awhile, I preie thee; and suffre meekly the pyne, yif thou mayst not sone wynne to theese sleights. For trewly it is thi purgatory. And than whan thi pyne is al passid, and thi sleights ben goven of God and graciously getyn in custume, than it is no doute to me that thou ne arte clensid not only of synne, bot also of the pyne of synne. I mene of the pyne of thi special fordone synnes, and not of the pyne of the original synne. For that pyne schal always last on thee to thi deeth day, be thou never so besi. Nevertheless it schal bot lityl dere thee, in rewarde of this pyne of thi specyal synnes; and yit schalt thou not be withoutyn grete travayle. For oute of this oryginal synne wil alday sprynge newe and fresche sterynges of synne; the whiche thee behovith alday to smyte doun, and be besy to schere awey with a scharpe doubleggid dreedful swerde of discretion. And herby mayst thou see and leerne that ther is no sothfast sekynnes, ne yit no trewe rest in this liif.

1226 koure . . . doun, cower; **cheitif**, caitiff, captive. **1229 fordone**, destroyed. **1231 solely**, penetratingly. **1232 filthe**, defilement, vile creature; **fer**, far. **1235 ighen**, eyes. **1236 wode**, mad. **1239 cun**, know how to. **1242 fast**, hard, steadfastly; **pyne**, pain. **1244–45 graciously getyn in custume**, acquired by grace as a habit. **1246 fordone**, previously committed. **1248 besi**, persevering; **dere**, afflict, harm. **1248–49 in rewarde of**, in comparison with.

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1255 Nevertheles, herfore schalt thou not go bac, ne yit be over-ferd of thi faylyng. For and it so be that thou mayst have grace to distroye the pyne of thin fordone specyal dedes — in the maner beforeseide, or betyr if thou betyr mayst — sekir be thou that the pyne of the orygynal synne, or elles the newe sterynges of synne that ben to comen, scholen bot ryght lityl mowe dere thee.

Here bygynnyth the foure and thritty chapitre.

1260 And yif thou askest me by what menes thou schalt com to this werk, I beseche Almighty God of His grete grace and His grete curtesye to teche thee Hymself. For trewly I do thee wel to wyten that I can not telle thee. And that is no wonder. For whi that is the werk of only God, specyaly wrought in what soule that Hym likith, withoutyn any deseert of the same soule. For withoutyn it no seynte ne none aungel can thenk to desire it. And I trowe that oure Lorde as specyaly and as ofte — ye! and more specyaly and more ofte — wil vouchesaaf to worche this werk in hem that have ben customizable synners, then in somme other that never grevyd Hym greetly in comparison of hem. And this wil He do, for He wil be seen almercyful and almygthy; and for He wil be seen to worche as Hym lyst, where Him lyst, and when Hym lyst.

1265 And yit He gevith not this grace, ne worcheth not this werk, in ani soule that is unable thereto. And yit ther is no soule withoutyn this grace, abil to have this grace, noo, whether it be a synner soule or an innocent soule. For neither it is goven for innocence, ne withholden for synne. Take good kepe that I sey withholden, and not withdrawnen. Bewar with error here, I preye thee; for ever the nere men touchen the trewhth, more war men behoveth to be of error. I meen bot wel. Yif thou canst not conseyve it, legge it bi thi syde tyl God come and teche thee. Do then so, and hurt thee not.

1270 Bewar with pride, for it blasfemith God in his giftes, and booldenith synners. Were thou verrelly meek thou schuldest fele of this werk as I sey: that God gevith it freely withouten any desert. The condicion of this werk is soche, that the presence therof ablith a soule for to have it and for to fele it. And that abilnes may no soule have withoutyn it. The abilnes to this werk is onyd to the selve werk, withoutyn departryng; so that whoso felith this werk is abil therto, and elles none; insomochel, that withoutyn this werk a soule is as it were deed, and can not coveite it ne desire it. For as moche as thou wylnest it and desirrest it, so mochel hast thou of it, and no more ne

1255 and, if. 1258 mowe dere, be able to harm. 1262 wyten, know. 1266 vouchesaaf, grant. 1270 lyst, pleases. 1277 legge it bi thi syde, lay it aside. 1279 Bewar with, Be on guard against. 1283 onyd, united, “one-ed.” 1283–84 departryng, distinction.

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- no lesse; and yit is it no wil, ne no desyre, bot a thing thou wost never what, that sterith thee to wilne and desire thou wost never what. Reche thee never thof thou wite no more, I preye thee; bot do forth ever more and more, so that thou be ever doyng.
- 1290 And, yif I schal schortlyer sey, lat that thing do with thee and lede thee wherso it list. Lat it be the worcher, and thou bot the suffrer; do bot loke apon it, and lat it alone. Medel thee not therwith as thou woldest help it, for drede lest thou spille al. Be thou bot the tre, and lat it be the wright; be thou bot the hous, and lat it be the hosbonde wonyng therin. Be blynde in this tyme, and schere awey covetyse of knowyng, for it wil more let thee than help thee. It suffisith inowgh unto thee that thou fele thee steryd likyngly with a thing thou wost never what, ellys that in thi steryng thou have no specyal thought of any thing under God, and that thin entent be nakidly directe unto God.
- 1295 1300 And yif it be thus, trist than stedfastly that it is only God that sterith thi wyl and thi desyre, pleynly by Hymself, withouten mene outhier on His party or on thin. And be not feerd for the devel, for he may not com so neer. He may never come to styrre a mans wil, bot occasyoneely, and by a fer mene, be he never so sotyl a devil. For sufficiently and withouten mene may no good aungel stire thi wil; ne, schortly to sey, no thing bot only God.
- 1305 So that thou mayst conceyve here by theese wordes sumwhat — bot moche more cleerly by the profe — that in this werk men schul use no menes, ne yit men mowe not com therto with menes. Alle good menes hangen upon it, and it on no mene; ne no mene may lede therto.
- 1310 **Here byginnith the five and thritty chapitre.**
- 1315 Nevertheles menes ther ben in the whiche a contemplatiif prentys schuld be occupied, the whiche ben theese: Lesson, Meditacion, and Oryson. Or elles to thin understandyng thei mowe be clepid: Redyng, Thinkyng, and Preiing. Of theese thre thou schalt fynde wretyn in another book of another mans werk moche betyr then I can telle thee; and therfore it nedeth not here to telle thee of the qualitees of hem. Bot this may I telle thee: these thre ben so couplid togodir, that unto hem that ben biginners and profiters — bot not to hem that be parfite, ye, as it may be here — thinkyng may not goodly be getyn withoutyn reding or heryng comyng before. Alle is one in
- 1288 Reche,** Care. **1292 suffrer,** one acted upon. **1294 wright,** carpenter. **1295 hosbonde,** master of the house, husband. **1296 let,** hinder. **1297 likyngly,** pleasantly, delectably. **1299 directe,** directed. **1301 mene,** intermediary. **1307 menes,** helpful activities. **1317 profiters,** those making progress.

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maner, redyng and heryng; clerkes redyn on booke, and lewid men redyn on
1320 clerkes, whan thei here hem preche the worde of God. Ne preier may not goodly be
getyn in bigynners and profiters withoutyn thinkyng comyng bifore. See by the preof
in this same cours.

Goddes worde, outhir wretyn or spokyn, is licnid to a mirour. Goostly, the ighe of
1325 thi soule is thi reson; thi concience is thi visage goostly. And right as thou seest that
yif a foule spot be in thi bodily visage, the ighe of the same visage may not see that
spotte, ne wite wher it is, withoutyn a myrour or a teching of another than itself: right
so it is goostly. Withouten redyng or heryng of Godes worde, it is impossible to mans
understandyng that a soule that is bleendif in custom of synne schuld see the foule
spot in his concyence.

1330 And so folowyn, whan a man seeth in a bodily or goostly myrour, or wote by
other mens techyng, wheraneintes the foule spot is on his visage, outhir bodily or
goostly, than at erst, and none er, he rennith to the welle to wasche hym. Yif this spot
be any specyal synne, than is this welle Holy Chirche, and this water confession,
1335 with the circumstaunces. Yif it be bot a blynde rote and a steryng of synne, than is
this welle merciful God, and this water preyer, with the circumstaunces.

And thus maist thou se that no thinkyng may goodly be getyn in byginners and
profiters withoutyn redyng or heryng comyng before, ne preyng withouten thinkyng.

Here bygynnith the six and thritty chapitre.

1340 But it is not so with hem that contynuely worchen in the werk of this book. For
theire meditacions ben as thei were sodein conseites and blynde felynges of theire
owne wreichidnes, or of the goodnes of God, withoutyn any menes of redyng or
heryng comyng before, and withoutyn any specyal beholdingyng of any thing under
God. Thees sodeyn conseytes and thees blynde felynges ben sonner lernyd of God
then of man.

1345 I maad no force, thof thou haddest nowondays none other meditacions of thin
owne wreichidnes, ne of the goodnes of God — I mene yif thou fele thee thus steryd
by grace and by counseyl — bot soche as thou mayst have in this worde *synne* and in
this worde *God*, or in soche other, whiche as the list; not brekyng ne expounyng
thees wordes with coryousté of witte, in beholdingyng after the qualitees of thees
wordes, as thou woldest by that beholdingyng encrees thi devucion. I trowe it schuld

1319 redyn on . . . redyn on, read . . . listen to; **lewid**, uneducated. **1322 cours**, procedure.
1328 bleendif, blinded. **1331 wheraneintes**, whereabouts. **1332 at erst, and none er**, at first
and not before. **1334 blynde**, secret, obscure. **1340 conseites**, understandings. **1345 maad no
force, thof**, would not care if. **1346 mene**, focus intently on, mean. **1348 the list**, pleases you.

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never be so in this caas and in this werk. Bot holde hem alle hole theese wordes; and mene synne a lump, thou wost never what, none other thing bot thiself. Me think that in this blynde beholdyng of synne, thus conjelyd in a lumpe (none other thing than thiself) it schuld be no nede to bynde a woder thing then thou schuldest be in this tyme. And yit, paraventure, whoso lokid apon thee schuld think thee ful sobirly disposit in body, withoutyn any chaunging of contenaunce; bot sittyng, or going, or liggyng, or lenyng, or stondyng, or knelyng, whether thou were in a ful sad restfulnes.

Here biginnyth the seven and thrity chapitre.

1360 And right as the meditacions of hem that contynouely worchen in this grace and in this werk risen sodenly withoutyn any menes, right so don theire preiers. I mene of theire specyal preiers, not of thoo preiers that ben ordeynid of Holy Chirche. For thei that ben trewe worchers in this werk, thei worschip no preier so moche; and therfore thei do hem in the fourme and in the statute that thei ben ordeynid of holy faders before us. Bot theire specyal preiers risen evermore sodenly unto God, withoutyn any meenes or any premeditacion in special comyng before, or going therwith.

1365 1370 And yif thei ben in wordes, as thei ben bot seldom, than ben thei bot in ful fewe wordes; ye, and in ever the fewer the betir. Ye, and yif it be bot a lityl worde of o silable, me think it betir then of to, and more acordingy to the werk of the spiryte; sithen it so is that a goostly worcher in this werk schulde evermore be in the highest and the sovereynest pointe of the spirit. That this be soth, se by ensaumple in the cours of kynde. A man or a womman, affraied with any sodeyn chaunce of fir, or of mans deeth, or what elles that it be, sodeynly in the height of his speryt he is drevyn upon hast and upon nede for to crie or for to prey after help. Ye, how? Sekirly not in many woordes ne yit in o woorde of two silabes. And whi is that? For hym thinketh to longe tariing, for to declare the nede and the werk of his spirit. And therfore he brestith up hidously with a grete spirit, and cryeth bot a litil worde of o silable, as is this worde *fir* or this worde *oute*.

1375 1380 And right as this lityl worde *fir* sterith rather and peerseth more hastely the eren of the herers, so doth a lityl worde of o sylable, whan it is not only spoken or thought, bot prively ment in the depnes of spirit, the whiche is the height (for in goostlynes alle is one, height and depnes, lengthe and brede). And rather it peersith the eres of

1354 **woder**, madder. 1356 **contenaunce**, bearing, behavior. 1357 **liggyng**, lying; **sad**, steadfast. 1363 **worschip**, honor. 1369 **to**, two. 1372 **affraied**, frightened. 1377 **brestith up hidously**, bursts out terrifyingly. 1382 **brede**, breadth.

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Almyghty God than doth any longe sauter unmyndfuly mumlyd in the teeth. And herfore it is wretyn that schort preier peersith heven.

1385 **Here biginnyth the eight and thritty chapitre.**

And whi peersith it heven, this lityl schort preier of o litil silable? Sikirly for it is preyed with a fulle spirite, in the height and in the depnes, in the lengthe and in the breed of his spirit that preieth it. In the height it is, for it is with al the might of the spirit. In the depnes it is, for in this lityl silable ben contyned alle the wittis of the spirit. In the lengthe it is, for might it ever fele as it felith, ever wolde it crie as it crieth. In the brede it is, for it wilnith the same to alle other that it wilnith to itself. In this tyme it is that a soule hath comprehendid, after the lesson of Seynte Poule, with alle seyntes — not fully bot in maner and in partie, as it is acordyng unto this werk —whiche is the lengthe and the breed, the height and the depnes of Everlastyng and 1390 Allovely, Almighty and Alle-witty God. The everlastyngnes of God is His lengthe; His love is His breed; His might is His height; and His wisdam is His depnes. No wonder thof a soule, that is thus nigh confourmyd bi grace to the ymage and the licnes of God, his maker, be sone herde of God. Ye, thof it be a ful synful soule — the whiche 1395 is to God as it were an enmye — and it might thorow grace com to for to crye soche a lityl silable in the height and the depnes, the lengthe and the breed of his spirit, yit he scholde for the hidous noise of this crye be alweis herde and holpen of God.

Se by ensaumple. He that is thi deedly enmye, and thou here him so afraied that he crye in the height of his spirit this lityl worde *fir*, or this worde *oute*: yit, withoutyn any beholdyng to hym for he is thin enmye, bot for pure pité in thin herte stirid and reisid with the doelfulnes of this crie, thou risist up — ye! thof it be aboute midwintirs night — and helpist hym to slecke his *fir*, or for to styll hym and rest hym in hys diseise. A, Lorde! sithen a man may be maad so mercyful in grace, to have so moche mercy and so moche pité of his enmye, not agenstonding his enmité, what pité and what mercy schal God have than of a goostly crye in soule, maad and wrought in the height and the depnes, the lengthe and the breed of his spirit, the whiche hath al by kynde, that man hath by grace, and moche more? Sekirly withoutyn comparison moche more mercy wil he have; sithen so is that that thing that is so had by kynde is nerer to iche a thing then that the whiche is had by grace.

1383 **sauter**, psalter, a portion of psalms; **mumlyd**, mumbled. 1389–90 **wittis of the spirit**, spiritual intelligence. 1395 **Alle-witty**, omniscient. 1405 **doelfulnes**, anguish. 1406 **slecke**, extinguish, slake. 1408 **not agenstonding**, notwithstanding.

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Here bigynnyth the nine and thritty chapitre.

- 1415 And therfore it is to preie in the height and the depnes, the lengthe and the brede of oure spirit. And that not in many wordes, bot in a lityl worde of o silable.
And what schal this worde be? Sekyrllyche soche a worde as is best accordyng unto the propirté of preier. And what worde is that? Lat us first see what preier is propirly in itself, and therafter we mowe clearerlier knowe what worde wil best acorde to the propirté of preier.
- 1420 Preyer in itself propirly is not elles bot a devoute entent directe unto God, for getyng of goodes and remowyng of yvelles.
And than, sithen it so is that alle yvelles ben comprehendid in synne, outhier by cause or by beyng, lat us therfore, whan we wyl ententify preie for remowyng of yvelles, outhier sey or think or mene nougnt elles, ne no mo wordes, bot this lityl worde *synne*. And yif we wil ententify preie for getyng of goodes, lat us crie, outhier with worde or with thought or with desire, nougnt elles, ne no mo wordes, bot this worde *God*. For whi in God ben alle goodes, bothe by cause and by beyng.
- 1425 Have no merveile whi I sette thees two wordes forby alle other. For and I couthe any schorter wordes, so fully comprehendyng in hem alle goodes and alle yvelles, as thees two wordes don, or yif I had be lernyd of God to take any other wordes outhier, I wolde than have taken hem and lefte thees; and so I rede that thou do. Stody thou not for no wordes, for so schuldest thou never come to thi purpose ne to this werk, for it is never getyn by stody, bot al only by grace. And therfore take thou none other wordes to preie in — althof I sete thees here — bot soche as thou arte sterid of God for to take. Nevertheless, yif God stire thee to take thees, I rede not that thou leve hem — I mene yif thou schalt preie in wordes, and elles not; for whi thei ben ful schorte wordes.
- 1430 Bot althof the schortnes of preier be greetly comedid here, nevertheless the oftnes of preier is never the rather refreynid. For as it is seide before, it is preied in the lengthe of the spirite; so that it schuld never sees tyl the tyme were that it had fully getyn that that it longid after. Ensaumple of this have we in a man or a womman affraied in the maner beforeseide. For we see wel that thei seese never criing on this litil worde *oute*, or this lityl worde *fir*, er the tyme be that thei have in greet party getyn help of theirre angre.
- 1435
- 1440
- 1445

1418 propirté, essential characteristic. 1421 directe, directed. 1422 remowyng, removing. 1424 ententify, wholeheartedly. 1429 forby, in preference to; couthe, knew. 1432 Stody, study, cast about. 1439 oftnes, frequency. 1440 never the rather, no more for that. 1445 angre, affliction.

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Here bigynnith the fourty chapitre.

Do thou, on the same maner, fille thi spirit with the goostly bemenyng of this worde *synne*, and withoutyn any specyal beholdingy unto any kynde of synne, whether it be venial or deedly: pryde, wraththe or envy, covetyse, slewth, glotenie or lecherye. What thar reche in contemplatives what synne that it be, or how mochel a synne that it be? For alle synne hem thinkyth — I mene for the tyme of this werk — iliche greet in hemself, when the leest synne departeth hem fro God, and letteth hem of here goostly pees.

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1455
1460
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1470
1475

And fele synne a lumpe, thou wost never what, bot none other thing than thiself. And crye than goostly ever upon one: “Synne, synne synne; oute, oute, oute!” This goostly crie is betyr lernid of God by the proef then of any man by worde. For it is best whan it is in pure spirit, withoutyn specyal thought or any pronounsyng of worde; bot yif it be any seeldom tyme, when for habundaunce of spiryt it brestith up into worde, so that the body and the soule ben bothe fillid with sorrow and kumbryng of synne.

On the same maner schalt thou do with this lityl worde *God*. Fille thi spirit with the goostly bemenyng of it withoutyn any specyal beholdingy to any of His werkes whether thei be good, betir, or alther best, bodily or goostly — or to any vertewe that may be wrought in mans soule by any grace, not lokyng after whether it be meeknes or charité, pacyence or abstynence, hope, feith, or sobirnes, chastité or wilful poverté. What thar reche in contemplatyves? For alle vertewes thei fynden and felyn in God; for in Hym is alle thing, bothe by cause and by beyng. For hem think and thei had God, thei had alle good; and therfore thei coveyte nothing with specyal beholdingy, bot only good God. Do thou on the same maner, as forth as thou maist by grace; and mene God al, and al God, so that nought worche in thi witte and in thi wile, bot only God.

And forthi that ever the whiles thou levyst in this wrechid liif, thee behoveth always fele in som partye this foule stynkyng lump of synne, as it were onyd and congelid with the substauce of thi beyng, therfore schalt thou chaungabely mene thees two wordes — *synne* and *God*: with this general knowyng: that and thou haddest God, then schuldest thou lacke synne, and mightest thou lacke synne, then schuldest thou have God.

1447 bemenyng, significance. **1450 What thar reche**, What does it matter. **1453 here goostly pees**, their spiritual peace. **1459 kumbryng**, burden. **1466 What thar reche**, What does it matter. **1474 congelid**, coalesced; **chaungabely**, alternately. **1475 and**, if.

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Here bigynnyth on and fourty chapitre.

1480 And furthermore, yif thou aske me what discrecion thou schalt have in this werk, than I answer thee and sey: "Ryght none!" For in alle thin other doynges thou schalt have discrecion, as in etyng and in drynkyng, and in slepyng, and in kepyng of thi body fro outrageous colde or hete, and in longe preiing or redyng, or in comounyng in speche with thin even-Crysten. In alle thees schalt thou kepe discrecion, that thei be nouther to mochel ne to lityl. Bot in this werk schalt thou holde no mesure; for I wolde that thou schuldest never seese of this werk the whiles thou levyst.

1485 I sey not that thou schalt mowe ever contynow therin iliche fresche; for that may not be. For sumtyme seeknes and other unordeind disposicions in body and in soule, with many other needfulnes to kynde, wol let thee ful mochel, and oft tymes drawe thee doun fro the height of this worching. Bot I sey that thou schuldest evermore have it outhier in ernest or in game; that is to sey, outhier in werk or in wille. And therfore for Godes love beware with seeknes as moche as thou maist goodly, so that thou be not the cause of thi febilnes, as forth as thou maist. For I telle thee trewly that this werk asketh a ful greet restfulnes, and a ful hole and a clene disposicion, as wele in body as in soule.

1490 1495 And therfore for Godes love governe thee discreetly in body and in soule, and gete thee thin hele as mochel as thou mayst. And yif seeknes come agens thi power, have pacyence and abide meekly Goddes mercy; and al is than good inowgh. For I telle thee trewly that oftymes pacyence in seeknes, and in othere diverse tribulacions, plesith God moche more then any likyng devocyon that thou mayst have in thi hele.

1500 **Here biginnith the two and fourty chapitre.**

1505 But paraventure thou askest me how thou schalt governe thee discreetly in mete, and in slepe, and in alle thees other. And herto I think to answer thee right schortli: "Gete that thou gete mayst." Do this werk evermore withoutyn cesyng and withoutyn discrecion, and thou schalt wel kun beginne and ceese in alle thin other werkes with a grete discrecion. For I may not trowe that a soule contynowyng in this werk night and day withoutyn discrecion schuld mowe erre in any of thees outward doinges; and elles me think that he schuld alweis erre.

And therfore and I might gete a wakyng and a besi beholdyng to this goostly werk

1483 **even-Crysten**, fellow Christian. 1486 **iliche**, alike. 1488 **let**, hinder. 1491 **goodly**, diligently. 1493 **hole**, whole. 1496 **hele**, health. 1499 **likyng**, pleasant. 1501 **paraventure**, possibly. 1504 **kun**, know how to. 1506 **mowe**, be able (to). 1508 **and I**, if I.

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1510 withinne in my soule, I wolde than have a rechelesnes in etyng and in drynkyng, in sleping and in spekyng, and in alle myn outward doynges. For sekirly I trowe I schuld rather com to discrecion in hem by soche a rechelesnes than by any besy beholding to the same thinges, as I wolde bi that beholdyng set a merke and a mesure in hem. Trewly I schuld never bryng it so aboute for ought that I couth do or sey. Sey what men seye wil, and lat the preof witnes. And therfore lift up thin hert with a blynde steryng of love; and mene now synne, and now God. God woldest thou have, and synne woldest thou lacke. God wanteth thee; and synne arte thou sekir of. Now good God help thee, for now hast thou need!

1515

Here biginnith the thre and fourty chapitre.

1520 Look that nought worche in thi wit ne in thi wil bot only God. And fonde for to felle alle wetyng and felyng of ought under God, and treed alle doun ful fer under the cloude of forgetyng. And thou schalt understande that thou schalt not only in this werk forgete alle other creatures then thiself, or their dedes or thine, bot also thou schalt in this werk forgete bothe thiself and also thi dedes for God, as wel as alle other creatures and their dedes. For it is the condicion of a parfite lover, not only to love that thing that he loveth more then himself, bot also in maner for to hate himself for that thing that he lovith.

1525

Thus schalt thou do with thiself: thou schalt lothe and be wary with alle that thing that worcheth in thi witte and in thi wil, bot yif it be only God. For whi sekirly elles, whatsoever that it be, it is bitwix thee and thi God. And no wonder thof thou lothe and hate for to think on thiself, when thou schalt alweis fele synne a foule stynkyng lumpe, thou wost never what, bitwix thee and thi God: the whiche lumpe is none other thing than thiself. For thee schal think it onyd and congelid with the substaunce of thi beyng, ye, as it were withoutyn departyng.

1530 And therfore breek doun alle wetyng and felyng of alle maner of creatures; bot most besily of thiself. For on the wetyng and the felyng of thiself hangith wetyng and felyng of alle other creatures; for in rewarde of it, alle other creatures ben lightly forgetyn. For, and thou wilt besily set thee to the preof, thou schalt fynde, when thou hast forgotten alle other creatures and alle their werkes, ye, and therto alle thin owne werkes, that ther schal leve yit after, bitwix thee and thi God, a nakid weting and a

1535

1509 rechelesnes, carelessness, indifference. **1512 merke**, limit. **1513 couth**, could. **1516 wanteth**, misses. **1519 fonde**, try. **1520 felle**, put down; **treed**, trample. **1528 bot**, unless. **1532 thee schal think**, it shall seem to you. **1533 departyng**, distinction. **1534 wetyng**, knowing. **1536 in rewarde of**, in comparison with.

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1540 felyng of thin owne beyng, the whiche wetyng and felyng behovith alweis be distroyed er the tyme be that thou fele sothfastly the perfeccyon of this werk.

Here biginnith the foure and fourty chapitre.

Bot now thou askist me how thou maist distroie this nakid wetyng and felyng of thin owen beyng. For paraventure thee think that and it were distroyed, alle other lettynges were distroyed, and yif thou thinkist thus, thou thinkist right trewly. Bot to this I answer thee, and I sey that withoutyn a ful specyal grace ful frely goven of God and therto a ful acordyng abilnes to resseyve this grace on thi partye, this nakid wetyng and felyng of thi beyng may on no wise be destroyed.

And this abilnes is not elles bot a stronge and a deep goostly sorow. Bot in this sorow nedeth thee to have discrecion on this maner: thou schalt beware in the tyme of this sorow that thou neither to rudely streyne thi body ne thi spirit, bot sit ful styll, as it were in a slepyng sleight, al forsobbid and forsonken in sorow. This is trewe sorow; this is parfite sorow; and wel were hym that might wynne to this sorow.

Alle men han mater of sorow, bot most specyal he felith mater of sorow that wote and felith that he is. Alle other sorowes ben unto this in comparison bot as it were gamen to ernest. For he may make sorow earnestly that wote and felith not onli what he is, bot that he is. And whoso felid never this sorow, he may make sorow, for whi he felid yit never parfite sorow.

This sorow, when it is had, clensth the soule, not only of synne, bot also of peyne that he hath deservid for synne. And therto it makith a soule abil to resseive that joye, the whiche revith fro a man alle wetyng and felyng of his beyng. This sorow, yif it be trewly conseyyid, is ful of holy desire; and elles might never man in this liif abide it ne bere it. For ne were it that a soule were sumwhat fed with a maner of counforte of his right worching, elles schuld he not mow bere the pyne that he hath of the wetyng and felyng of his beyng. For as ofte as he wolde have a trewe wetyng and a felyng of his God in purtee of spirit, as it may be here, and sithen felith that he may not — for he findeth evermore his wetyng and his felyng as it were occupied and fillyd with a foule stinkyng lumpe of himself, the whiche behoveth alweis be hatid and be dispisid and forsaken, if he schal be Goddes parfite dissiple, lernid of Hymself in the mount of perfeccion — as ofte he goth ni wood for sorow; insomochel, that he wepit and weilith, strivith, cursith, and banneth, and, schortly to sey, hym thinkith that he berith

1544 paraventure thee think, possibly it seems to you. **1544–45 lettynges**, hindrances. **1551 rudely**, violently. **1552 slepyng sleight**, simulation of sleep, sleeping strategem; **forsobbid**, exhausted with sobbing; **forsonken**, plunged deeply. **1556 wote**, knows. **1561 revith**, robs. **1564 mow**, be able. **1570 ni wood**, nearly insane. **1571 banneth**, curses.

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so hevy a birthen of hymself that he rechith never what worth of hym, so that God were plesid. And yit in al this sorrow he desireth not to unbe, for that were develles woodnes and despite unto God. Bot hym listith right wel be; and he menith ful hertly thankyng to God for the worthines and the gift of his beyng, thof al that he desire unsesingly for to lakke the wetyng and the felyng of his beyng.

This sorrow and this desire behovith iche a soule have and fele in itself, outher in this maner or in another, as God vouchethsaaf for to lerne to His goostly disciples, after His weelwyllyng and theire acordyng abylnes in body and soule, in degré and compleccion, er the tyme be that thei mowe parfitely be onid unto God in parfite charité — soche as may be had here yif God vouchethsaaf.

Here biginnith the five and fourty chapitre.

Bot o thing I telle thee: that in this werk may a yong disciple, that hath not yit ben wel used and provid in goostly worching, ful lightly be disceyvid, and, bot he be sone war and have grace to leve of and meek hym to counsel, paraventure be distroied in his bodily mightes, and falle into fantasie in his goostly wittes. And alle this is longe of pride and of fleschlynes and curiousté of witte.

And on this maner may this disceite befalle. A yong man or a womman, newe set to the scole of devocion, hereth this sorrow and this desire be red and spokyn, how that a man schal lift up his herte unto God, and unseesingly desire for to fele the love of here God. And as fast in a curiousté of witte thei conceyve thees wordes not goostly, as thei ben ment, bot fleschly and bodily, and travaylen theire fleschly hertes outrageously in their brestes. And what for lackyng of grace, that thei deserven, and pride and curiousté in hemself, thei streyne here veynes and here bodily mightes so beestly and so rudely, that withinne schort tyme thei fallen outher into werynes and a manner of unlisty febilnes in body and in soule, the whiche makith hem to wende oute of hemself and seke sum fals and sum veyne fleschly and bodily counforte withoutyn, as it were for recreacion of body and of spirite. Or elles, yif thei falle not in this, elles thei deserve — for goostly blyndnes and for fleschly chaufyng of their compleccion in their bodily brestis in the tyme of this fenid beestly and not goostly worchyng — for to have their brestes outher enflaumid with an unkyndely hete of compleccion, causid of misrewlyng of their bodies or of this fenid worching, or elles thei conceyve a fals hete wrought by the feende, their goostly enmye, causid of

1572 *rechith*, cares; **worth**, becomes. **1578** *lerne*, teach. **1579** *weelwyllyng*, goodwill. **1585** **war**, on guard; **leve of**, leave off; **paraventure**, possibly. **1587** *longe of*, on account of. **1593** **deserven**, deserve. **1595** **beestly**, carnally; **rudely**, violently. **1596** **unlisty**, listless. **1599** **chaufyng**, inflaming. **1601** **unkyndely**, unnatural.

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theire pride and of theire fleschlines and theire coriousté of wit.

1605 And yit, paraventure, thei wene it be the fir of love, getyn and kyndelid by the grace and the goodnes of the Holy Goost. Treuly of this disceite, and of the braunches therof, spryngyn many mescheves: moche ypocrisie, moche heresye, and moche errorur. For as fast after soche a fals felyng cometh a fals knowyng in the feendes scole, right as after a trewe feling cometh a trewe knowing in Gods scole.

1610 For I telle thee trewly that the devil hath his contemplatyves, as God hath His. This disseite of fals felyng, and of fals knowyng folowyng theron, hath diverse and wonderful variacions, after the dyversté of states and the sotyl condicions of hem that ben disceyvid, as hath the trewe felyng and knowyng of hem that ben savid.

1615 Bot I sette no mo disceites here bot thoo with the whiche I trowe thou schalt be assailid, yif ever thou purpose thee to worche in this werk. For what schuld it profite to thee to wite hou thees greet clerkis, and men and wommen of other degrees then thou arte, ben disceyvid? Sikirly right nought. And therfore I telle thee no mo, bot thoo that fallyn unto thee, yif thou travayle in this werk. And forthi I telle thee this, that thou schalt bewar therwith in thi worching, yif thou be assailyd therwith.

1620 **Here biginnith the six and fourty chapitre.**

1625 And therfore for Goddes love bewar in this werk, and streyne not thin hert in thi brest over-rudely, ne oute of mesure; bot wirche more with a list then with any lither strengthe. For ever the more listly, the more meekly and goostly; and ever the more rudely, the more bodeyly and beestly. And therfore bewar. For sekirly what beestly herte that presumith for to touche the highe mounte of this werke, it schal be betyn away with stones. Stones ben harde and drie in her kynde, and thei hurte ful sore where thei hit. And sekirly soche rude streynynges ben ful harde fastnid in fleschlines of bodeyly felyng, and ful drie fro any wetyng of grace; and thei hurte ful sore the sely soule, and make it feestre in fantasie feinid of feendes. And therfore bewar with this beestly ruednes, and leerne thee to love listly with a softe and a demure contenaunce, as wel in body as in soule. And abide curtesly and meekly the wil of oure Lorde, and lache not over-hastely, as it were a gredy grehounde, hungre thee never so sore. And gamenly be it seyde, I rede that thu do that in thee is, refreynyng the rude and the grete steryng of thi spirite; ryght as thou on no wyse woldest lat Hym wite hou fayne thou woldest see Hym and have Hym or fele Hym.

1630 **wene**, imagine. 1622 **over-rudely**, too violently; **list**, zest, desire. 1622–23 **lither strengthe**, evil brute force. 1629 **selly**, simple; **bewar with**, be on guard against. 1630 **demure**, quiet, composed. 1630–31 **contenaunce**, bearing, behavior. 1632 **lache**, seize. 1633 **gamenly**, as in play; **rede**, advise. 1634 **rude**, violent, excessive. 1635 **fayne**, gladly.

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This is childly and pleyingly spoken, thee think, paraventure. Bot I trowe whoso had grace to do and fele as I sey, he schuld fele God gamesumli pley with hym, as the fadir doth with the childe, kyssyng and clippynge, that weel were him so.

Here bigynnith the seven and fourty chapitre.

1640 Loke thou have no wonder whi that I speke thus childly, and as it were folily and lackyng kyndly discretion; for I do it for certeyn skyles, and as me thinketh that I have ben sterid many day bothe to fele thus and think thus and sey thus, as weel to som other of my specyal frendes in God, as I am now unto thee.

1645 And o skyle is this, whi that I bid thee hide it fro God, the desire of thine herte. For I hope it schuld more cleerly com to His knowyng, to thi profite and in fulfyllyng of thi desire, by soche an hidyng, than it scholde by any other maner of schewyng that I trowe thou coudest yit schewe. And another skyle is: for I wolde by soche a hid schewyng bryng thee oute of the boistousté of bodely felyng into the pureté and depnes of goostly felyng, and so furthermore at the last to help thee to knit the goostly knot of brennyng love bitwix thee and thi God, in goostly onheed and acordyng of wille.

1650 Thou wost wel this, that God is a spirit; and whoso schuld be onid unto Hym, it behovith to be in sothfastnes and deepnes of spirit, ful fer fro any feynid bodely thing. Soth it is that alle thing is knownen of God, and nothing may be hid fro His wetyng, neither bodily thing ne goostly. Bot more aperte is that thing knowyn and schewid unto Him, the whiche is hid in depnes of spirit, sith it so is that He is a spirit, than is any thing that is medelid with any maner of bodelines. For alle bodely thing is ferther fro God bi the cours of kynde then any goostly thing. By this skile it semith that the whiles oure desire is medelid with any maner of bodelines — as it is whan we stresse and streyne us in spirit and in body togeders — as longe it is ferther fro God then it schuld be, and it were done more devoutly and more listely in sobirnes and in puretee and in depnes of spirite.

1660 And here maist thou see sumwhat and in party the skil whi that I bid thee so childly hele and hyde the steryng of thi desire fro God. And yit I bid thee not pleynly hyde it, for that were the biddynge of a fole, for to bid thee pleynly do that on no wise may be done. Bot I bid thee do that in thee is to hide it. And whi bid I thus? Sekirly

1637 **gamesumli**, sportively. 1638 **clippynge**, embracing. 1641 **kyndly**, natural; **skyles**, reasons. 1648 **boistousté**, crude, uncultured natural state. 1649 **knit**, tie. 1650 **onheed**, oneness. 1655 **aperte**, open. 1657 **medelid**, mixed. 1661 **listely**, with eager longing. 1664 **hele**, conceal; **pleynly**, wholly.

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for I wolde that thou castedest it into depnes of spirite, fer fro any rude medelyng of
any bodelines, the whiche wolde make it lesse goostly, and ferther fro God in as
muche; and for I wote wel that ever the more that thi spirit hath of goostlines, the
1670 lesse it hath of bodelines and the nerer it is God, and the betyr it plesith Hym, and the
more clearly it may be seen of Hym. Not that His sight may be any tyme, or in any
thing, more clearer then in another, for it is evermore unchaungable; bot forthi it is
more liche unto Hym, when it is in puretee of spirit, for He is a spirit.

Another skyle ther is whi that I bid thee do that in thee is to late Hym not wite: for
1675 thou and I, and many soche as we ben, we ben so abyl to conceyve a thing bodily,
the whiche is seyde goostly, that paraventure, and I had boden thee schewe unto God
the steryng of thin herte, thou schuldest have maad a bodily schewyng unto Hym,
outher in contenaunce, or in voyce, or in worde, or in som other rude bodely
1680 streynyng, as it is when thou schalt schewe a thing that is hid in thin hert to a bodely
man; and inasmuche thi werk schuld have ben inpure. For on o maner schal a thing
be schewid to man, and on another maner unto God.

Here biginnith the eight and fourty chapitre.

I sey not this for I wil that thou leve any tyme, yif thou be stirid for to preie with
thi mouth, or for to brest oute, for habundaunce of devucion in thi spirit, for to speke
1685 unto God as unto man, and sey som good worde as thou felist thee sterid, as ben
thees: "Good Jhesu! Faire Jhesu! Swete Jhesu!" and alle thees other. Nay, God
forbede thou take it thus! For trewly I mene not thus. And God forbede that I schuld
departe that God hath couplid, the body and the spirit; for God wil be servid with
body and with soule, bothe togeders, as seemly is, and rewarde man his mede in blis
1690 bothe in body and in soule.

And in erles of that mede, sumtyme He wil enflaume the body of a devoute ser-
vaunt of His here in this liif — not onys or twies, bot paraventure right ofte, and as
Him likith — with ful wonderful swetnes and counfortes. Of the whiche, som beth
not comyng fro withoutyn into the body bi the wyndowes of oure wittys, bot fro
1695 withinne, risyng and spryngyng of habundaunce of goostly gladnes, and of trewe
devucion in the spirit. Soche a counforte and soche a swetnes schal not be had sus-
pecte; and, schortly to sey, I trowe that he that felith it may not have it suspecte.

Bot alle other counfortes, sounes, and gladnes, and swetnes, that comyn fro with-
oute sodenly, and thou wost never whens, I prey thee have hem suspecte. For thei

1672 forthi, because. **1676 boden**, enjoined. **1678 contenaunce**, bearing, expression. **1683**
leve, leave off, refrain from. **1688 departe**, separate. **1691 in erles of that mede**, as a fore-
taste of reward.

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1700 mowe be bothe good and yvel; wrought by a good aungel, yif thei ben good, and by an yvel aungel, yif thei ben yvel. And this may on no wise be yvel, yif theire deseites of coriouste of witte and of unordeynd streynynge of the fleschely herte be remowed, as I lere thee, or betyr yif thou betir maist. And whi is that? Sekirly for the cause of this counforte: that is to sey, the devoute steryng of love, the whiche woneth in pure spirit. It is wrought of the hande of Almighty God withouten mene; and therfore it behovith always be fer fro any fantasie, or any fals opynion that may befall to man in this liif.

1705 And of the tother counfortes and sounes and swetnes, how thou schuldest wite whether thei ben good or ivel, I think not to telle thee at this tyme. And that is for me think that it nedith not; for whi thou mayst fynde it wretyn in another place of another mans werk a thousandfolde betir than I kan sey or write. And so maystow this that I set here, fer betir than it is here. Bot what therof? Therfore schal I not lette, ne it schal not noye me to fulfille the desire and the steryng of thin herte, the whiche thou hast schewed thee to have unto me before this tyme in thi wordes, and now in thi dedes.

1710 1715 Bot this may I sey thee of thoo sounes and of thoo swetnes that comen in by the wyndowes of thi wittes, the whiche mowe be bothe good and ivel. Use thee contynowlly in this blynde and devoute and this listy steryng of love that I telle thee; and than I have no doute that it ne schal wel kun telle thee of hem. And yif thou yit be in partie astounied of hem at the first tyme, and that is bicause that thei ben uncouthe, yit this schal it do thee; it schal bynde thin herte so fast that thou schalt mowe on no wise geve ful grete credence to hem, er the tyme be that thou be either certefied of hem withinne wonderfullly by the spirite of God, or elles withouten by counsel of sum discrete fader.

1720 1725 **Here biginnith the nine and fourti chapitre.**

1726 And therfore I preie thee, lene listely to this meek steryng of love in thin herte, and folow therafter; for it wil be thi gyde in this liif, and bring thee to blisse in the tother. It is the substaunce of alle good levyng, and withouten it no good werk may be bygonne ne eendid. It is not elles bot a good and an acordyng wil unto God, and a manner of weelpayednes and a gladnes that thou felest in thi wille of alle that He doth.

Soche a good wille is the substaunce of alle perfeccion. Alle swetnes and coun-

1702 **removed**, removed. 1703 **lere**, teach. 1704 **woneth**, dwells. 1705 **mene**, intermediary. 1712 **lette**, desist. 1713 **noye**, annoy. 1718 **listy**, vigorous. 1719 **kun**, be able to. 1720 **uncouthe**, strange. 1726 **lene listely to**, incline eagerly towards. 1730 **weelpayednes**, full satisfaction.

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fortes, bodily or goostly, ben to this bot as it were accydentes, be thei never so holy; and thei don bot hangen on this good wil. Accydentes I clepe hem, for thei mowe be had and lackyd withoutyn parbrakyng of it. I mene in this liif; bot it nys not so in the
1735 blis of heven, for there schul thei be onyd with the substaunce withouten departyng, as schal the body in the whiche thei worche with the soule. So that the substaunce of hem here is bot a good goostly wil. And sekirly I trowe that he that felith the perfec-
1740 tion of this wil, as it may be had here, ther may no swetnes ne no counforte falle to any man in this liif, that he ne is as fayne and as gladde to lache it at Goddes wille as to fele it and have it.

Here biginnith the fifty chapitre.

And herby maist thou see that we schulde directe alle oure beholding unto this meek steryng of love in oure wille. And in alle other swetnes and counfortes, bodily or goostly, be thei never so likyng ne so holy (yif it be cortesie and semely to sey) we
1745 schuld have a maner of rechelesnes. Yif thei come, welcome hem; bot lene not to moche on hem for ferde of febelnes; for it wol take ful mochel of thi myghtes to bide any longe tyme in soche swete felynges and wepynges. And paraventure thou mayst be steryd for to love God for hem. And that schalt thou fele by this: yif thou grocche overmoche when thei ben away. And yif it be thus, thi love is not yit neither chaste
1750 ne parfite. For a love that is chaste and parfite, thof it suffre that the body be fed and counfortid in the presence of soche swete felynges and wepynges, nevertheless yit it is not gruchyng, bot ful wel apayed for to lache hem at Goddes wille.

And yit it is not comounly withoutyn soche counfortes in som creatures; and in som other creatures soche swetnes and counfortes ben bot seldom. And alle this is after the disposicion and the ordynaunce of God, al after the profite and the needful-
1755 nes of diverse creatures. For some creatures ben so weike and so tendre in spirit, that bot yif thei were sumwhat counfortid by feling of soche swetnes, thei mighthe on no wise abide ne bere the diverseté of temptacions and tribulacions that thei suffre and ben travaylid with in this liif of theire bodily and goostly enmyes. And som ther ben that thei ben so weike in body that thei mowe do no grete penance to clense hem with. And thees creatures wil oure Lorde clense ful gracyously in spirit by soche swete felynges and wepynges. And also, on the tother partye, ther ben sum creatures so stronge in spirit, that thei kun pike hem counforte inowgh withinne in theire

1732 **accydentes**, non-essentials. 1734 **parbrakyng**, breaking up. 1735 **departyng**, distinction. 1744 **likyng**, pleasurable. 1745 **rechelesnes**, indifference; **lene not**, do not rely. 1746 **ferde**, fear; **bide**, remain. 1748 **grocche**, complain, are resentful. 1752 **apayed**, pleased. 1763 **pike**, gather.

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1765 soules, in offryng up of this reverent and this meek steryng of love and accordaunce of wille, that hem nedeth not mochel to be fedde with soche swete cunfortes in bodely felynges. Whiche of thees ben holyer or more dere with God, one then another, God wote and I not.

Here biginnith the on and fifty chapitre.

1770 And therfore lene meekly to this blinde steryng of love in thin herte. I mene not in thi bodily herte, bot in thi goostly herte, the whiche is thi wil. And be wel ware that thou conseyne not bodily that that is seyde goostly. For trewly I telle thee that bodely and fleschely conseytes of hem that han corious and ymagineatyve wittys ben cause of moche error.

1775 Ensaumple of this maist thou see by that that I bid thee hele thi desire fro God in that that in thee is. For, paraventure, and I had boden thee schewe thi desire unto God, thou schuldest have conceyvid it more bodily then thou dost now when I bid thee hele it. For thou wost wel that alle that thing that is wilfuly helid, it is casten into the depnes of spiryt.

1780 And thus me thinketh that it nedith greetly to have moche warnes in understanding of wordes that ben spokyn to goostly entent, so that thou conceyve hem not bodily, bot goostly, as thei ben mente. And namely it is good to be ware with this worde *in* and this worde *up*, for in myconceyvyng of thees two wordes hangeth moche error and moche disseite in hem that purposen hem to be goostly worchers, as me thinketh. Sumwhat wote I by the profe, and sumwhat by herdsey; and of thees disseites list me telle thee a lityl, as me thinketh.

1785 A yonge disciple in Goddes scole, newe turnid fro the woredl, the whiche weneth that for a litil tyme that he hath goven him to penaunce and to preier, taken by counseil in confescion, that he be therfore abil to take apon hym goostly worching, of the whiche he herith men speke or rede aboute hym, or paraventure redith hymself, and therfore whan he redith or hereth spoken of goostly worching, and namely of this worde, how a man schal drawe alle his witte withinne hymself, or how he schal clymbe aboven himself, — as fast for blindnes in soule, and for fleschelines and coriousté of kyndely witte, thei misunderstande thees wordes, and wenem, for thei fynden in hem a kyndly covetyse to hid thinges, that thei ben therfore clepid to that werke by grace; insomoche, that yif counsel wil not acorde that thei schul worche in this werke, as sone thei fele a maner of grocchyng agens theire counsel, and thinken —

1769 **lene**, incline. 1772 **conseytes**, conceptions. 1773 **hele**, hide. 1774 **boden**, enjoined. 1778 **warnes**, caution. 1783 **wote I by the profe**, I know by experience; **herdsey**, hearsay. 1785 **weneth**, thinks, imagines. 1792 **kyndely witte**, natural intelligence. 1793 **covetyse**, inordinate desire.

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ye, and paraventure seyen to soche other as thei ben — that thei kan fynde no man that kan wite what thei mene fully. And therfore as fast for boldnes and presumption of theirre corious witte, thei leve meek preier and penaunce over-sone, and sette hem (thei wene) to a ful goostly werk withinne in here soule: the whiche werk, and it be
1800 trewly conceyvid, is neither bodily worching ne goostly worching. And, schortly to sey, it is a worching agens kynde, and the devel is the cheef worcher therof. And it is the rediest wey to deth of body and of soule, for it is woodnes and no wisdom, and ledith a man even to woodnes. And yit thei wene not thus, for thei purpose hem in this werk to think on nought bot on God.

1805 **Here biginnith the two and fifty chapitre.**

And on this maner is this woodnes wrought that I speke of. Thei reden and heren wel sey that thei schuld leve utward worching with theirre wittes, and worche inwardes; and forthi that thei knowe not whiche is inward worchyng, therfore thei worche wronge. For thei turne theirre bodily wittes inwardes to theirre body agens the
1810 cours of kynde; and streynyn hem, as thei wolde see inwardes with theirre bodily ighen, and heren inwardes with theirre eren, and so forthe of alle theirre wittes, smellen, taasten, and felyn inwardes. And thus thei reverse hem agens the cours of kynde, and with this coriousté thei travayle theirre yimaginacion so undiscreetly, that at the laste thei turne here brayne in here hedes. And than as fast the devil hath power for
1815 to feyne sum fals light or sounes, swete smelles in theirre noses, wonderful taastes in theirre mowthes, and many queynte hetes and brennynges in theirre bodily brestes or in theirre bowelles, in theirre backes and in theirre reynes, and in theirre pryvē membres.

And yit in this fantasie hem think that thei have a restful mynde of theirre God withoutyn any lettyng of veyne thoughtes. And sekirly so have thei in maner, for thei ben so fillid in falsheed that vanité may not dere hem. And whi? For he, that same feende that schuld ministre veyne thoughtes to hem and thei were in good wey, he, that same, is the cheef worcher of this werk. And wite thou right wel that him list not lette hymself. The mynde of God wol he not put fro hem, for feerde that he schuld be had in suspecte.

1799 **here**, their. 1802 **woodnes**, madness. 1808 **whiche**, what. 1810 **kynde**, nature. 1817 **reynes**, kidneys, loins; **pryvē**, private. 1818 **restful mynde**, peaceful awareness. 1819 **lettyng**, obstruction. 1820 **dere**, harm. 1823 **lette**, hinder. 1824 **suspecte**, suspicion.

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1825 **Here biginnith the thre and fifti chapitre.**

Many wonderful contenaunces folowen hem that ben disseyvid in this fals werk, or in any spice therof, forby that doth hem that ben Goddes trewe disciples; for thei ben evermore ful semely in alle here contenaunces, bodily or goostly. Bot it is not so of thees other. For whoso wolde or might beholde unto hem ther thei sitte in this tyme, and it so were that theire igheliddes were open, he schulde see hem stare as thei were wode, and leighingly loke as thei sawe the devil. Sekirly it is good thei be ware; for trewly the feende is not fer. Som sette theire ighen in their hedes as thei were sturdy scheep betyn in the heed, and as thei schulde dighe anone. Som hangen here hedes on syde, as a worme were in their eres. Som pipyn when thei schuld speke, as ther were no spirit in their bodies; and this is the propre condicion of an ypcrite. Som crien and whinen in their throte, so ben thei gredy and hasty to sey that thei think; and this is the condicion of heretikes and of hem that with presumpcion and with curiouste of witte wil always meynteyn errorr.

Many unordeynde and unsemely contenaunces folowen on this errorr, whoso mighte parceyve alle. Nevertheles, som ther ben that ben so curious that thei kun refreyne hem in grete partye whan thei comen before men. Bot might thees men be seen in place where thei ben homely, then I trowe thei schuld not be hidde. And nevertheles yit I trowe that whoso wolde strelty geinsey their opynion, that thei schuld sone see hem brest oute in som partie; and yit hem think that alle that ever thei do, it is for the love of God and for to meynteyne the treuth. Now trewly I hope that bot yif God schewe His merciful miracle to make hem sone leve of, thei schul love God so longe on this maner that thei schul go staryng wood to the devil. I sey not that the devil hath so parfite a servaunt in this liif, that is desceyvid and infecte with alle thees fantasies that I sette here. And nevertheles yit it may be that one, ye and many one, be infecte with hem alle. Bot I sey that he hath no parfite ypcrite ne heretike in erthe, that he ne is gilty in somme that I have seide, or paraventure schal sey, yif God vouchethsaaf.

For som men aren so kumbred in nice corious contenaunces in bodily beryng, that whan thei schal ought here, thei writhen here hedes onside queyntly, and up with the chin; thei gape with their eoues as thei schuld here with hem, and not with here eres. Som, when thei schulen speke, poynten with here fyngres, or on their

1826 contenaunces, expressions, behavior. **1827 spice**, kind; **forby**, in comparison with. **1831 leighingly**, laughingly; **ware**, on guard. **1832 sturdy**, diseased. **1833 dighe**, die. **1834 pipyn**, peep, chirp. **1841 hem**, themselves. **1842 homely**, in familiar surroundings. **1843 trowe**, believe; **strelty**, rigorously. **1853 corious**, frivolous. **1854 ought**, anything; **queyntly**, with affection. **1855 here**, hear. **1856 here**, their.

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fyngres, or on theire owne brestes, or on theires that thei speke to. Som kan nouther sit stille, stonde styll, ne ligge stille, bot yif thei be outhir waggyng with theire fete, or elles sumwhat doyng with theire handes. Som rowyn with theire armes in tyme of
1860 here spekyng, as hem nedid for to swymme over a grete water. Som ben evermore smyling and leighing at iche other worde that thei speke, as thei weren gigelotes and nice japyng jogelers lackyng kontenaunce. Semeli cher were with sobre and demure beryng of body and mirthe in maner.

I say not that alle thees unseemly contenaunces ben grete synnes in hemself, ne yit
1865 alle tho that done hem ben grete synners hemself. Bot I sey if that thees unseemly and unordeinde contenaunces ben governors of that man that doth hem, insomochel that he may not leve hem whan he wile: than I sey that thei ben tokenes of pride and coryousté of witte, and of unordeynde schewyng and covetise of knowyng. And spe-
1870 cyaly thei ben verrei tokenes of unstabelnes of herte and unrestfulnes of mynde, and namely of the lackyng of the werk of this book. And this is only the skile whi that I set so many of thees disceytes here in this writyng, for whi that a goostly worcher schal prove his werk by hem.

Here biginnith the foure and fifti chapitre.

Whoso had this werk, it schuld governe him ful semely, as wele in body as in
1875 soule, and make hym ful favorable unto iche man or womman that lokyd apon hym; insomuche that the worst favored man or womman that leveth in this liif, and thei mighte come to by grace to worche in this werk, theire favour schuld sodenly and graciously be chaunged, that iche good man that hem sawe schulde be fayne and joiful to have hem in companye, and ful mochil thei schuld think that thei were ple-
1880 sid in spirit and holpen by grace unto God in theire presence.

And therfore gete this gifte, whoso by grace gete may; for whoso hath it verely, he schal wel kun governe hymself by the vertewe therof, and alle that longith unto hym. He schuld wel geve discrecion, yif nede were, of alle kyndes and alle complexions. He schuld wel kun make hymself liche unto alle that with hym comouned, whether
1885 thei were customable synners or none, withoutyn synne in hymself, in wondryng of alle that hym sawen, and in drawyng of other by helpe of grace to the werk of that same spirit that he worcheth in hymself.

1861 leighing, laughing; **gigelotes**, flirts. **1862 nice japyng jogelers**, foolish jesting buf-foons; **lackyng kontenaunce**, who don't know how to behave; **cher**, face, demeanor; **de-mure**, composed. **1863 mirthe**, cheerfulness. **1872 prove**, test. **1877 favour**, features. **1878 fayne**, glad. **1882 kun**, be able. **1885 customizable**, habitual.

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His chere and his wordes schuld be ful of goostly wysdam, ful of fiire and of frute,
spoken in sad sothfastnes, withouten any falsheed, fer fro any feynyng or pipynge of
ypocrites. For sum ther ben that with alle theire mighte, inner and utter, ymageneth
in theire spekyng how they mowe stuffe hem and underput hem on iche a side for
fallyng with many meek pipyng wordes and contenaunces of devocation, more lokyng
after for to seme holy in sight of men, then for to be so in the sight of God and His
aungelles. For whi thees folk wil more charge and more sorow make for an un-
ordeynde contenaunce, or unseemly or unsittynge worde spoken byfore men, then thei
wil for a thousande veyne thoughtes and stynckyng sterynges of synne wilfuly
drawen apon hem, or rechelesly voided in the sight of God and the seyntes and the
aungelles in heven. A, Lorde God! wher ther be any pride withinne ther as soche
meek pipyng wordes ben so plenteuous withoutyn, I graunte wel that it is sittyngly
and semely to hem that ben meek withinne for to schewe meek and semely wordes
and contenaunce withoutyn, acordyng to that meeknes that is withinne in the herte.
Bot I sey not that thei schul thanne be schewed in brokyn ne in pipyng voices agens
the pleyn disposission of theire kynde that spekyn hem. For whi yif thei ben trewe,
then ben thei spoken in sothfastnes, and in hoelnes of voyce, and of theire spirit that
speken hem. And yif he, that hath a pleyn and an open boystous voice by kynde,
speke hem poerly and pypyngly — I mene bot yif he be seek in his body, or elles that
it be bitwix hirn and his God or his confessour — than it is a vertey token of ypocrisie.
I mene outhir yong ypocrite or olde.

And what schal I more sey of theese venemos disseites? Trewly I trowe, bot yif
thei have grace to leve of soche pipyng ypocrisie, that bitwix that privé pride in
their hertes withinne and soche meek wordes withoutyn, the sely soule may ful sone
sinke into sorow.

Here biginnith the five and fifty chapitre.

Som men the feende wyl disceyve on this maner. Ful wonderfuly he wol enflaume
here braynes to meinteyne Goddes lawe, and to distroie synne in alle other men. He
wil never tempte hem with a thing that is aperte yvel. He makith hem liche besy
prelates wakyng over alle the degrees of Cristen mens levyng, as an abbot over his
monkes. Alle men wil thei reprove of theire defautes, right as thei had cure of theire

1889 sad, sober, steadfast. **1891** stuffe hem, reinforce themselves; **underput**, support. **1894**
charge, attach importance to. **1895** unsittynge, unbecoming. **1897** voided, letout. **1898** wher,
whether. **1899** sittyngly, becoming manner. **1902** pipyng, obsequious. **1903** disposission,
tendency. **1905** boystous, loud. **1910** pipyng ypocrisie, feigned weakness. **1916** aperte,
openly.

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- 1920 soules. And yit hem think that thei dur not elles for God. Bot thei telle hem here defautes that thei see; and thei sey that thei ben steryd therto by the fiire of charité and of Goddes love in their hertes. And trewly thei lighe, for it is with the fiire of helle wellyng in their braynes and in their ymagination.
- 1925 That this is sothe, it semeth bi this that foloweth. The devil is a spirit, and of his owne kynde he hath no body more then hath an aungele. Bot yit nevertheles, what tyme that he or an aungele schal take any bodi by leve of God to maak any mynistracion to any man in this liif: al after the werk is that he schal mynistre, therafter in licesnes is the qualité of his body in som party. Ensaumple of this we have in Holy Writte. As ofte as any aungele was sente in body in the Olde Testament and in the Newe also, evermore it was schewed, outhir by his name or by sum instrument or qualità of his body, what his mater or his message was in spirit. On the same maner it fareth of the feende, for when he apereth in body, he fygureth in som qualità of his body what his servauntes ben in spirit.
- 1930 Ensaumple of this may be sene in one in stede of alle thees other. For as I have conceyvid by som disciples of nygromauncye, the whiche han it in scyence for to make advocation of wickyd spirates, and by som unto whom the feende hath apperid in bodily licesnes, that in what bodily licesnes the feend appereth, evermore he hath bot o nose-therel, and that is grete and wyde. And he wil glady kast it up, that a man may see in therate to his brayne up in his heed. The whiche brayn is not elles bot the fiire of helle, for the feende may have none other brayn. And yif he might make a man loke in therate, he kepeth no beter; for at that lokyng he schuld lese his witte for ever. Bot a parfite prentys of nigromauncye knowith this wel inowgh, and kan wel ordeyne therfore, so that he dere him not.
- 1935 Herfore it is that I sey, and have seide, that evermore whan the devil takith any bodi, he fygureth in som qualità of his body what his servauntes ben in spirit. For he enflaumeth so the ymagination of his contemplatyves with the fiire of helle, that sodenly, withoutyn discrecion, thei schete outhir theire corious conceites, and withouten any avysement thei wil take apon hem to blame other mens defautes over sone. And this is for thei have bot o nose-therel goostly. For that staunson that is in a mans nose bodely, and the whiche departeth the to nose-therel fro the tother, bitokeneth that a man schulde have discrecion goostly, and kun dissevre the good fro the ivel, and the yvel fro the worse, and the good fro the betyr, er that he gave any ful dome
- 1940 1945 1950

1919 **dur**, dare. 1921 **lighe**, lie. 1931 **fygureth**, symbolizes, typifies; provide a temporal or physical manifestation. 1934 **nygromauncye**, necromancy. 1937 **nose-therel**, nostril. 1940 **kepeth**, seeks after. 1942 **dere**, harm. 1947 **avysement**, deliberation; **over sone**, too soon. 1948 **staunson**, membrane separating the nostrils, septum. 1949 **the to**, "thet o," i.e., the one. 1950 **dissevre**, separate.

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of any thing that he herde or sawe done or spokyn aboute hym. And by a mans brayn
is goostly understanden ymagynacion; for kyndely it woneth and worcheth in the
heed.

1955 **Here biginnith the six and fifty chapitre.**

Somme ther ben that, thof al thei be not disceyved with this errorre as it is sette
here, yit for pride and coriousté of kyndely witte and letterly kunning levith the
comoun doctrine and the counsel of Holy Chirche. And thees, with alle here fautours,
lenyn overmoche to theire owne knowyng. And for thei were never grounded in this
1960 meek blynde felyng and vertuous levyng, therfore thei deserve to have a fals felyng,
feynid and wrought by the goostly enmye; insomoche that at the last thei brestyn up
and blasphemyn alle the seyntes, sacramentes, statutes and ordenaunces of Holy
Chirche. Fleschly levyng men of the woreld, the whiche thinkyn the statutes of Holy
Chirche over-harde to be amendid by, thei lenen to thees heretikes ful sone and ful
1965 lyghtly, and stalworthly meynteyne hem, and al is for hem think thei lede hem a
softer wey then is ordeyned of Holy Chirche.

Now trewly I trowe that who that wil not goo the streyte wey to heven that thei
schul goo the softe wey to helle. Iche man prove in hymself. For I trowe and alle
soche heretikes, and alle theire fautours, and thei might cleerly be seen as thei
1970 scholen on the last day, schulde be sene ful sone kumbrid in grete and horrable
synnes of the woreld and theire foule flessche privily, withouten theire apeerte
presumpcion in meyntenynge of errorre. So that thei ben ful properly clepid Antecriste
discyple; for it is seide of hem that for alle theire fals fare in aperte, yit thei schul be
ful foule lechors privily.

1975 **Here biginnith the seven and fifti chapitre.**

No more of thees at this tyme now; bot forthe of oure mater, how that thees yonge
presumptuous goostly disciples misunderstanden this other worde *up*.

For yif it so be that thei outhere rede, or here redde or spoken hou that men schuld
lift up here hertes unto God, as fast thei stare in the sterres as thei wolde be aboven
1980 the mone, and herkyn when thei schul here any aungelles synge oute of heven. Thees
men willen sumtyme with the coriousté of here ymaginacion peerce the planetes, and
make an hole in the firmament to loke in therate. Thees men wil make a God as hem

1957 letterly kunning, erudite knowledge. **1958 fautours**, partisans. **1961 brestyn up**, burst
out. **1965 stalworthly**, vigorously. **1971 apeerte**, open, public. **1973 fare**, behavior.

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- lyst, and clothen hym ful richely in clothes, and set hym in a trone, fer more curiously than ever was he depeynted in this erthe. Thees men wil maken aungelles in bodely lices, and set hem aboute ich one with diverse minstralsie, fer more corious than ever was any seen or herde in this liif.
- Somme of thees men the devil wil disceyve wonderfuly. For he wil seende a maner of dewe — aungelles foode thei wene it be — as it were comyng oute of the eire, and softly and sweetly fallyng in theire mowthes; and therfore thei have it in costume to sitte gapyng as thei wolde kacche flies. Now trewly alle this is bot disceyte, seme it never so holy; for thei have in this tyme ful emty soules of any trewe devocion. Moche vanitee and falsheed is in theire hertes, causid of theire corious worchyng, insomoche that oftetimes the devil feyneth queinte sounes in theire eres, queynte lightes and schinyng in theire ighen, and wonderful smelles in theire nosen; and al is bot falsheed.
- And yit wene thei not so; for hem think that thei have ensaumple of Seynte Martyn of this upward lokyng and worching, that sawe by revelacion God clad in His mantel amonges His aungelles, and of Seinte Steven that sawe oure Lorde stonde in heven, and of many other; and of Cryste, that assendid bodily to heven, seing His discyples.
- And therfore thei sey that we schul have oure ighen upwardes. I graunte wel that in oure bodely observaunce we schul lifte up oure ighen and oure hondes yif we ben steryd in spirit. Bot I sey that the werke of oure spirit schal not be direcete neither upwardes ne donwardes, ne on o syde ne on other, ne forward ne bacward, as it is of a bodely thing. For whi oure werke schuld be goostly, not bodely, ne on a bodely manner wrought.

Here biginnith the eight and fifty chapitre.

- For that that thei sey of Seynte Martyn and of Seinte Steven, thof al thei sie soche things with their bodely ighen, it was schewyd bot in myracle and in certefieng of thing that was goostly. For wite thei ryght wel that Seynte Martyn mantel come never on Crystes owne body substancyaly, for no nede that He had therto to kepe him fro colde; bot by miracle and in lices for alle us that ben abel to be savid, that ben onyd to the body of Criste goostly. And whoso clotheth a pore man and doth any other good deed for Goddes love, bodily or goostly, to any that hath need, sekir be thei thei do it unto Criste goostly, and thei schul be rewardid as substancyaly therfore as thei had done it to Cristes owne body. Thus seith Hymself in the Gospel. And yit thoughte He it not inowgh, bot yif he affermyd it after by miracle; and for this skyle

1983–84 curiously, elaborately. 1988 wene, imagine. 2000 ighen, eyes. 2002 direcete, directed. 2012 onyd, joined. 2016 skyle, reason.

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He schewed Hym unto Seynte Martyn by revelacion.

Alle the revelacions that ever sawe any man here in bodely lices in this liif, thei have goostly bemenynges. And I trowe that and thei unto whome thei were schewid, or we for whome thei were schewid, had ben so goostly, or couthe have conceyvid their bemenynges goostly, that than thei had never ben schewed bodily. And therfore late us pike of the rough bark, and fede us of the swete kyrnel.

Bot how? Not as thees heretikes done, the whiche ben wel licned to wode men havyng this custume, that ever whan thei have dronken of a faire cup, kast it to the walle and breke it. Thus schul not we do, yif we wil wel do. For we schul not so fede us of the frute that we schul dispise the tree; ne so drynke that we schul breke the cuppe when we have dronken. The tre and the cuppe I clepe this visible miracle, and alle semely bodely observaunces that is acordyng and not lettyng the werke of the spirite. The frute and the drync I clepe the goostly bemening of thees visible miracles, and of thees semely bodely observaunces, as is lifting up of oure ighen and oure handes unto heven. Yif they be done by steryng of the sprit, then ben thei wel done; and elles ben thei ypcrisie, and then ben thei fals. Yif thei ben trewe and contynen in hem goostly frute, whi schuld thei than be dispisid? For men wil kysse the cuppe, for wine is therin.

And what therof, thof oure Lorde, when He assendid to heven bodely, toke His wey upwardes into the cloudes, seing His moder and His disciples with here bodely ighen? Schul we therfore in oure goostly werk ever stare upwardes with oure bodely ighen, to loke after Hym yif we mowe se Hym sit bodely in heven, or elles stonde, as Seinte Steven did? Nay, sekirly He schewid Him not unto Seynte Steven bodily in heven forthi that He wolde geve us ensaumple that we schuld in oure goostly werk loke bodely up into heven, yif we mought se Hym as Seynte Steven did, outhier stondyng or sittynge or liggyng. For howso His body is in heven — stondyng, sittynge, or ligging — wote no man. And it nedith not to be wetyn; ne no more, bot that His body is anhighed with the soule, withouten departing. The body and the soule, the whiche is the Manheed, is onid with the Godheed withoutyn departyng also. Of His sittynge, His stonding, His liggyng, nedith it not to wetyn, bot that He is there as Him list, and hath Him in body as moste semely is unto Hym for to be. For yif He schewid Hym liggyng, or stondyng, or sittynge, by revelacion bodely to any creature in this liif, it is done for sum goostly bemenyng, and not for no maner of bodely beryng that He hath in heven.

2017 Hym, Himself. 2019 bemenynges, complex significances. 2036 seing His moder and His disciples, as His mother and His disciples watched. 2042 liggyng, lying. 2043 wetyn, known. 2044 departing, distinction.

The Cloud of Unknowing

See by ensaumple. By stondyng is understanden a redynes of helping. And herfore it is seide comounly of oo frende to another, whan he is in bodely batayle: "Bere thee wel, felaw, and fight fast, and give not up the bataile over-lightly; for I schal stonde by thee." He meneth not only bodely stondyng, for paraventure this batayle is on hors and not on fote, and paraventure it is in going and not stondyng. Bot he meneth, whan he seith that he schal stonde bi hym, that he schal be redy to helpe him.

For this skyle it was that oure Lorde schewid Him bodely in heven to Seinte Steven, when he was in his martirdome; and not to geve us ensaumple to loke up to heven. As He had seide thus to Seynte Steven, in persone of alle thoo that suffren persecucion for His love: "Loo, Steven! as verrely as I open this bodely fyrnament, the whiche is clepid heven, and lete thee se My bodily stondyng, trist stedfastly that as verrely stonde I biside thee goostly, by the myght of My Godheed. And I am redy to helpe thee. And therfore stonde thou stifly in the feith, and suffre booldely the fel buffetes of thoo harde stones; for I schal coroune thee in blis for thi mede, and not only thee, bot alle thoo that suffren persecucion for Me on any maner."

And thus maist thou se that thees bodely schewynges were done by goostly bemenynges.

Here biginnith the nine and fifti chapitre.

And yif thou sey ought touching the assencion of oure Lorde, for that was done bodely and for a bodely bemenyng as wel as for a goostly, for bothe He assendid verrey God and verrey Man, to this wil I answer thee, that He had ben deed, and was clad with undeedlines, and so schul we be at the Day of Dome. And than we schul be maad so sotyl in body and in soule togeders, that we schul be than as swiftly where us liste bodely, as we ben now in oure thoughte goostly; whether it be up or doune, on o syde or on other, bihinde or before. Alle I hope schal than be iliche good, as clerkes seyne. Bot now thou mayst not come to heven not bodely, bot goostly. And yit it schal be so goostly that it schal not be on bodely maner — nowther upwardes ne donwardes, ne on o side ne on other, behynde ne before.

And wite wel that alle thoo that setten hem to be goostly worshers and namely in the werk of this book, that thof al thei rede "lifte up" or "go in," thof al that the werke of this book be clepid a steryng, nevertheles yit hem behoveth to have a ful besy beholding, that this steryng streche neither up bodely ne in bodely, ne yit that it be any soche steryng as is from o stede to another. And thof al that it be sumtyme cleped a rest, nevertheles yit thei schul not think that it is any soche rest as is any

2063 *stifly*, resolutely; **fel**, cruel. **2066** *by*, on account of. **2075** *iliche*, invariably, unceasingly. **2083** *stede*, place.

The Cloud of Unknowing

2085 abidyg in a place withouten remowing therfro. For the perfeccion of this werke is so pure and so goostly in itself, that and it be wel and trewly conceyvid, it schal be seen fer lengthid fro any steryng and fro any stede.

2090 And it schuld by sum skyle rather be clepid a sodeyn chaunging then any steedly steryng. For tyme, stede, and body, thees thre schuld be forgeten in alle goostly worching. And therfore bewar in this werk that thou take none ensaumple at the bodely assencion of Criste, for to streyne thin yimaginacion in the tyme of thi preier bodely upwards, as thou woldest clymbe aboven the mone. For it schuld on no wise be so goostly. Bot yif thou schuldest assende into heven bodely, as Criste did, than thou mightest take ensaumple at it; bot that may none do bot God, as Himself witnessith, seiing: "Ther is no man that may assende unto heven, bot only He that descendid fro heven, and bycome man for the love of man." And yif it were possible, as it on no wise may be, yit it schuld be for habundance of goostly worshyng, only bi the might of the spirit, ful fer fro any bodely stressyng or streyning of oure ymagination bodely, outhier up, or in, on o side, or on other. And therfore lat be soche falshede; it schuld not be so.

2100

Here biginnith the sixty chapitre.

2105 Bot now, paraventure, thou seiste that how schuld it thanne be. For thee think that thou haste verrey evidence that hevyn is upwards; for Criste assendid thedir bodely upwards, and sente the Holy Goost, as He Hight, comyng fro aboven bodely, seyng alle His disciples; and this is oure beleve. And therfore thee think sithen thou haste thus verrey evidence, whi schalt thou not directe thi mynde upward bodely in the tyme of thi preier?

2110 And to this wil I answer thee so febely as I kan, and sey: sithen it so was that Criste schuld assende bodely, and therafter sende the Holy Goost bodely, then it was more semely that it was upwards and fro aboven, than outhier donwardes and fro bynethen, byhinde or before, on o side or on other. Bot elles ne were this semelines, Him nedid never the more to have wente upwards then donwardes, I mene for nerenes of the wey. For heven goostly is as neigh doun as up, and up as down, bihinde as before, before as behynde, on o syde as other, insomoche that whoso had a trewe desire for to be at hevyn, then that same tyme he were in heven goostly. For the highe and the nexte wey theder is ronne by desires, and not by pases of feet. And herfore seith Seinte Poule of himself and many other thus: "Thof al oure bodies ben

2115

2085 remowing, moving. 2086 and, if. 2088 steadily, steady. 2102 thee think, it seems to you. 2104–05 seyng alle His disciples, as all His disciples watched. **2108 so febely as I kan,** as well as my feebleness permits, however inefficiently. **2116 nexte,** nearest.

The Cloud of Unknowing

presently here in erthe, nevertheles yit oure levynge is in heven." He ment theire love
and theire desire, the whiche is goostly theire liif. And sekirly as verrelly is a soule
2120 there where it lovith, as in the body that leveth bi it, and to the whiche it geveth liif.
And therfore yif we wil go to heven goostly, it nedith not to streyne oure spirit nei-
ther up ne doun, ne on o syde ne on other.

Here biginnith the on and sixti chapitre.

2125 Nevertheles it is needful to lifte up oure ighen and oure hondes bodely, as it were
unto yone bodely heven, in the whiche the elementes ben fastnid. I mene yif we ben
sterid of the werk of oure spirit, and elles nought. For alle bodely thing is sogetto
unto goostly thing and is reulid therafter, and not agensward.

2130 Ensaumple herof may be seen by the assencion of oure Lorde; for whan the tyme
statute was icomen that Him likyd to weende to His Fader bodely in His Manheed —
the whiche was never, ne never may be, absent in his Godheid — than mightely, by
the vertewe of the Spirit God, the Manheed with the body folowed in onheed of Per-
sonne. The visibilité of this was moste seemly and most acordyng to be upward.

2135 This same subjeccion of the body to the spirit may be in maner verrelly conceived
in the preof of this goostly werk of this book by hem that worchen therin. For what
tyme that a soule disposeth him effectuely to this werk, than as fast sodenly — unwe-
tyng himself that worcheth — the body, that paraventure bifore er he bygan was
sumwhat heeldyng donwardes on o syde or on other for ese of the flesche, by
vertewe of the spirit schal set it upright, folowing in maner and in lices bodely the
werk of the spirit that is maad goostly. And thus it is moste semely to be.

2140 And for this seemlines it is that a man, the whiche is the seemliest creature in body
that ever God maad, is not maad crokide to the erthewardes, as ben alle other beestes,
bot upright to hevenwardes; for whi that it schulde figure in lices bodely the werke
of the soule goostly, the whiche falleth to be upright goostly and not crokide goostly.
Take kepe that I sey upright goostly, and not bodely. For how schulde a soule, the
whiche in his kynde hath no maner thing of bodelines, be strenid upright bodely?
Nay, it may not be.

2145 And therfore beware that thou conceyve not bodely that that is mente goostly, thof
al it be spokyn in bodely wordes, as ben thees: *up* or *doun*, *in* or *oute*, *behinde*, or
before, *on o side* or *on other*. For thof al that a thing be never so goostly in itself,
nevertheles yit yif it schal be spoken of, sithen it so is that speche is a bodely werk
wrought with the tongue, the whiche is an instrument of the body, it behoveth alweis

2126 sogetto, subject. **2129** statute, ordained; **likyd**, pleased; **weende**, go. **2135–36** unwe-
tyng, unknowing. **2136** paraventure, possibly. **2137** heeldyng, inclining. **2143** falleth, fails.

The Cloud of Unknowing

be spoken in bodey wordes. Bot what therof? Schal it therfore be taken and conceyvid bodey? Nay, it bot goostly.

Here biginnith the two and sixty chapitre.

2155 And forthi that thou schalt kun betir wite how thei schul be conceyved goostly, thees wordes that ben spoken bodey, therfore I think to declare to thee the goostly bemenyng of somme wordes that fallyn to goostly worching; so that thou mayst wite cleerly withouten error when thi goostly werke is benethe thee and withoutyn thee, and when it is within thee and even with thee, and when it is aboven thee and under thi God.

2160 Alle maner of bodey thing is withouten thi soule and benethe it in kynde. Ye, the sonne and the mone and alle the sterres, thof al thei be aboven thi body, nevertheless yit thei ben benethe thi soule.

2165 Alle aungelles and alle soules, thof al thei be conformed and anowrnid with grace and with vertewes, for the whiche thei ben aboven thee in clemnes, nevertheless yit thei ben bot even with thee in kynde.

Withinne in thiself in kynde ben the mightes of thi soule, the whiche ben thees thre principal: minde, reson, and wille; and secundary, yimaginacion and sensualité.

2170 Aboven thiself in kynde is no maner of thing bot only God.

Evermore where thou fyndest wreten thiself in goostlines, than it is understanden thi soule, and not thi body. And then, al after that thing is on the whiche the mightes of thi soule worchyn, therafter schal the worthines and the condicion of thi werke be demid: whether it be binethe thee, withinne thee, or aboven thee.

Here bigynnith the thre and sixty chapitre.

2175 Mynde is soche a mighte in itself, that proprely to speke and in maner it worcheth not itself. Bot reson and wille, thei ben two worching mightes, and so is yimaginacion and sensualité also. And alle thees foure mightes and theire werkes mynde conteneneth and comprehendeth in itself. And on none other wise it is seide that the mynde worcheth, bot yif soche a comprehencion be a werke.

2180 And herfore it is that I clepe the mightes of a soule, som principal, and som secundary. Not for a soule is departable, for that may not be; bot for alle tho things in the whiche thei worchen ben departable, and somme principal, as ben alle goostly thinges, and som secundary, as ben alle bodily thinges. The two principal worching

2153 **it bot goostly**, it signifies spiritually; see note. 2164 **anowrnid**, adorned. 2165 **clemnes**, cleanliness, purity. 2170 **wreten**, written. 2181 **departable**, divisible.

The Cloud of Unknowing

myghtes, reson and wille, worchen purely in hemself in alle goostly thinges, withouten help of the other two secundary mightes. Ymaginacion and sensualité worchin beastly in alle bodey things, whether thei be present or absente in the body, and with the bodey wittes. Bot by hem, withouten helpe of reson and of wille, may a soule never come to for to knowe the vertewe and the condicions of bodey creatures, ne the cause of theire beynges and theire makynges.

And for this skyle is reson and wille clepid principal mightes, for thei worchen in pure spirit withouten any maner of bodelines; and ymaginacion and sensualité secondary, for thei worchen in the body with bodey instrumentes, the whiche ben oure five wittes. Minde is clepid a principal myghte, for it conteneth in it goostly not only alle the other mightes, bot therto alle tho thinges in the whiche thei worchen. Se by the profe.

2195

Here biginnith the fourie and sixty chapitre.

Reson is a myght thorou the whiche we departe the ivel fro the good, the ivel fro the worse, the good fro the betir, the worse fro the worste, the betir from the best. Before er man synned, might reson have done al this by kynde. Bot now it is so blendid with the original synne that it may not kon worche this werk bot yif it be illuminid by grace. And bothe the self reson, and the thing that it worcheth in, ben comprehendid and contened in the mynde.

2200

Wille is a myght thorou the whiche we chese good, after that it be determinid with reson; and thorow the whiche we love good, we desire good, and resten us with ful likyng and consent eendli in God. Before er man synnid, might not wille be disceyvid in his chesying, in his lovyng, ne in none of his werkes; for whi it had than by kynde to savour iche thing as it was. Bot now it may not do so, bot yif it be anointed with grace. For oftymes, bicause of infeccion of the original synne, it savoreth a thing for good that is ful yvel, and that hath bot the licesnes of goode. And bothe the wille and the thing that it wilnith the mynde conteneth and comprehendith in it.

2210

Here biginnith the five and sixty chapitre.

Imagynacion is a might thorow the whiche we portray alle ymages of absent and present thinges. And bothe it, and the thing that it worcheth in, ben contened in the mynde. Byfore er man synned, was ymagynacion so obeyent unto the reson — to

2187 wittes, senses. 2200 blendid, blinded; kon, know how to. 2201 the thing that it worcheth in, i.e., its object. 2205 likyng, pleasure, joy; eendli, finally. 2207 savour, apprehend, savor.

The Cloud of Unknowing

2215 the whiche it is as it were servaunt — that it mynystrid never to it any unordeynde
ymage of any bodey creature, or any fantasy of any goostly creature. Bot now it is
not so. For bot yif it be refreynd by the light of grace in the reson, elles it wil never
sese, sleping or wakyng, for to portray dyverse unordeynd ymages of bodey creatures;
2220 or elles sum fantasye, the whiche is nougnt elles bot a bodey conseyte of a
goostly thing, or elles a goostly conseyte of a bodey thing. And this is evermore
feynid and fals, and anexte unto errour.

2225 This inobedyence of the yimaginacion may clerly be conseyvid in hem that ben
newlynges tornid fro the worlde unto devocion in the tyme of here preier. For before
the tyme be that the yimaginacion be in grete partie refreynid by the light of grace in
the reson — as it is in contynowel meditacion of goostly thinges, as ben theire wren-
chidnes, the Passion and the kyndenes of oure Lorde God, with many soche other —
thei mowe in no wise put away the wonderful and the diverse thoughtes, fantasies
and ymages, the whiche ben mynystred and preentid in theire mynde by the light and
2230 the coriouste of yimaginacyon. And alle this inobedyence is the pyne of the original
synne.

Here biginnith the six and sixty chapitre.

2235 Sensualité is a mighte of oure soule, rechyng and regnyng in the bodey wittes,
thorow the whiche we have bodey knowyng and felyng of alle bodey creatures,
whether thei be likyng or gruchyng. And it hath two partyes: one thorow the whiche
it beholdeth to the needfulnes of oure body, another thorou the whiche it serveth to
the lustis of the bodey wittys. For this same might is it that gruchith when the body
lackyth the needful thinges unto it, and that in the takyng of the nede stereth us to
take more than nedith in fedyng and fortheryng of oure lustys. It grochith in lackyng
of likyng creatures, and lustily is delited in theire presence. It grochith in presence of
2240 mislikyng creatures, and it is lustely plesid in theire absence. Bothe this might and
the thing that it worcheth in ben contened in the mynde.

2245 Before er man synnid was the sensualité so obedient unto the wille — unto the
whiche it is as it were servaunt — that it ministred never unto it any unordeinde
likyng or groching in any bodey creature, or in any goostly feynyng of likyng or
mislikyng maad by any goostly enmye in the bodey wittes. Bot now it is not so; for
bot yif it be reulyd by grace in the wille, for to suffre meekly and in mesure the pyne
of the original synne — the whiche it felith in absence of needful likyng and in pres-

2223 **newlynges**, recently. 2227 **mowe**, can. 2232 **rechyng**, ranging, reaching. 2234
2236 **gruchyng**, displeasing. 2236 **lustis**, pleasures, desires. 2239 **grochith**, is displeasing. 2240
mislikyng, displeasing.

The Cloud of Unknowing

ence of speedful groching — and therto also for to streyne it fro luste in presence of
needful lykyng, and fro lusty plesaunce in absence of speedful groching, elles wil it
2250 wretchedly and wantounly weltre, as a swine in the myre, in the welthes of this wорuld
and the foule flessche so mochel, that alle oure levynge schal be more beastly and
fieschly then outhir manly or goostly.

Here biginnith the seven and sixty chapitre.

Loo, goostly freende to soche wretchednes as thou here mayst see ben we fallen for
2255 synne! And therfore what wonder is it though we be blinely and lightly disseyvid
in understandyng of goostly wordes and of goostly worchyng, and namely thoo the
whiche knowyn not yit the myghtes of their soules and the maners of theirie wor-
chyng?

For ever whan the mynde is occupied with any bodely thing, be it taken to never so
2260 good an eende, yit thou arte binethe thiself in this worching, and withouten thi soule.
And ever whan thou felist thi mynde occupied with the sotil condicions of the
myghtes of thi soule and theirie worchynges in goostly thinges as ben vices or
vertewes of thiself or of any creature that is goostly and even with thee in kynde, to
2265 that eende that thou mightest by this werke lerne to knowe thiself in forthring of
perfeccion: then thou arte withinne thiself and even with thiself. Bot ever when thou
felist thi mynde occupied with no maner of thyng that is bodely or goostly, bot only
with the self substauce of God, as it is and may be in the preof of the werk of this
book, then thou arte aboven thiself and under thi God.

Aboven thiself thou arte: for whi thou atteynest to come thedir by grace, whether
2270 thou mayst not come by kynde; that is to sey, to be onyd to God in spirit and in love
and in acordaunce of wille. Bynethe thi God thou arte: for whi thof al it may be seide
in maner that in this tyme God and thou ben not two bot one in spirit — insomoche
2275 that thou or another for soche onheed that feleth the perfeccion of this werk may
sothfastly, bi witnes of Scripture, be clepid a god — nevertheles yit thou arte binethe
Hym. For whi He is God by kynde withouten biginnynge; and thou that sumtyme
were nougnt in substauce and therto after when thou were by His might and His
love maad ought, wilfully with synne madest thiself wors then nougnt: only bi His
mercy withouten thi desert arte maad a God in grace, onyd with Him in spirit with-
2280 outen departyng, bothe here and in blis of heven withouten any eende. So that,
though thou be al one with Hym in grace, yit thou arte ful fer binethe Hym in kynde.

2248 **speedful**, profitable, expedient. 2250 **wantounly weltre**, wallow without discipline;
welthes, good things; well being. 2252 **manly**, human. 2256–57 **thoo the whiche**, those who.
2269 **whether**, whither. 2276 **nought**, nothing. 2277 **ought**, something.

The Cloud of Unknowing

Loo, goostly freende! herby maist thou see sumwhat in partie that whoso knowith
not the myghtes of their owne soule, and the maner of their worshyng, may ful
lightly be disseyved in understandyng of wordes that ben wretyn to goostly entent.
And herfore maist thou see sumwhat the cause whi that I durst not pleynly bid thee
2285 schewe thi desire unto God; bot I bad thee childly do that in thee is to hyde it and
hele it. And this I do for feerde lest thou schuldest conseyve bodily that that is mente
goostly.

Here biginnith the eight and sixty chapitre.

And on the same maner, wher another man wolde bid thee gader thi myghtes and
2290 thi wittes holiche withinne thiself, and worship God there — thof al he sey ful wel
and ful trewly, ye! and no man trewlier and he be wel conseivid — yit for feerde of
disseite and bodely conceyvyng of his wordes, me list not byd thee do so. Bot thus
wil I bid thee. Loke on no wyse that thou be withinne thiself. And schortly withoutyn
thiself wil I not that thou be, ne yit aboven, ne behynde, ne on o side, ne on other.

2295 "Wher than," seist thou, "schal I be? Noghwhere, by thi tale!" Now trewly thou
seist wel; for there wolde I have thee. For whi noghwhere bodely is everywhere
goostly. Loke than besily that thi goostly werk be noghwhere bodely; and than wher-
soever that that thing is, on the whiche thou wilfuly worchest in thi mynde in sub-
staunce, o sekerly ther art thou in spirit, as verrely as thi body is in that place that
2300 thou arte bodely. And thof al thi bodely wittes kon fynde ther nothing to fede hem
on, for hem think it nought that thou doste, ye! do on than this nought, elles that thou
do it for Goddes love. And lete nought, therfore, bot travayle besily in that nought
with a wakyng desire to wilne to have God, that no man may knowe. For I telle thee
trewly that I had lever be so nowhere bodely, wrastlyng with that blynde nought,
2305 than to be so grete a lorde that I might when I wolde be everywhere bodely, merily
pleiing with al this ought as a lorde with his owne.

Lat be this everiwhere and this ought, in comparison of this noghwhere and this
nought. Reche thee never yif thi wittys kon no skyle of this nought; for whi I love it
moche the betir. It is so worthi a thing in itself that thei kon no skyle therapon. This
2310 nought may betir be felt then seen; for it is ful blynde and ful derk to hem that han
bot lityl while lokid therapon. Nevertheles, yif I schal sothlier sey, a soule is more
bleendid in felyng of it for habundaunce of goostly light, then for any derknes or
wantynge of bodely lightte. What is he that clepith it nought? Sekirly it is oure utter
man, and not oure inner. Oure inner man clepith it Al; for of it he is wel lernid to kon

2301 elles, provided. 2302 lete nought, do not desist. 2306 ought, something. 2308 Reche
thee never, Don't ever care; wittys, faculties. 2314 Al, All.

The Cloud of Unknowing

2315 skyle of alle thinges, bodey or goostly, withouten any specyal beholdyng to any o
thing by itself.

Here biginnith the nine and sixty chapitre.

2320 Wonderfully is a mans affeccion varied in goostly felyng of this nought when it is
noughwhere wrought. For at the first tyme that a soule lokith therapon, it schal fynde
alle the specyal dedes of sinne that ever he did sithen he was borne, bodey or
goostly, prively or derkly, peyntid therapon. And howsoever that he tornith it aboute,
evermore thei wil apere before his ighen; unto the tyme be that with moche harde
travayle, many sore sighinges, and many bitter wepynges he have in grete party rub-
bid hem awey.

2325 Somtyme in this travayle him think that it is to loke therapon as on helle; for him
think that he despeirith to wynne to perfeccyon of goostly rest oute of that pyne. Thus
fer inwardes comyn many; bot for greetnes of pyne that thei fele and for lackyng of
counforte thei go bak in beholdyng of bodey thinges, sekyngh fleschly counfortes
withouten, for lackyng of goostly that thei have not yit deservyd, as thei schuld yif
thei had abeden.

2330 For he that abidith felith somtyme som coumforte, and hath som hope of perfec-
cion; for he felith and seeth that many of his fordone specyal synnes ben in grete
partye by help of grace rubbid awey. Nevertheles yit everamonge he felith pyne; bot
he thinkith that it schal have an ende, for it wexith ever les and les. And therfore he
clepith it nought helle bot purgatory. Somtyme he kan fynde no specyal synne wre-
tyn therapon, bot yit hym think that it is synne a lumpe, he wote never what, none
other thing than hymself; and than it may be clepid the stathil and the pyne of the
original synne. Somtyme hym think that it is paradis or heven, for diverse wonderful
swetnes and counfortes, joyes and blessid vertewes that he fyndeth therin. Somtyme
hym think it God, for pees and rest that he findeth therin.

2340 Ye! think what he think wil; for evermore he schal fynde it a cloude of unknowyng
that is bitwix hym and his God.

Here biginnyth the seventy chapitre.

2345 And therfore travayle fast in this nought and this noughwhere, and leve thin out-
ward bodey wittes and alle that thei worche in; for I telle thee trewly that this werk
may not be conceyvid by hem.

For by thin ighen thou maist not conceyve of any thing, bot yif it be by the lengthe

2330 abeden, remained, endured. **2337 stathil**, remaining root of felled tree.

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and the breed, the smalnes and the gretnes, the roundnes and the swarenes, the fernes
and the neernes, and the colour of it. And bi thin eren, not bot noise or sum maner of
2350 soun. By thin nose, not bot either stynche or savour. And by thi taast, not bot either
soure or swete, salt or fresche, bittyr or likyng. And bi thi feling, not bot outhere hote
or colde, hard or tendre, soft or scharpe. And trewly neither hath God ne goostly
things none of thees qualitees ne quantitees. And therfore leve thin outward wittes,
and worche not with hem, neither withinne ne withouten. For alle thoo that setten
2355 hem to be goostly worshers withinne, and wenēn that thei scholen outhere here, smel,
or see, taast or fele goostly things, outhere withinne hem or withouten, sekerly thei
ben deceyved and worchen wronge ayens the cours of kynde. For kyndely thei ben
ordeynid that with hem men schuld have knowyng of alle outward bodely things,
and on no wise by hem com to the knowing of gostely things. I mene bi their
2360 werkes.

By their failinges we may, as thus: when we rede or here speke of sum certeyn
thinges, and therto conceyve that oure outward wittys kon not telle us bi no qualitee
what thoo thinges ben, than we mowe be verely certefied that thoo thinges ben
goostly things, and not bodely things.

2365 On this same maner goostly it farith within in oure goostly wittys, when we tra-
vailen aboue the knowyng of God Himself. For have a man never so moche goostly
understandingyng in knowyng of alle maad goostly things, yit may he never bi the
werk of his understandingyng com to the knowyng of an unmaad goostly thing, the
whiche is nought bot God. Bot by the failyng it may; for whi that thing that it failith
2370 in is nothyng elles bot only God. And herfore it was that Seynte Denis seyde: "The
most goodly knowyng of God is that, the whiche is knowyn bi unknowyng."

2375 And trewly, whoso wil loke Denis booke, he schal fynde that his wordes wil
clearly aferme al that I have seyde or schal sey, fro the biginnynge of this tretis to the
ende. On none otherwise then thus list me not alegge him, ne none other doctour for
me at this tyme. For somtyme men thought it meeknes to sey nought of their owne
hedes, bot yif thei afermid it by Scripture and doctours wordes; and now it is turnid
into coriouste and schewyng of kunnynge. To thee it nedith not, and therfore I do it
nought. For whoso hath eren, lat hem here, and whoso is sterid for to trowe, lat hem
trowe; for elles scholen thei not.

2348 **swarenes**, squareness; **fernēs**, distance. 2349 **eren**, ears. 2365 **goostly wittys**, spiritual
senses of perception. 2369 **failyng**, failing. 2374 **alegge**, cite. 2376 **hedes**, conclusions. 2377
kunnynge, knowledge. 2378 **trowe**, believe.

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2380 **Here biginnith the on and seventy chapitre.**

Somme think this mater so harde and so feerful that thei say it may not be comen to withouten moche stronge travayle comyng before, ne conceived bot seeldom, and that in the tyme of ravisching. And to thees men wol I answe as febely as I kan, and say that it is alle at the ordynaunce and the disposicion of God, after theirre abilities in soule that this grace of contemplacion and of goostly worching is goven to.

2385 For som ther ben that withoutyn moche and longe goostly excersise mowe not com thereto; and yit it schal be bot ful seeldom, and in special callyng of oure Lorde, that thei schul fele the perfeccion of this werk: the whiche callyng is clepid ravisching. And som ther ben that ben so sotyl in grace and in spirit, and so homely with God in 2390 this grace of contemplacion, that thei mowe have it when thei wolen in the comoun state of mans soule: as in sittynge, goyng, stondyng, or knelyng. And yit in this tyme thei have fulle deliberacion of alle theirre wittis, bodely or goostly, and mowe use hem yif hem list: not withouten som lettyng, bot withouten gret lettyng. Ensaumple of the first we have by Moises, and of this other by Aaron, the preest of the temple.

2395 For whi this grace of contemplacion is figurid by the Arke of the Testament in the Olde Lawe, and the worshers in this grace ben figurid by hem that most medelid hem aboute this arke, as the story wol witnes. And weel is this grace and this werk licnid to that arke. For right as in that arke were contenid alle the juelles and the relikis of the temple, right so in this lityl love put ben contenid alle the vertewes of mans soule, 2400 the whiche is the goostly temple of God.

2405 Moyses, er he might come to se this arke, and for to wite how it schuld be maad, with grete longe travayle he clombe up to the top of the mounteyne and wonid there and wrought in a cloude six daies: abidynge unto the seventh day, that oure Lorde wolde vouchesaaf for to schewe unto hym the maner of this arke-makyng. By Moyses longe travaile and his late schewyng ben understanden thoo that mowe not come to the perfeccion of this goostly werk withouten longe travayle comyng before, and yit bot ful seeldom, and when God wil vouchesaaf to schewe it.

2410 Bot that that Moyses might not come to se bot seeldom, and that not withoutyn grete longe travayle, Aaron had in his power, bicause of his office, for to se it in the temple withinne the veyle as ofte as him likid for to entre. And bi this Aaron ben understanden alle thoo the whiche I spak of aboven, the whiche by theirre goostly

2381 **feerful**, terrifying. 2383 **ravisching**, ecstasy; **as febely as I kan**, as well as my feebleness permits, however inefficiently. 2389 **homely**, familiar. 2393 **lettyng**, hindrance. 2395 **figurid**, typified. 2396–97 **most medelid hem aboute**, were most concerned with. 2399 **lityl love put**, little placing of love. 2408 **Bot that**, Whereas.

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sleightes, with help of grace, mowen propre unto hem the perfeccion of this werk as oft as hem likith.

Here biginnith the two and seventi chapitre.

2415 Lo! herby maist thou see that he that may not com to for to see and fele the perfeccion of this werk, bot with grete travayle, and yit is it bot seeldom, and may lightly be disceyvid yif he speke, think and deme other men as he felith in himself, that thei mowe not com to it bot seeldom, and that not withouten greet travaile. And on the same maner may he be deceyvid that may have it whan he wil, yif he deme alle other therafter, seiing that thei mowe have it when thei wile. Lat be this: nay, sekirly he may not think thus. For paraventure, whan it likith unto God, thoo that mowe not at the first tyme have it bot seeldom and that not withouten grete travayle, sithen after thei schulen have it whan thei wile, as ofte as hem likith. Ensaumple of this we have of Moyses, that first bot seeldome, and nought withouten grete travayle in the mounte, might not see the maner of the arke; and sithen after, as ofte as hym likid, sawe it in the vaale.

Here biginnith the thre and seventy chapitre.

2430 Thre men ther weren that most principlaly medelid hem with this arke of the Olde Testament: Moyses, Bezeleel, Aaron. Moyses lernid in the mounte of oure Lorde how it schuld be maad. Bezeleel wrought it and maad it in the vaale, after the en-saumple that was schewid in the mounteyne. And Aaron had it in kepyng in the temple, to fele it and see it as ofte as hym likid.

2435 At the liceses of thees thre, we profite on thre maners in this grace of contemplacion. Somtyme we profite only by grace, and than we ben licnid unto Moyses, that for alle the clymbyng and the travaile that he had into the mounte, might not com to se it bot seeldom; and yit was that sight only by the schewyng of oure Lorde whan hym likid to schewe it, and not for any deseert of his travayle. Somtyme we profite in this grace by oure owne goostly sleight, holpyn with grace, and than ben we licnid to Bezeleel, the whiche might not se the arke er the tyme that he had mad it by his owne travayle, holpen with the ensaumple that was schewid unto Moyses in the mounte. And somtyme we profite in this grace by other mens teching. And than be we licnid to Aaron, the whiche had it in keping and in costume to see and fele the arke when hym list, that Bezeleel had wrought and maad redy before to his handes.

2412 sleightes, devices, stratagems; mowen propre unto hem, can make their own. **2426 vaale, valley. 2437 deseert,** deserving. **2442 costume,** habit.

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Lo! goostly freende, in this werk, thof it be childly and lewdely spoken, I bere,
2445 thof I be a wreche unworthi to teche any creature, the ofice of Bezeleel, makynge and
declarlyng in maner to thin handes the maner of this goostly arke. Bot fer betir and
more worthely then I do, thou maist worche yif thou wilt be Aaron; that is to sey,
contynuely worching therin for thee and for me. Do then so, I prey thee, for the love
of God Almighty. And sithen we ben bothe clepid of God to worche in this werk, I
2450 beseche thee for Goddes love fulfille in thi partie that lackith of myne.

Here biginnith the foure and seventi chapitre.

And yif thee think that this maner of worching be not acordyng to thi disposicion
in body and in soule, thou maist leve it, and take another savely with good goostly
counseile withoutyn blame. And than I beseche thee that thou wilt have me excusid;
2455 for trewly I wolde have profitid unto thee in this writyng at my simple kunning, and
that was myn entent. And therfore rede over twyes or thries; and ever the ofter the
betir, and the more thou schalt conceyve therof, insomoche, paraventure, that sum
clause that was ful harde to thee at the first or the secound redyng, sithen after thee
schal think it ful light.

Ye! and it semith impossible to myn understanding that any soule that is dispositid to
this werk schuld rede it, or speke it, or elles here it red or spoken, bot yif that same
soule schuld fele for that tyme a verrey accordaunce to the effecte of this werk. And than,
yif thee think it doth thee good, thank God hertly, and for Goddes love prey for
me.

Do than so. And I prey thee for Godes love that thou late none see this book, bot if
it be soche one that thee think is liche to the book after that thou fyndest wreten in
the book before, where it tellith what men and when thei schuld worche in this werk.
And yif thou schalt late any soche men see it, then I preie thee that thou bid hem take
hem tyme to loke it al over. For paraventure ther is som mater therinne, in the beginnyng
2470 or in the middes, the whiche is hanging and not fully declarid there as it stondeth. Bot yif it be not there, it is sone after, or elles in the eende. And thus yif a man
sawe o partye and not another, paraventure he schuld lightly be led into errour. And
therfore I preyee thee do as I sey thee.

And yif thee think that ther be any mater therin that thou woldest have more
2475 openid than it is, late me wetyn whiche it is and thi conceypte therapon; and at my
simple kunning it schal be amendid yif I kan.

2453 savely, safely. 2456 ofter, more often. 2466 liche to, apt for. 2470 hanging, left in the air.

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2480 Fleschly jangelers, glosers and blamers, roukers and rouners, and alle maner of pynchers, kept I never that thei sawe this book; for myn entent was never to write soche thing to hem. And therfore I wolde not that thei herde it, neither thei ne none of thees corious lettrid ne lewid men, ye! althof thei be ful good men in actyve levyng; for it acordeth not to hem.

Here biginnith the five and seventy chapitre.

2485 Alle thoo that redyn or heren the mater of this book be red or spokin, and in this redyng or hering think it good and likyng thing, ben never the rather clepid of God to worche in this werk, only for this likyng steryng that thei fele in the tyme of this redyng. For paraventure this steryng cometh more of a kyndely coriouste of witte then of any clepyng of grace.

2490 Bot yif thei wil prove whens this steryng cometh, thei mowe prove thus, yif hem likyth. First lat hem loke yif thei have done that in hem is before, ablyng hem thereto in clensyng of their concyence, at the dome of Holi Chirche, their counsel acordyng. Yif it be thus, weel is inasmoche. Bot yif thei wil wetyn more nere, lat hem loke yif it be evermore presing in theirre mynde more costumabely then is any other of goostly excersise. And yif hem think that ther is any maner of thing that thei do, bodely or goostly, that is sufficiently done with witnes of theirre concyence, bot yif this privé litil love put be in maner goostly the cheef of alle theirre werk, and yif thei thus fele, then it is a token that thei ben clepid of God to this werk. And sekirly elles not.

2500 I say not that it schal ever laste and dwelle in alle theirre myndes contynowely that ben clepid to worche in this werk. Nay, so is it nought. For from a yong goostly prentys in this werk the actueel felyng therof is ofttymes withdrawnen for divers skyles; somtyme for he schal not take over-homely therapon and wene that it be in grete party in his owne power, to have it when him list and as him list. And soche a wenying were pride. And evermore whan the felyng of grace is withdrawnen, pride is the cause: not ever pride that is, bot pride that schuld be, ne were that this feling of grace were withdrawnen. And thus wenyn ofttymes som yong foles that God is theirre enemye, when He is theirre ful freende.

2505 Somtyme it is withdrawnen for theirre rechelesnes; and when it is thus, thei fele sone

2477 jangelers, babblers; glosers, flatterers; roukers and rouners, tale-bearers and whisperers. 2478 pynchers, carpers. 2480 corious lettrid ne lewid, inquisitive people, educated nor uneducated. 2484 likyng, delectable. 2494–95 bot yif, only if. 2501 over-homely, too comfortably; wene, expect. 2507 rechelesnes, carelessness.

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after a ful bitter pyne that betith hem ful sore. Somtyme oure Lorde wil delaye it bi a
2510 cauteel, for He wol bi soche a delaing make it growe and be had more in deintee
when it is newe founden and felt agein, that longe had be lost. And this is one of the
rediest and sovereynist tokin that a soule may have to wite bi, whether he be clepid
or not to worche in this werk: yif he fele after soche a delaying and a longe lackingyng
of this werk, that when it cometh sodenly as it doth, unpurchasid with any mene, that
he hath than a gretter fervour of desire and gretter love-longing to worche in this
2515 werk, than ever he had any before, insomochel that oftymes I trowe he hath more
joie of the fynding therof, then ever he had sorow of the lesing. And yif it be thus,
sekirly it is a tokin verrey withoutyn errorur that he is clepid of God to worche in this
werk, whatsoever that he be or hath ben.

For not what thou arte, ne what thou hast ben, beholdeth God with his merciful
2520 ighe; bot that that thou woldest be. And Seinte Gregory to witnes that “alle holy de-
sires growen bi delaies; and yif thei wanyn bi delaies, then were thei never holy de-
sires.” For he that felith ever les joye and les in newe fyndinges and sodeyn pre-
sentacions of his olde purposid desires, thof al thei mowe be clepid kyndely desires
2525 to the goode, nevertheless holy desires weren thei never. Of this holy desire spekith
Seint Austyne and seith that “al the liif of a good Cristen man is not elles bot holy
desire.”

Farewel, goostly freende, in Goddes blessing and myne! And I beseche Almighty
God that trewe pees, hole counsel, and goostly coumforte in God with habundaunce
of grace, evirmore be with thee and alle Goddes lovers in eerthe. Amen.

HERE EENDITH THE CLOWDE OF UNKNOWNING

2509 cauteel, strategem; **deintee**, esteem. **2511 wite**, know. **2521 wanyn**, wane, diminish.
2522 fyndinges, discoveries, insights.

Notes

When I make use of Hodgson's notes, I follow the form used in her 1982 edition. That is, each note is preceded by the page and line numbers, in brackets, of the word or phrase being glossed: e.g., [H. 1/16–17] refers to page 1 of her text of the *Cloud*, lines 16 and 17. References to the *Cloud* author's other works, in the same Hodgson edition, follow the same format.

"R. M." throughout the notes refers to Richard Methley, a Carthusian, who in the fifteenth century translated the *Cloud* into Latin and annotated it (Walsh, pp. 14–19).

I have used British Library MS Harleian 674 as my copy text. It is referred to in the notes as Har1. Other manuscripts referred to are British Library MS Harleian 2373 = Har2; British Library MS Royal C xxvi = Ro1; British Library MS Royal D v = Ro3; University Library, Cambridge MS Kk.vi.26 = Kk; Bodleian Library MS University College = U; St. Hugh's Charterhouse, Sussex, MS Parkminster, D176 = Pa.

- 8 ff. The convention of warning off those who are unworthy is meant to force the reader to examine his motives, make him appropriately wary, and inculcate a sense of reverence.
- 15–16 Although the author restricts the achievement of the highest prayer here to a relatively small group of Christians, there are hints throughout the *Cloud* (lines 8–27; 32–38; 339–43; 795–97; 1274–78; 2444–50) that such prayer is potentially accessible to all. In lines 340 ff., he says that contemplation is the activity man should have continued in, had he not sinned; without this activity, man moves further and further from God. Gilson, *History*, p. 166: Man's act of willing himself for himself made him "dissimilar to God, but the effect of the grace of the Redemption is to restore man to the divine resemblance he lost. *The Christian life is therefore identical with the mystical life*, and the latter in turn can be considered as a reeducation of love" (my emphasis). See the discussion in Riehle, pp. 15 ff. Also, Hodgson [2/7–13] cites Gregory and Walter Hilton on the "mixed life." For the active and contemplative lives, see Butler, pp. 201–23.
- 15 *sovereinest pointe of contemplatif leving*. This phrase, a variation of the concept of the *apex animae*, occurring also at lines 37, 1370–71 (see note), and 1371, is at the heart of mystical theology. See Hodgson, pp. xxii–xxiii, lv; Lees, pp. 270–308, quoting Gregory of Nyssa's "to anotaton meros." Walsh, p. 185, quotes from the *Divine Names*, ch. 7: "It is through the power of charity that the soul in the sovereign point of the spirit is extended"; and, p. 101, R. M.'s phrase *supremo affectivo apice vitae contemplationis* ("the supreme affective peak of the contemplative life" — my translation). See also Houston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*: "This essence, or 'being,' is called by the German mystics

Notes

grund, ‘ground,’ of the spirit.” The Middle English poem, *Pearl*, has the word *grounde* in the final line of each stanza in section VII, lines 372, 384, 396, etc. According to Wood, Eckhart considered “the ground, the abyss and the apex of the soul to be actually one and the same” (p. 53, n. 28).

- 20–23 I.e., the treatise must be read in its entirety. In this context, it should be said that the author’s *Book of Privé Counseling*, at least, is an important supplement to understanding the *Cloud*.
- 28–38 For a similar vigor in the defense of the author’s teaching on contemplation, see beginning of *Privé Counseling*, 76/16 ff.
- 31 *of*. MS: *off*.
- corious. Bernard of Clairvaux’s definition of “curiosity” is “love of abstract speculation for its own sake and without bearing on the quest for salvation” [H. 2/2–5; my translation].
- 36 *verrey*. Inserted in the margin of Har1.
- 67 *also*. Inserted in the margin of Har1.
- 76 *of God*. Inserted in the margin of Har1.
- 121–22 *The seven and . . . of this book*. Omitted and placed at the bottom of the page in Har1.
- 141 *boistousnes*. “A lack of culture, a crudeness, in spiritual matters” [H. 5/12]. However, the adverb form of the word is used as the equivalent of “humbly” or “unpretentiously” in *Privé Counseling*, 77/18.
- 180 *werk*. Inserted in the margins of Har1.
- 201 *goostly wittes*. Either the reason and the will, or the “spiritual senses,” inferred from “some experience of God’s presence in metaphor or implicit analogy” [H. 6/41].
- 218 *Goostly freende in God*. On the indebtedness of the *Cloud* to the epistolary style of Seneca, see Emery, pp. 47–50.
- 220 *stifly*. Between *stifly* and *agens*, the following has been heavily canceled in Har1: *in the state and the degree and in the fourme of leving that thou hast ententively purposed*. Hodgson ignores the cancellation and prints the phrase as part of the

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text. She notes that it has also been canceled in Ro1 and omitted in Kk, Har2, U, Ro3, and Pa. Observing “it is uncertain whether [those passages] were in the original text,” she notes scholarly debate on the issue [H. 7/24–25].

- 229 R. M.: “The ordinary degree is of laypeople, the special of clerics or religious, and the singular of solitaries: that is, hermits, anchorites and especially Carthusians” (Walsh, p. 116). See also Emery on the use of William of St. Thierry’s *Epistola ad Fratres de Monte Dei* by the *Cloud* author and by the Carthusians. *Singuler* can also refer to a physically solitary state or a solitude of the spirit. The recipient of the letter is described as in the singular life [H. 7/348/17].
- 234–35 *wrought . . . nought . . . bought.* This rhyming antithesis between creation, nothingness, and redemption, continued in the *oughtes* of line 243, sums up a key pattern in the work, an existential dimension that occurs more explicitly in *Privé Counseling*, 75/18 ff., where the reader is urged to focus on the simple fact of his existence, that he *is*. But the purpose of this exercise is mainly negation: a “noughting” of oneself and an “alling” of God [H. 85/15]; and forgetting “the feeling of the being of thyself for the feeling of the being of God” [H. 88/41–42]. See below, lines 745–46.
- 238 *longing.* The word used by the Owl to describe the kind of prayer she engages in in the *Owl and the Nightingale* (Stanley, pp. 869, 889). See also Denis’s discussion of “yerning” in the *Divine Names*, Ch. 4, 708B ff.
- 246 *the fote of thi love.* The source of this image is Augustine, commenting on Psalm 9: “Rightly understood, the foot of the soul is love, for it moves by means of love to the place it is going” *PL* 36:124 [H. 8/16; my translation]. See also line 395 and *Privé Counseling* [H. 84/14]. This is a reference to the active part to be played by the contemplative, who is to avoid any kind of Quietism [H. 8/16]. For an application of the foot motif to Dante, *Inferno*, 28–30, see Freccero, p. 38.
- 249 *weike wreche.* Canceled in Har1 but added in several other manuscripts. I have followed Hodgson’s decision to include it.
- what thou arte.* In the *Cloud*, the author moves from a meditation on *what* a person is, his character, virtues and vices, to a forgetting of what he is, as in the case of Mary Magdalen, who no longer reflects on *what* she has been (lines 834–41). This movement is more explicit in *Privé Counseling*, 76/38–39: “For I hold him too ignorant and too crude who cannot think and feel that he himself is, not what he is, but that he is.”
- 252 *wreche.* Canceled in Har1 and omitted in several other manuscripts. Hodgson includes it, and I like its dramatic force.

Notes

- 254 *cursid*. Hodgson emends to *werid* on grounds of alliteration and recurrence of the phrase *wrechid and werid* elsewhere in the manuscript.
- 261 *Look now forwardes, and lat be bacwardes*. An idea repeated at lines 2519–20, where the author insists that God does not care what you have been but what you are going to be. It is an allusion to Philippians 3:13: “Forgetting what lies behind and reaching out for what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal,” cited by Walsh, p. 118.
- 263 The assertion that all the contemplative’s life now must be desire recurs at lines 2524–26 and is from Augustine (Walsh, p. 266).
- 265 *gelous lover*. The idea of God as a jealous lover may derive from the Pseudo-Dionysius: “Those strong in divine things [contemplatives] call him the jealous one,” *Divine Names*, ch. 4, as cited by Walsh, p. 119.
- 268 *the windowes and the dore*. The “window” image is associated with the five bodily senses, from a traditional interpretation of Jeremiah 9:21 (Vulg.) (Walsh, p. 119). In Chaucer’s Tale of Melibee, an elaborate allegory develops from this *topos* (Benson, lines 970–72; 1421–23).
- 274 *mene Himself*. The core injunction, repeated at lines 495–98.
- 276–77 *And do . . . of hem*. This clause was omitted by the scribe but added at the foot of the page.
- 278 *streche*. Walsh, p. 120, observes that this is “perhaps the most typical word used by the Dionysian school to describe the contemplative effort.” See also Lees, pp. 328–30.
- 280 *aungelles*. Medieval angelology developed, with the authority of the Pseudo-Dionysius in the *De Coelesti Hierarchia*, from Scripture and the Neoplatonic theory of Emanations [H. 9/19–20]. In the mystical ascent in Gallus, Bonaventure, and Balma, the nine orders of angels parallel the stages of contemplation. See Introduction, p. 6.
- 289 *cloude of unknowyng*. See Exodus 24:15–18.
- 290 *nakid entent*. *Entent*, from the Latin *intentio*, is defined as “an act of the will moved by the desire of love and directed by reason.” *Nakid* means “stripped of all images,” a concept common to apophatic mystical texts [H. 9/31]. For an excellent discussion of intentionality in medieval culture, see Myles 1994, pp. 33–54; and note at line 1065.

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- 303 *athomus*. See 1 Corinthians 15:52. “In Medieval Latin, its time value was equivalent to about 1/6 (15/94) of a second, the smallest measure of time” [H. 10/6]. See in the *Pistle of Preier*, the phrase, “a twinkeling of an ige” [H. 101/23]. Augustine’s treatment of the smallest segments of time is an occasion for a philosophical reflection on eternity (Vance, pp. 34–50). For a discussion of the “moment” as a temporal designation for the mystical experience in Augustine and a similar motif among Romantic writers, see Abrams, pp. 385–90, *et passim*.
- 314 *soverein desirable*. The use of the prefix *soverein*, a stylistic feature of the Dionysian tradition, corresponds to the Latin *super* and Greek *hyper* (Lees, pp. 226–28). See note at line 15.
- 316 *He is*. MS: *maad* has been canceled after *is*.
- by *mesuring*. According to the Pseudo-Dionysius, every created spirit receives divine things “in proportion to its powers, and in this measure is perception granted through the workings of the Divine goodness,” which “divinely tempereth unto finite measure” the infinite things that pass man’s understanding [H. 10/22]. In the *Consolation of Philosophy*, V, pr. 4, a similar observation occurs: *for al that evere is iknowe, it is rather comprehendid and knownen, nat aftir his strengthe and his nature, but aftir the faculte (that is to seyn, the power and the nature) of hem that knownen* [Everything which is known is known not according to its own power but rather according to the capacity of the knower] (Chaucer’s translation, Benson, lines 137–41; see Green, p. 110). Walsh, p. 122, cites Thomas Gallus in regard to this passage: “So great is the power of the true love of the good and the beautiful that not only does it lead men and angels to outstrip their natural powers so that they can ascend to God, but it causes God to leave behind as it were his own nature, and to descend below it to the creature.” However, the *Cloud* author seems to shy away from this kind of aesthetic statement; and the Thomist theology of being, which, from one point of view, is rather austere, seems more congenial to him.
- 324 *Bot seth*. In Harl, this is *bot sith*, “but since,” amended convincingly by Hodgson to “but see” [H. 10/31].
- 326–27 *two mightes*. Walsh, p. 123, quotes Gallus: “We are convinced that the affection is ineffably more profoundly and more sublimely drawn to God by God himself than is the intellect, because men and angels love more than they have the power to reason or understand. . . . And what is there in God that is not loved by the affection? It is as if the whole of him is clasped by the affection and rejected by the understanding.”

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- 338 *taast*. Walsh, p. 123, cites Psalm 33:9 and 1 Peter 2:3 as an important image in Western spirituality. See *Piers Plowman*, B.18, 83–84: “For alle þei were unhardy þat houed þer or stode / To touchen hym or to *tasten* hym or taken doun of roode. . . .” See Gallacher, 1991, pp. 59–60; italics my own.
- 339–46 This very strong assertion that the contemplation described in the *Cloud* is what humanity was created for and by which it is to be restored enlarges the possible audience envisioned for the work. See note to 15–16.
- 352 *hy*. Canceled by Hodgson.
- 358 *thing seerly*. Harl reads *thing*, but Hodgson, with evidence from other manuscripts, emends to *tyme* for purposes of coherence. But *thing* makes good sense too.
- 368–76 For the central role of Christ as creator and time keeper in the *Cloud*, as opposed to the views of Huxley and others, see Johnston, (1975), pp. 67–79.
- 373 St. Theresa of Avila describes a stage at which the humanity of Christ is withdrawn only to provide a future, deeper fruition of this humanity, which has only seemed to be lost (see Johnston, [1975], p. 76).
- 385 *sparcle fro the cole*. See Introduction, p. 6, for the concept of the *scintilla synderesis*. The idea is evident in Henry Vaughan’s *Silex Scintillans* (1655). Also an image from Gerard Manley Hopkins’s poem, *The Windhover*, seems to suggest this same tradition: “and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear, / Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.”
- 388–90 *for corupcion . . . riseth agen*. Hugh of Balma describes the commonplace of the recoil of the spirit: “immediately after its rise, the mind falls beneath itself, again and again rises, and again falls beneath itself” [H. 12/27–29; my translation]. For Augustine’s complex experience of falling back from the mystical vision, see TeSelle, pp. 20–26.
- 395 *troden doun*. This metaphor is often associated in mystical writing with the “foot of love” [H. 12/36]. See note at line 246.
- 423 *cloude of forgetyng*. Walsh, p. 128, cites Richard of St. Victor’s *Benjamin Major*, V, 2: “To enter the Cloud of Unknowing is to rise above mind, and by means of the cloud of forgetfulness, to hide from the mind the awareness of whatever lies at hand.” In Chaucer’s *House of Fame*, II, 972–78, the dreamer looks down at one point and is prevented from seeing the world he has left by a *cloud*: “And thou thoughte y upon Boece, / That writ, ‘A thought may flee so

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hye / Wyth fetheres of Philosophye, / To passen everych element, / And whan he hath so fer ywent, / Than may be seen behynde his bak / *Cloude . . .*” (Chaucer’s translation; my emphasis). Also see Boethius, *Consolation*, Book 4, meter 1, 1–7 (Benson, p. 441).

- 441–42 A combination of affirmation and negation that runs throughout the *Cloud*. By telling the reader in some detail not to think about the kindness and worthiness of God, he has already caused him to think about it.
- 445–48 It is good to think on the kindness of God (affirmation), but better to think upon His “nakid beyng” (negation). See note at line 590. For the existential metaphysics of the *Cloud*, see Myles; and for the “prayer of being,” see Rissanen.
- 446 *apon.* MS: *on pon.*
- 453–56 R. M. “Man’s thought or mental skill can never find God. So, according to Denis the Areopagite, it is by an incomprehensible ascent that we find union with him who is above every substance and all knowledge” (Walsh, p. 130).
- 464 *darte.* Guigues du Pont: “It often happens, that God, for the soul’s sake, causes certain rents to occur in the cloud itself. Through these rents the divine goodness is reached by means of secret aspirations — sharp arrows of loving impulses which penetrate the cloud. When this happens, the soul has a sweet and spiritual taste of divine things, which it savors but does not see” (Walsh, p. 131).
- 470–74 Answering the question is an affirming act, even though it is followed by the apophatic advice to tread it down.
- 473 *thof.* MS: *For thof.* Hodgson’s (1944) emendation notes that although *for* is to be found in the best manuscript, “it is obviously redundant” [H. 27/1].
- 483 *scaterid.* In the process of telling the reader what to reject, he affirms the value of many meditative activities. For the motif of “scattering and oneing,” see Englert.
- 495 *love.* Omitted by Hodgson though she notes that the word “love” must have entered the text at an early stage [H. 15/26].
- 497–98 Ro1, which seems to have more copy mistakes than the other manuscripts I have looked at, has “with any other cause” rather than “*withouten*,” an error which reverses the meaning of Har1 and is obviously contradictory.

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- 500 *a litil worde of o silable*. The author “aims at focusing the attention by giving the mind an imageless suggestion to fasten on” [H. 15/31–32].
- 504 Ro1 has *for thing that it bifalleth*, which is ungrammatical.
- 505 *thi scheeld*. Cassian: “Take a short verse of a psalm and it shall be your shield and buckler” (Walsh, p. 134).
- 513 *swete*. Inserted in the margin of Har1.
- 525 *questyon*. The variant spelling in Kk is *whestion*.
- 526 *so febeli as I can*. That is, “as well as my feebleness permits” [H., glossary under *febeli*].
- 530 *a beme . . . God*. “Because man was created in the image and likeness of the Trinity, his reason participates in the intelligence of God, whose light illuminates the true working of the mind” [H. 16/27].
- 566 *nakid beyng*. “I.e., not clothed in any image or concept that would restrict and falsify” [H. 17/33]. See line 447.
- 577 *thanne*. Inserted in the margin of Har1.
- 590 *fantasie*. Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae, q. 180, a. 5: “Human contemplation according to the condition of the present life, cannot exist without images, because it is con-natural for man to see intelligible species in images” [H. 18/18–21; my translation].
- 595 *werk blynd*. Emended to *blynd werk* by Hodgson.
- 605 *privé love put*. Kk and Ro1, as well as other manuscripts, have *puttyng* for *put*, making it clear that *put* is used as a noun in this expression which occurs throughout the *Cloud*: lines 807–08, 859, 1058, 2399, 2495. The term seems related to the Latin *ponere* and Greek *tithenai* (Lees, pp. 211–13). Walsh, p. 139, translates this phrase as “this secret love beating on this cloud of unknowing.”
- 606–09 Note again the combination of affirmation and negation. Encountering the cloud of unknowing (negation) is better than beholding all the mirth and melody of heaven (affirmation). The imagery of “mirth and melody” are negated, but only after being invoked.
- 617 *nere it were*. “If it were not”; literally, “were it not that it were.”

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- 642 Seven lines have been canceled in Har1 between *woreld* and *soche*. Hodgson ignores this cancellation and reads *& arte oblisched unto any degree in devote levynge in Holi Chirche, what-so it be, prive or aperete, & ther-to that wil be rewlid not after theire owne wille & theire owne witte, bot after the wille & the counsel of theire sovereigns, what-so thei be, religious or seculeres after woreld*, observing that this was apparently an early addition which may have been canceled by those opposed to the religious life, perhaps Lollards [H. 20/4].
- 643 Hodgson [20/5] glosses *venial* as “pardonable” and *deedly* (line 641) as “leading to damnation.” She refers to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, questions 88, 89 for further information.
- 645 *stonde in*. The phrase *bi the witnes and the counsel of som discret fader* [i.e., priest] has been canceled after *stonde in*. It is included in Hodgson who notes its cancellation in Har1, Ro1, Ro2, and its omission in Kk, Har2, U, Ro3, and Pa. Like the clause identified in line 642, this seems to have been an early addition, subsequently canceled by an anti-clerical reader. See H. 7/24.
- 649 ff. Hodgson [20/15–36] calls this treatment of the Seven Deadly Sins “unusual and perfunctory.” However, the unusual placing of Wrath before Pride fits in with his discussion of the world, the flesh, and the devil in his treatise on the Discretion of Spirits. He calls the devil the “prince of wræphe” [H. 148/12] and weaves wrath in with malice, wickedness, and bitterness. His main argument against this group of vices is that they rob the soul of the peace and charity so essential to contemplation. Also relevant to this passage is his discussion of the sensuality in Chapter 66, where a peace of the senses is to be obtained by regulating the natural irritation that occurs in the senses because of discomfort or the lack of bodily comforts. He calls this irritation *grocning*, which can be translated as *grumbling* — see Wolpers, p. 131, Johnston (1973), p. 133 — with the obvious connotation of Wrath. A similar point is made in *Piers Plowman* 5.609 ff. (Kane/Donaldson edition) where Wrath undermines Truth discovered and possessed in the heart as the goal of the pilgrimage.
- 664 This is the only instance in Har1 where *worldy* replaces the usual *wordly*.
- 678 Several manuscripts read *the trewe dissipes*, namely U, Ro3, Pa, Kk, Har2 and Ro1, but such an addition is redundant given the state of perfection sought.
- 698 *be sotely*. MS: *sotely be*, with words reversed by scribal correction.
- 700 *crokid*. “Cf. Latin *curva*, a familiar term used technically by St. Bernard and St. Bonaventura among others in antithesis to *recta*, to signify curvature away from

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God" [H. 22/2]. See the phrase "crooked wey" in Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale, line 761.

- 703 *clene cause of alle vertewes*. A quote from Augustine harmonizes with the existential dimension of the *Cloud*: "For virtue is principally God himself: in whom there is no difference between having virtue and being virtue" [H. 22/4–5; my translation].
- 707 *charité*. Augustine's classic definition of charity is useful here: "I call 'charity' the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for His own sake, and the enjoyment of one's soul and of one's neighbor for the sake of God; but 'cupidity' is a motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of one's self, one's neighbor, or any corporeal thing for the sake of something other than God" (*On Christian Doctrine* Bk. 3.x.16, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. [Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1958], p. 88).
- 710 *meeknes*. Christian Dionysianism, by shifting the emphasis from the efficient to the final cause, circumvents the possibility of self-contempt in monastic discussions of humility and stresses the "divine glory that is the purpose of humility" (Walsh, p. 147).
- 711 *thof al it be the cheef*. Virtually the same words and meaning occur in lines 705 and 735 (where "this" replaces "it"). Contrary to Hodgson [22/13–14], I would suggest that none of these three pronouns refers to "God." Rather, "it" in line 705 and "this" in line 735 refer to "cause"; and "it" in line 711 refers to "thing." The meaning of these three expressions is virtually the same: that is, when even the (seemingly) highest cause or thing ("the cheef") *that is not God* brings a virtue into existence, that virtue is imperfect. Only when God Himself causes the virtue is it perfect. In this interpretation, however, Hodgson's rejection of the "he" for "it" or "this" in other manuscripts would be correct; and the use of "he" in other variations of this clause suggests a misreading of the line.
- 721 *worthines of God in Himself*. This is, in effect, a brief allusion to the illuminative way — affirmation rather than negation — the mind's contemplation of the works of God, which the *Cloud* author deals with only glancingly.
- 727–31 That the worthiness of God can cause the meditant to forget all knowing and feeling of his being, whether he is holy or wretched, touches on the motif of *nought* or "nothing," as it is developed in chapters 68 and following. Compare Balma: "Every creature who truly recognizes the source whence he originates reckons himself as nothing; and since he is created from nothing, is all the more aware of the splendour of the Creator" (Walsh, p. 148). See note at lines 234–35.

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- 732 *a ful schort while.* The shortness of this experience of completely forgetting one's own being parallels the brevity of the actual union with God or the One. See TeSelle, p. 21, on Augustine, and Louth, p. 48, on Plotinus.
- 735 *inparfite meeknes.* R. M. points out here that imperfect humility is based on knowledge derived from the senses and the intellect. Perfect humility transcends this "in an ineffable way through union with God" (Walsh, p. 149).
- 745–46 *swink and swete . . . a trewe knowyng and a feling of thiself as thou arte.* The concern here is still with *what* one is, rather than *that* one is, an existential emphasis found in *Privé Counseling* [H. 76/39]. Although this seems to contradict lines 727–31, it is a characteristic of the author's dialectic, a constant movement between affirmation and negation. Richard of St. Victor says that "it is arduous and difficult to win the necessary grace in the higher reaches of contemplation: and compunction of heart, sighs, and groans will be of more avail than a welter of investigation and reasoning" (Walsh, p. 150).
- 762 *lackyng of knowyng.* As regards the importance of knowledge, see lines 2255–58, where the author refers to the blindness and deception of those who are ignorant of the powers of the soul, which he has discussed in several previous chapters.
- 763 *parfite meeknes.* R. M.: "This true humility is in love, which is perfect in the highest union that is possible in this life. But until this is certainly revealed to you by the Lord, be on your guard against thinking that you are possessed of this highest humility, charity and union. What is said here about not sinning — that is, mortally — is not a general rule for everyone, but for the chosen, as is believed of the apostles after Pentecost, and of others specially chosen. For David and Solomon were contemplatives, yet they sinned mortally" (Walsh, p. 151). See Proserpina's view of Solomon in Chaucer's Merchant's Tale, lines 2291–2302.
- 780 MS reads *as it were that ben* with order corrected by scribal signs.
- 782–85 The author may be "anxious to establish that his doctrine had nothing" to do with those heretical sects such as the Brethren of the Free Spirit, who "held themselves above common morality" [H. 24/15–17].
- 784 *alle.* Canceled in Har1 and omitted in Pa which may be correct.
- 793 *seen.* MS: *sesen* with second *s* canceled.

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- 795 *perfeccion*. The author is referring to the perfect meekness that realizes the over-abundant love and worthiness of God as He is in Himself, described at lines 720–25. Gallus says that it was this perfect, contemplative humility that brought the wisdom of God to earth (Walsh, p. 152).
- 810 *was*. Inserted above the line in Har1.
- 822 *mynde of hir synnes*. R. M.: “We ought to have particular sorrow for our sins whenever they come to mind in any special way. But in this contemplative ascent it is undesirable to delay over them in actual sorrow, except when we are especially moved to do so; but since they are an obstacle to the higher, we can only know through the Holy Spirit if we should follow our instinct. For the rest, because of our feeble human nature, to recall one’s special sins on occasion (though not during the contemplative exercise) is good and for some people necessary, lest they fall into pride, and forget whence they came, where they are and whither they go” (Walsh, p. 154).
- 837 *lityl specyal mynde*. In Plotinus, the pursuit of morality for its own sake, like self-consciousness, can be a hindrance to the soul’s progress. See Louth, pp. 43–44.
- 848–51 There seems to be a parallel here to St. Bernard’s three phases of mystical love: the “object of sensible love is the Humanity of Christ and the mysteries of His mortal life, of rational love the teaching of the faith, of spiritual love the very being of God” [H. 26/13–17].
- 856–59 R. M.: “As often as we are completely rapt into the Cloud of Unknowing, which is the author’s subject here, our ravishing, in comparison with that of the blessed in heaven who see, is a sort of cloud, though it is luminous. Further, though God is clearly seen by the blessed in heaven, he is still far above their comprehension, otherwise he could not be said to be immense. From this point of view, the blessed in heaven are also in a cloud, even though he is seen most clearly according to each one’s capacity” (Walsh, p. 157).
- 856 Hodgson’s text [26/22] has *is* instead of *in*.
- 903 *hir unknowyng was the cause*. The *Cloud* author’s gracious tolerance of those who criticize contemplatives is an important characteristic (see Burrow, p. 146).
- 905 Walsh, p. 160, suggests that the author has Martha’s later “confession of faith” in mind. Brown, pp. 190–91, goes further in the praise of Martha, and consequently of the role of women, to assert that her confession of faith in John 11:27

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[“You are the Christ, the Son of God”] is on a virtually equal plane with Peter’s confession in Matthew 16:16.

921 *wordes and dedes ignoraunte*. MS: *ignoraunte* marked for transposition.

953–54 *even of noumbre*. Hodgson, p. xlvii, cites a passage from Balma in which the Latin phrase *idem numero*, “the same in number,” occurs. The latter phrase means “the same individual” (Deferrari, p. 496). Frege’s distinction between sense and reference may be helpful here. That is, the two phrases “Plato’s student” and “Alexander’s teacher” differ in sense but have the same referent — Aristotle (Ricoeur, p. 74). In medieval terms, the referent of the two phrases is *idem numero*, “the same in number.” Gallus: “The perfection of unitive love is precisely the same union as in heaven; but here below, separation is still possible” (Walsh, p. 163). Walsh, who says here that the issue is not the frequency of the stirrings but the quality of contemplative love, opposes Hodgson [29/17] who glosses *even of noumbre* as referring to the number of stirrings.

957 Gregory discusses the superlative *best* in his *Homilies on Ezekiel*, PL 76:953–54 [H. 28/39–40]. See also the quest for Dowel, Dobel, and Dobest in *Piers Plowman*.

966 ff. That the mystical life has three stages goes back at least to Origen, although successive writers often provide a unique configuration. See Hodgson, p. xxxii, and Introduction pp. 2, 4, and 6; and note at line 1316–17.

970 *secound partie*. The distinction between the second and third parts of contemplation correspond to Augustine’s distinction between knowledge (*scientia*) and wisdom (*sapientia*), to which the inferior reason and the superior reason correspond respectively. Man cannot through his own powers move from the temporal to the eternal, but through the Incarnation, Christ enters the temporal and all of his actions are the object of *scientia*, not of *sapientia*. Any true judgment concerning the Word beyond time and space would be the function of *sapientia*: *On The Trinity*, XII. xix.24 (Louth, p. 155). For the *Cloud* author, who follows Denis the Areopagite, the movement from the temporal to the eternal is a matter of unknowing and darkness. See below, lines 2259 ff., the distinction between *without*, *within*, and *above*.

998 I have substituted *boldely* for Hodgson’s *bodely*, which appears in Harl and in the Latin version of the *Cloud* in Pembroke College MS 221, as *corporaliter*. However, as Hodgson notes, other manuscripts have *boldely*. Progoff opts for *bodely* in his phrase “physically at once;” Wolpers, p. 81, has “courageously” and Johnston, (1973), p. 77: “courageously undertake both together.” In his edi-

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tion/ translation, Walsh, p. 165, has the interpretation, “at once,” where the problematic word would appear.

- 999 *pley*. Hodgson [30/28] quotes from Thomas Merton’s *Asian Journal*: “To live with the true consciousness of life centered in Another is thus to lose one’s self-important seriousness, and thus to live life as ‘play’ in union with a Cosmic Player.” See also Englert, “Of Another Mind.”
- 999–1000 *best partie*. Gallus: “All the just love God, but there is a special and pre-eminent love of God in perfect spiritual men which by its excellence outstrips reason and understanding. This love is called ecstatic, or producing ecstasy, because it raises the sovereign point of the loving power (*affectus*) above all intellectual knowledge. On this love is founded the best part of Mary, which shall never be taken from her” (Walsh, p. 162). See Introduction, p. 8.
- 1022 *Symound Leprouse*. “Simon the Leper”; Vulgate *Simon Leprosus*, Mark xiv, 3 [H. 31/14].
- 1029 *sum men*. MS: written as one word.
- 1037 *we*. Harl manuscript *he*. Hodgson’s emendation notes: “Harl has unique inferior reading *he*” [H. (1944) 57/5].
- 1040 *God sendeth the kow*. This is a proverb of the detractors, who say in effect “that God helps those who help themselves.” The *Cloud* author disagrees with this and, following the argument of Guigo II, maintains that “it is not for our limited judgment to impose limits on the generosity of God” [H. 31/35].
- 1043–44 *habundaunce*. R. M.’s Charterhouse of Mount Grace in Yorkshire was a royal foundation under Richard II (Walsh, p. 168).
- 1050 *the wonderful height and the worthines of God*. Another example of the author’s brief allusion to the kataphatic phase of illumination.
- 1059 *understonden*. MS: *vnstonden*. Hodgson’s emendation.
- 1060 *charité*. See note to line 707.
- 1065 *nakid entente*. Linked with “chaste love” in line 1750 and in the author’s *Pistle of Preier* [H. 105/16–22]. See notes at lines 290 and 1213. See also Hodgson [15/31–34; 32/24–31; 52/6–9; *Privé Counseling* 97/10–20].

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- 1088 *charité*. The *locus classicus* for this concept is Origen's comment on *Canticles* 2:4: "He set in order charity in me" (Walsh, p. 171).
- 1108 *streyne up his spirite*. Walsh, p. 172, quotes a line from Denis, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies*, ch. 3, with a gloss from Gallus to show the philosophical richness of the tradition and the *Cloud* author's contrasting restraint: "The divine goodness benignly directs our substance and fashions it in his own form by the archetypal beauties." Gallus comments: "By means of the *archetypal* beauties: that is, makes us like to God through the beautiful works of Christ, which are the exemplars of all our living" (Walsh, p. 172).
- 1170–71 *fele that*. Harl deletes *that*, perhaps on the grounds of redundancy. Other manuscripts and Hodgson retain the word.
- 1181–82 *customable synners*. Northrop Frye, p. 115, gives the name *culte générale* to a recurring type of biblical event in which the weak become powerful and the powerful weak, a reversal in roles that takes place, as in the case of Mordecai and Haman in the Book of Esther. Providing hope for the delinquent and wariness for the just, this principle enriches the possibility for character development in authors like Chaucer and Langland.
- 1190 *helle calves*. Devils [H. 36/8].
- 1191 *demyd*. R. M.: "In every walk of life, religious, cleric, or lay, we have to pass judgment with charity — religious on their brethren, clerics on their fellows, lay-folk on their neighbour. But note that I say 'with charity.' And perfect charity takes into account time, place and circumstances" (Walsh, p. 178).
- 1213 *sleightes*. Several manuscripts read *soteletes*, which may be preferable.
- sotiltees*. Gallus says that most chaste prayer is one of the devices used by the contemplative soul, the bride of the *Canticles*, to achieve union. Prayer is most chaste when the bride asks not for the spouse's gifts but for the spouse himself (Walsh, p. 180). See notes to lines 1065 and 1749.
- 1235–36 *that is in poynte to perische under the mouthes of wilde swyne or wode bityng beres*. The alliterative pattern, especially the interlocking of the last two phrases, is itself a manifestation of the playfulness which is explicitly mentioned at lines 999 and 1637.
- 1242 *I preie* inserted from the margin before *thee* in Harl.

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- 1258 *scholen bot ryght lityl mowe dere thee.* “will be able to trouble you hardly at all” (Walsh, p. 183).
- 1261 *curtesye.* St. Francis, *Floretti*, cap. 37: “Courtesy is one of the properties of God,” a favorite concept with fourteenth-century writers, especially Julian of Norwich [H. 38/7].
- 1263 *the werk of only God.* R. M.: “The Saints and angels in heaven do not see in a mirror dimly, but clearly, simply and openly, face to face; though they also see God in creatures. But what the author seems to be implying is this: since God is incomprehensible, it would never be possible to be carried above natural knowledge to the incomprehensible God, except by the hand of God” (Walsh, p. 183).
- 1271 ff. On the question of who is capable of doing this work, see lines 1281–90 and also lines 1120–26. In this context, Walter Hilton quotes Augustine: “God . . . fillith alle creatures aftir that they are able to receyve” [H. 38/18–21]. See also *Privé Counseling*, 88/28–38. On the universal call to mysticism, see McGinn, index, s.v. *mysticism*.
- 1274–75 *withholden, and not withdrawn.* According to R. M., these two words “differ in this way: a sinner, no matter how wicked he has been, when he is truly converted, becomes a persevering seeker after God, who does not withhold any gift of contemplation from him permanently” (Walsh, p. 184).
- 1277 *it₂.* Omitted in MS. Hodgson’s emendation, though the manuscript reading makes a kind of sense, like “sleep with it.”
- 1285–87 St. Bernard, *De Diligendo Deo*, vii, 22: “But what is amazing here is that no one can seek you if he has not already found you. You wish therefore to be found so that you may be sought, to be sought so that you may be found” [H. 38/29–36; my translation].
- 1287–88 *that sterith . . . never what.* Found at the bottom of the page with proper position delineated by a line.
- 1291 *schortlyer.* Four manuscripts (Kk, Har2, Ro3, and Pa) read *sothlyer*.
- 1291–93 A distinction is being made between the “co-operant” and the “operant” mode of grace. *Summa Theologica* I–II, q. 111, a. 2: “In that effect . . . in which our mind is moved and not moving, but God alone moving, the activity is attributed to God; and accordingly it is called *operant grace*. In that effect in which our mind both moves and is moved, the activity is attributed not only to God, but also to the soul; and accordingly, this is called *co-operant grace*” [H. 39/2–13; my

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- translation]. See *Privé Counseling*, 88/20–27, for an illustration of the dominance of grace and the proper response.
- 1312 *Lesson, Meditacion, and Oryson*. The book referred to at line 1314 is probably Guigo II's *Ladder*, where reading, reflecting, and praying are the first three rungs. See Walsh, p. 187. For the importance of reading, or *lectio divine*, see Leclercq, pp. 90, 366.
- 1316–17 *biginners and profiters . . . parfite*. “There are technical terms which translate the commonly accepted Latin division into *Incipientes, Proficientes, Perfect*” [H. 39/30]. These categories are related to Purgation, Illumination, and Union, the three stages of the Mystic Way as formulated by Denis the Areopagite. See note at line 966; and Louth, pp. 57, 82, 163.
- 1323 The mirror image is a favorite medieval *topos*, evident in innumerable books that have the Latin word for mirror, *speculum*, in the title. See St. Gregory, *Moralia* II, i: “Holy Scripture confronts the eyes of the mind as a kind of mirror, so that our internal face may be seen therein. And it is there that we know our ugly and beautiful deeds” [H. 39/37; my translation]. For Gregory of Nyssa’s use of mirror imagery, see Louth, p. 92.
- 1340 *sodein conseites*. For a discussion of this motif from Plato to Origen, see Louth, s.v. *exaiphnes*, “suddenly.” See also note at line 2088. This motif of suddenness is present in Plato (McGinn, p. 27) as well as in the Stoics, Plotinus, and Origen (Louth’s index, s.v. *exaiphnes*).
- 1360–66 “The author again stresses that the practices of Holy Church are to be assumed as framework for his ‘special work’ ” [H. 41/1–5].
- 1367–71 Mystical prayer is wordless and differs from discursive or reasoned petition. Bernard dramatizes the movement from the need for words to wordlessness in one of his *Sermones de Diversis* (Gallacher 1975, pp. 24–25). See Hugh of St. Victor, *De Modo Orandi*, ii: “Prayer is pure, when the mind is so inflamed by the abundance of devotion, that . . . it even forgets its request because of the magnitude of its love” [H.41/8; my translation].
- 1368–69 *a lityl worde of o silable*. See Augustine *Ep. ad Proba*, x, 20: “The brothers in Egypt are said to have made frequent prayers, but very short and, in a way, quickly thrown. . . . Let prayer be free from much talking, but not from much pleading, provided that the fervent intention perseveres” [H. 41/10; my translation].
- 1371 *the sovereynest pointe of the spirit*. See note at line 15.

Notes

- 1371 *soth.* Inserted from the right margin in Har1.
- 1377 *bot.* Moved in Har1 from position after *worde* to after *cryeth*.
- 1383–84 The teaching on short prayers is to be found in patristic commentary on the *Our Father* in the context of Matthew 6:7–13: “When you are at prayer, do not use many phrases.” Other treatments of the short prayer, or aspiration, can be found in Cassian’s *Conferences* (X, 10), the rule of St. Benedict (ch. 20), and Augustine in his *Letter to Proba*, X, 20, who refers to “very short prayers shot out speedily” (Walsh, p. 193).
- 1386 *it.* Inserted from the right margin in Har1.
- This whole chapter begins from Ephes. 3:17–19, and follows the development of Bernard of Clairvaux, *De Consideratione*, V, xiii: “That one thing is length because of eternity, breadth because of charity, sublimity because of majesty, depth because of wisdom.” This passage occurs also in Hilton, *Scale* I, 13 [H. 41/31]. Louth, p. 145, points out that for Augustine, continence is itself “a single-minded devotion to God.”
- 1389 Har1 has *contynoued*, which doesn’t make sense and Hodgson properly amends to the *contyned* of the other manuscripts.
- 1390 *as it felith.* The manuscript duplicates the phrase without cancellation.
- 1397–98 *the liceses of God.* A passage from Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 12.7, quoted in turn by Gallus, bears on this transformation which is the goal of the contemplative exercise: “The more the soul extends itself towards that which is eternal, the more it is reformed according to the image of God.” This passage in turn echoes 2 Corinthians 3:18: “We become transfigured into his likeness” (Walsh, p. 194).
- 1407–11 R. M.: “Good and devout contemplatives never rejoice over evil, but rejoice in truth. . . . By this you may know if you are mortified and ready for this exercise, if you do not rejoice over the ill-fortune of your enemy, but are well-affected towards him from your heart and really love him because of Christ” (Walsh, p. 194).
- 1429 *two.* Omitted from Har1 but added in Kk, Har2, Ro1, U, Ro3, and Pa.
- 1447–50 By means of a subtle *occupatio*, the author combines the affirmative and the negative movements of contemplation. That is, he lists sins and attributes of God that he doesn’t want you to imagine, thereby having you briefly imagine them,

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- only, however, to dismiss them in favor of the two summarizing words, *sin* and *God*.
- 1453 *goostly pees*. See Louth, p. 103, for the motif of monastic tranquility. See also *restfulnes* at line 1493.
- 1475 None of the manuscripts that I have examined — Har1, Kk, Ro1 — have the capitalization of SYNNE and GOD, as in Hodgson. I have opted for a less dramatic emphasis of italicizing, which modern practice requires for words used precisely as words.
- 1479 *discretion*. Although Antony the Hermit, Cassian, and the whole spiritual tradition maintain that discretion, the guardian of all virtues, leads to God and is the essential condition for perfection, the Dionysians subordinate discretion to reaching out to God (*consurrectio*). That is, in the latter tradition, the purpose of discretion, which is not itself the goal, is the “nakid entent unto God” (Walsh, p. 198). The aim of such teaching seems to be a kind of liberation and recalls the device in *Purgatorio XII*, 115–26, whereby Dante grows physically lighter after completing the penance of each cornice of the mountain.
- 1484 *holde no mesure*. Compare St. Bernard *De Diligendo Deo I*, i: “The cause of loving God is God; the measure, to love without measure” [H. 44/22; my translation].
- 1488 Har1 has an ungrammatical *the whiche* between *kynde* and *wol*. Hodgson does not mention this but tacitly removes these words and makes the sentence coherent.
- 1490 *in ernest or in game*. A phrase common in Chaucer. The author’s gloss of the phrase, *in werk or in wille*, means “in actuality or in intention” [H. 44/30].
- 1491 An insistence on maintaining health is characteristic of English devotional writers from *Ancrene Wisse* on [H. 44/31–32].
- 1502 *right schortli*. Inserted in margin in Har1.
- 1512 *merke*. Har1 has *a token and a mesure*. In the 1944 and 1982 editions, Hodgson substitutes *merke*, found in both Ro1 and Kk, to provide alliteration. Walsh’s translation seems to preserve this change in wording, but without the alliteration: “a target or a degree of moderation.” Similarly, at lines 1519–20, although Har1 has *proue, fonde* occurs in other manuscripts and provides alliteration. Hence, “fonde for to felle.” This substitution of *fonde*, “try,” appears in both Walsh’s and Wolpers’s translations.

Notes

- 1513 *in.* MS: *by*. I have followed the reading of Kk, Har2, Ro1, U, Ro3, and Pa. Hodgson emends to *in*.
- 1525 *hate himself*. Recalling the context of mystical theology with a quote from Balma can prevent the psychologizing of this phrase and puts the hyperbole in the context of the contemplative's arduous denial of self: "Because it is difficult to abandon all those things, we are directed to shear them away by contrition and a strong effort of the mind; for the soul must as it were despoil itself of itself, and the affection must follow step by step the love given from on high. So . . . we are ordered to tread down and leave behind all being, and the exercise of the knowing power itself" (Walsh, p. 202). See also Gilson's discussion of self-love in *La Théologie Mystique de Saint Bernard*, especially p. 59, n. 1.
- 1546 *withoutyn a ful specyal grace*. It is interesting to note that in Plato, this final movement towards completion of the ascent is not in the power of the individual. "The final vision of the Beautiful is not attained, or discovered: it *comes upon* the soul. . . . It is outside the soul's capacity; it is something given and received" (Louth, p. 13).
- 1552 *slepyng sleight*. For readers of the Middle English *Pearl*, this suggests the phrase, *slepyng-slaghte*, in line 59, which could be glossed as a "sleeping-stroke," i.e., something that causes sleep. See Gordon, et alii. It is tempting to see a kinship between the two phrases because each marks a transitional state in the experience of contemplation. MED glosses *slepyng sleight* as "sudden sleep." See *sleeping(e)f*. The phrase suggests a technique (slight) of negation (sleeping).
- 1556–57 *not onli what he is, bot that he is*. At the beginning of *Privé Counseling* [H. 75/21 ff.], the *Cloud* author uses this distinction as a way of explicating the meaning of his whole contemplative doctrine. See Myles, "This Litil Worde 'Is.' "
- 1565–66 *a trewe wetyng and a felyng of his God*. An indication that knowing in some sense is important for the *Cloud* author. See Introduction, pp. 8–9.
- 1572 *what worth of hym*. Har1 has *hym* and not *him*, as in Hodgson.
- 1573–74 *And yit in al this sorrow he desireth not to unbe, for that were develles woodnes and despite unto God*. A very subtle and clearly expressed combination of affirmative and negative movements. With the understanding that he must delight and be grateful for his being, the contemplative desires to move beyond this knowing and feeling in order to achieve a more profound union with God.

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- 1575 *gift of his beyng*. In *Shewings*, chapters 66–68, “Julian of Norwich, after describing such a temptation of the devil, beautifully elaborates on ‘the noble gift of man’s being’” (Walsh, p. 205).
- 1580 *compleccion*. “In Medieval physiology this term was used to refer to the combination of humours, or vital juices, which a man’s body was thought to contain. The four humours, blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile, were assumed to be related to the elements, air, water, earth, fire and to the primary qualities of those elements, hot and moist, moist and cold, cold and dry, hot and dry, respectively. These humours, which varied in proportion from individual to individual, determined a man’s temperament. According to which humour preponderated, temperaments were classified as sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholic, or choleric, epithets still current though retaining only a part of their original meaning” [H. 47/10].
- 1591 *as fast*. Inserted in margin in Har1.
- 1591–93 Walter Hilton and the *Cloud* author are “vehement in their warnings against the misinterpretation of purely natural psychological phenomena as supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit. See *Scale I*, chs. 10, 11 *Of Angels’ Song*” [H. 47/33–41].
- 1607 *moche heresye*. “This could well be a general reference to the Wycliffite challenge to the sacramental practices of the Church” [H. 47/43].
- 1609 *right as . . . Gods scole*. Inserted in the margin in Har1.
- 1632 *trewre feling*. The primacy of feeling here reflects the emphasis in the *Cloud’s* tradition: see Introduction, p. 8.
- 1637 *lache not over-hastely*. This parallels the motif of hiding one’s desire from God. See Dante’s comment on Virgil’s hasty movement away from Cato in *Purgatorio* 3, 10–11: “Quando li piedi suoi lasciar la fretta, / che l’onestade ad ogn’ atto dismaga . . .”: “When his feet left off haste, which takes seemliness from every act . . .” Text and translation from Charles S. Singleton, *La divina commedia*, ed. and annotated by C. H. Grangent; rev. by Charles S. Singleton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972); and *The Divine Comedy*, trans. with commentary by Charles S. Singleton, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970–75).
- 1637 *God gamesumli pley*. Hodgson convincingly substitutes *God* from Har2, for *good* in Har1 and most other manuscripts [48/35–36]. The philosophical reading of “good” would be grotesque in this highly personal and immediately human

Notes

context. The emendation clearly makes more sense in spite of manuscript evidence to the contrary.

- 1638 “. . . a masculine version of the traditional image of the *ludus amoris*, or game of love, where God is the mother. . . . Julian of Norwich gives an especially felicitous version of it in her theological exposition of the Motherhood of God. See *Showings*, ch. 61, pp. 299–302” (Walsh, p. 209). See also Caroline Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), and Georgia Ronan Crampton, ed. *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), pp. 125–26.
- 1691–96 Guigo II in the *Ladder*, ch. 12: “He does not wait until their prayer is finished, but he breaks into the midst of the burning longing of that thirsty soul, and with the balm of heavenly sweetness, softens and comforts the soul, and overpowers it with delight and joy” (Walsh, p. 212).
- 1720 *that thei ben*. Inserted in margin in Har1.
- 1729 The central act of the *Cloud*, the “steryng of love,” is here defined as *a good and an accordyng wil unto God*. Walsh says that Julian of Norwich, in *Showings*, approaches the problem of the good will with greater theological precision than the *Cloud* author or Walter Hilton: “Beseeching is a true and gracious enduring will of the soul, united and joined to our Lord’s will by the sweet, secret operation of the Holy Spirit” (p. 215).
- 1745 *rechelesnes*. See note on discretion at line 1479 and the function of the character *Rechelesnesse* in the B-Text of *Piers Plowman*, XI, 34. The proverbial expression “Man proposes, but God disposes” joins this passage to XX, 33, to assert the limitations of human prudence.
- 1749 *chaste*. St. Bernard uses the word to mean “disinterested,” loving God for Himself and not for one’s own sake [H. 52/6].
- 1750 *For a love . . . parfite*. Inserted in margin in Har1.
- 1751 *swete*. Omitted in Har1 but included in Kk, Har2, Ro1, U, Ro3, and Pa. Hodgson’s emendation.
- 1773 ff. The technique of hiding one’s desire from God seems to apply the apophatic principle to intention itself. Since intention — “meaning God” — sums up the work of the *Cloud*, hiding this intention from God comes close to being the ultimate negation.

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- 1793 *a kindly covetyse to hid thinges.* The Flemish mystic, Ruysbroeck, describes a perfectly natural state, distinct from mystical contemplation, in which someone is “bare and imageless in his senses, and empty and idle in his higher powers,” and “enters into rest through mere nature.” Such rest “is pleasant and great,” but possibly dangerous spiritually (Johnston, [1975], pp. 29–30).
- 1801 *worching agens kynde.* This section takes up the warning with which the book begins: that is, this method is not for everyone.
- 1826 ff. The *Cloud* author seems to combine personal observation with other accounts, notably from Hugh of St. Victor in the *De Institutione Novitiorum*, of strange gestures and antics of those who only pretend to be spiritual [H. 54/9]. As regards the word *semely* in line 1828, R. M. “is unwilling to accept that true contemplative graces always manifest themselves in exterior and interior decorum” and refers to his own spiritual inebriation (Walsh, p. 221).
- 1831 *leighingly.* MS: *ther to.* Although *leighingly* is not in Harl, it appears in Ro1 and Kk. It might have originally been Middle English *elengely*, “ailingly, miserably,” but *leighingly* suggests the maniacal quality of the action [H. 54/15]. Hodgson’s emendation.
- 1832–33 *sturdy scheep.* “Sheep suffering from the brain disease known as ‘sturdy,’ which makes them stagger around in circles” [H. 54/17]. The term *sturdy* is still used (Walsh, p. 222).
- 1849 *ye.* Omitted in Harl but added in Kk, Har2, Ro1, Ro3, Pa, and U. Hodgson’s emendation (1982 but not 1944).
- 1874–80 See Rudolph of Biberach’s *De Septem Itineribus Aeternitatis* III, v: “The human spirit walking through the journeys of the contemplative life shall be made beautiful in face” (my translation); Rachel’s beauty and Moses’s radiant countenance (Exod.34:30 [A.V.]) were examples [H. 55/25].
- 1923 ff. Walsh, p. 226, observes that a morbid curiosity about demonology began in the thirteenth century.
- 1936–37 *o nose-therel.* In *The Golden Legend*, the Latin *naris* “nostril,” or “nose,” is interpreted as discretion. The etymology of St. Apollinaris (July 23) is *apollo*, “admirable,” and *naris*, “discretion,” identifying a man of extraordinary discretion and prudence. In a manuscript version of St. Bridget’s *Revelations*, I, 23, a similar point occurs: “His nose is cutt awai for all discretion is taken fro him, bi the whilke he suld deme bitwene sin and vertue . . .” [H. 57/21]. Such allegorization suggests the Dionysian sensible mode of theology. See Introduction, p. 5.

Notes

- 1947 *to blame*. Inserted in margin in Har1.
- 1949 *the to*. This expression means “the one.” “The to” is “thet o,” which is an example of what is sometimes called *sandhi*, or shifted juncture, a redivision of words, such as happens with *adder*, a word which results from the shift of the *n* in the phrase, “a nadder,” to “an adder.” A common Middle-English example is *for the nones* which results from *for then ones*, “for then once.”
- 1979 *sterres*. The author is warning the novice against an excessively literal meaning of ascent, such as seems to be implied by Richard Rolle: “thi thought sal al be on Jhesu, and so be receyved aboven all ertly thynge aboven the firmament and the sternes, so that the egh of thi hert mai loke intil heven” [H. 58/26].
- 2007 *Seynte Martyn*. “One of the most universally acclaimed saints of Christendom.” According to the story, St. Martin divided his cloak to share it with a naked beggar and that same night saw Christ in a vision wearing the half-cloak [H. 59/9].
- 2010 *on Crystes*. Duplicated in Har1.
- 2026 *tree*. For another use of the tree image, see *The Epistle of Prayer*, Hodgson 130/34 ff.
- 2036 *seyng His moder and His disciples*. The construction, presumably a nominative absolute, means “while His mother and His disciples looked on”; and at lines 2104–05, a similar expression occurs: *seyng alle His disciples*: “while all His disciples looked on.” Walsh, p. 234, translates the first passage “in the sight of his mother and his disciples.” Har1 reads *unseyng*, which might mean “confounding” or “unsaying.” An interesting fact in Ro1, not noted by Hodgson, indicates the difficulty the copyist had with the line. In each of these instances, Ro1 has “*unseyng*” with the “*un*” crossed out. The grammatical construction was itself probably misunderstood in some way by the copyist, since a change reflecting doctrinal idiosyncrasy seems unlikely here. That is, it was probably not his belief that the ascent into heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit were not visible bodily. He may have construed the expression to mean that Christ was not looking at his mother and disciples with his bodily eyes. The precise nature of the copyist’s misunderstanding is, of course, irretrievable; but the fact that the incorrect *un-* in each instance was crossed out indicates that some copyist understood the construction.
- 2047 *He schewid*. Inserted in margin in Har1.
- 2055 *in*. Omitted in Har1. Hodgson’s emendation (1982 but not 1944) on the basis of readings in Kk, Har2, Ro1, Ro3, and U. Those manuscripts also add *in* after *not*.

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- 2073 *sotyl*. Medieval theologians list “subtlety” and “agility” (*subtilitas, agilitas*) as qualities of the glorified body (the body that rises at the Last Judgment) which make the body obey every command of the soul (Walsh, p. 236). For a discussion of this capacity in one of Chaucer’s sources, see Robert Holcot, *Commentary on Wisdom*, lectio 34, cap. 3, p. 119.
- 2086 *schal*. MS: *scal*. Hodgson’s emendation.
- 2088 *sodeyn chaunging*. R. M.: “A sudden change does occur in this exercise, but I think it would be impossible for anyone to find the exact word to describe it” (Walsh, p. 237).
- 2125 *elementes*. The “heavenly bodies” or “celestial spheres of ancient astronomy” [H. 63/1].
- 2153 *bot*. Hodgson does not comment on this odd sentence, for which there are no variant readings. The context is clear enough so that the translators can interpret the sentence without addressing the problem. Literally translated, the sentence would seem to be “No, it but spiritually.” Progoff offers a paraphrase: “Not at all; it should be interpreted spiritually, as it was intended to be” (p. 209). Johnston, (1973), p. 128, translates the sentence as “Of course not.” He then adds a whole interpretive comment which is not in the Middle English text: “As human beings we can go beyond their immediate significance to grasp the spiritual significance they [the words] bear at another level.” Walsh, p. 241, translates simply: “No, spiritually.” Wolpers, p. 128, keeps the “but”: “Indeed not, *but* spiritually” (my italics). In my view, it makes most sense to interpret *bot* as a contracted form of *bodeth*, “signifies,” in which the *d* and the *th* contract to *t* (see Mossé, p. 79, iv). The word would be from Middle English *boden*: Old English *bodian*. If this is the case, the short sentence would mean: “No, it signifies spiritually.” This has the advantage of removing the incoherence of interpreting the word as modern *but*. Neither Hodgson nor, as far as I can make out, any of the translators raises this possibility.
- 2159 *and when it is within thee and even with thee*. Omitted from Har1 without footnote or endnote in Hodgson, but the words are present in Kk and Ro1.
- 2183 *and som . . . bodily thinges*. Inserted from bottom of the page in Har1.
- 2197–98 Augustine, *On the Trinity*, chapter xii, makes the distinction between the “superior reason” and the “inferior reason,” which Walsh, p. 244, sees operative in the *Cloud*. See notes at lines 970 and 2259.

Notes

- 2204–05 I have departed here from Hodgson's reading, which occurs in Har1. The subject is the operation of the will, *thorow the whiche we love God, we desire God, and resten us with ful likyng and consent eendlī in God* [H. 65/10–11]. Instead of the first two uses of *God* in the passage, other manuscripts have *good*, as Hodgson points out. In fact, Kk has *God (god)* crossed out in the first two instances and *good (goode)* substituted throughout the whole sentence. I believe that the *Cloud* author here is referring to *good* as one of the “divine names,” as discussed by Denis the Areopagite. The author's intention, I believe, is to engage in word play which conveys the natural disposition of the will towards the *good* and its fulfillment in *God*, a pattern that is actually present in Ro1, but is absent from both Har1 and Kk. With this change, the passage reads as in Ro1: *thorow the whiche we love good, we desire good, and resten us with ful likyng and consent eendlī in God*. It is the more difficult reading, given the problem presented by the passage to the copyists; but also more in keeping with the motif of play in the treatise. In fact, another confusion between *good* and *God* (not capitalized) in the manuscripts occurs at line 1637 (see note above), where the line reads that in certain instances, the contemplative “schuld fele God gamesumli pley with hym.” Most of the manuscripts, as Hodgson observes, have *good* instead of *God*, a reading which makes little sense, unless *good* is one of God's names. The fact that *God* is never capitalized in manuscript versions of any of these three passages makes errors in copying such wordplay predictable.
- 2207 *savour*. From Latin verb *sapere*, ‘to taste’; *sapor* n., also related to *sapientia*, ‘wisdom.’ In mystical writings, these expressions often suggest “knowledge through immediate experience” [H. 65/14].
- 2254 *to*. Hodgson emends unnecessarily to *into*, noting a cancellation in Har1 which I am unable to perceive.
- 2259 ff. The immediate source of the distinction of *without*, *within*, and *above* is Richard of St. Victor, but the scheme parallels similar distinctions in Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bonaventure, and Denis the Areopagite [H. 66/36 and p. xxxii]. A classic Augustinian distinction between knowledge (*scientia*) and wisdom (*sapientia*), to which correspond the inferior reason and the superior reason respectively, is influential both here and in the Martha/Mary story. See note at line 970.
- 2273 *for soche onheed that feleth the perfeccio[n] of this werk*. One of the few references to mystical union. But see McGinn, p. xvii, for union as only one of many possible metaphors of the mystical encounter.
- 2274 “The *Cloud* author, anxious to avoid any pantheistic misinterpretation, insistently reiterates the traditional doctrine on the difference in essence between God and man” [H. 67/14].

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- 2302–06 An especially striking example of the author's use of *occupatio* (the saying of what you say you won't say through paralyptic negations) by which he both alludes to and simultaneously negates illumination. That is, he beautifully invokes the aesthetic of the Divine Names, surveying all creation in his image of a lord who can be everywhere bodily, merrily playing with this fullness of created being, this "something," to which he then immediately prefers the "nought" of the Divine Presence. See passage from Augustine in Introduction, p. 1.
- 2307–08 *this noghwhere and this nought*. Omitted in Har1 but found in all other manuscripts. Hodgson's emendation. " 'Nothing' in Dionysius connotes the 'Darkness' of the infinite Godhead. Eckhart and Tauler adopted 'Nothing' as one of God's names." According to Tauler, "God is none of the things you can name" [H. 68/7–8]. This use of the concept of *nothing* differs substantially from a famous usage in Hemingway's story, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," or in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre.
- 2308 *whi*. Hodgson emends to *sekirly* on the basis of Kk, Har2, Ro1, U, Ro3; Pa reads *surely*. But *for whi* better connects the author's approval with what precedes.
- 2318–19 R. M.: "He does not say that nothing is something, since nothing is nothing, that is, no thing. But because next to nothing (*quasi nihil*) is something, a man labors to cut away everything that exists that he might be purified and naked, according to that knowledge which is unknowing (*cognitionem incognitam*)" (Walsh, p. 253).
- 2325 *hym think*. "It seems to him." Old English *thyncan* "to seem" is very close to Old English *thencan* "to think." By the Middle-English period, the two expressions are morphologically identical, although usage remains different. The phrase *hym think* occurs also at lines 2325–26, 2336, 2338, and 2340; and at line 2341, the expression, "think what he think wil," employs the word in its modern sense.
- 2335 *nought helle bot purgatory*. Hodgson notes that *elles* appears in "other MSS" for *helle* here, but does not comment. For our purposes, the error is worth some interpretation. The theme is the suffering of the contemplative. For such a person, the activity of looking upon the nothing of the divine darkness is sometimes hell, but if he perseveres, he feels this pain continually decrease: "And therfore he clepith it noght helle bot purgatory." What is interesting is that the copyists of other manuscripts are distracted by the similarity of an idiomatic expression — "nothing else but" — and substitute *ellys* ("else") for *helle*, a mistake that ruins the parallelism, which is completed at the next stage when the *nothing* seems to be "paradis or heven."
- 2344–46 This is a brief summary of the directives of Denis's *Mystical Theology*, chapter 1; and especially the key text from the Latin translation of Sarracenus: "With

Notes

intense contrition, abandon the senses and the operations of the intellect" (my translation). See Walsh, p. 255.

- 2345 *and alle that thei worche in.* Omitted in Har1 but added in Kk, Har2, Ro1, U, Ro3, and Pa. Hodgson's emendation (1982 but not 1944).
- 2359 *and on . . . gostely thinges.* Inserted at the foot of the column in a different hand.
- 2372 For a discussion of the *Cloud* author's acquaintance with the works of Denis the Areopagite, see Walsh, pp. 26 ff.
- 2388 *ravisching.* Walter Hilton's use of the term defines it: "ravished from the use of thy bodily wits so that all manner phantoms of bodily likeness be withdrawn from thy soul, and thy mind overpass the common and reasonable manner of thinking in this life" (Walsh, p. 257).
- 2392 *deliberacion.* A generous concession on the part of the Dionysian author towards those who attribute a greater role to the intellect than he does — that is, the Victorines and Augustinians.
- 2393 *bot withouten gret lettyng.* Inserted at the foot of the column in a different hand. Included by Hodgson (1982 but not 1944).
- 2398–2400 The author here designates the *lityl love put* as the equivalent of the Ark of the Covenant, itself a symbol of the *perfeccion of this goostly werk* (line 2406). Walsh, p. 258, sees in this passage a summary of Gallus's teaching on the "hierarchies of the mind." Both Thomas Gallus and Hugh of Balma teach that in the affective union with God, the mind also is especially graced. See Introduction, pp. 8–9 and Walsh, p. 72.
- 2412 *with.* MS: *bi.* Hodgson's emendation (1982 but not 1944), following the example of Kk, Har2, Ro1, U, Ro3, and Pa.
- 2421 In both Kk and Ro1, a *that* is added between *God* and *thoo* (acknowledged by Hodgson in a footnote) and makes the sentence ungrammatical.
- 2455 *in this writyng.* Omitted in Har1 but found in all other manuscripts. Hodgson's emendation.
- 2480 *althof.* Kk has *all though.*
- 2483 *redyn or heren.* Transposed in Har1, Kk, Har2, and Ro1.

Glossary

algates always, completely, in every way,
entirely
and and; if

beholding, beholdyng beholding; regard,
examination, attention, sight

charge exhort, attach importance to
contenaunce bearing, behavior, expression
customable habitual

deme judge
departyng distinction
dere afflict, harm
directe directed

fast firmly, hard, steadfastly
fonde strive
for whi because
fordone previously committed, destroyed

goostly spiritual; spiritually

hem them, themselves
her(e) their
here here; hear

ighe(n) eye(s)
insomochel to the degree, to such a degree

kepe guard, seek after
kun know how to, be able to
kunnyng learning, knowledge, intelligence
kynde nature, kind

lat allow, permit
leve leave, leave off

let hinder, desist; allow, permit
leveful legitimate
leven live
liking, likyng pleasant, pleasurable, delectable
listely with eager longing, vigorously

mede reward
medel mixed up with, interfering, mix
mene focus intently on, focus attention, intend,
mean
menes means, helpful activities
mowe may, be able to
mynde remembrance, awareness
not don't know

o one
onyd united, joined
ought anything, something

paraventure possibly
parfite perfect, complete
privé secret, mysterious
profe proof, argument, experience
propirté ownership, special quality
put press on, thrust; placing

reche concern
rechelesnes carelessness, indifference
rudely violently

sely simple, innocent
sithen since, then, afterwards
skile reason, knowledge, understanding
sleightes devices, stratagems
sotely subtly, inseparably,
mysteriously, penetratingly

Glossary

speedful *profitable, expedient*

stede *place*

stifly *firmly, resolutely*

think *it seems (to)*

thof al *although*

thoo *those*

wene *imagine, think, expect*

wetyng *understanding, knowing*

whiche *what, who*

wist *knew*

wite *know*

witte *intelligence, intellectual faculty, sense*

woodnes *madness*

wordely *worldly*

wote *know(s), knew*