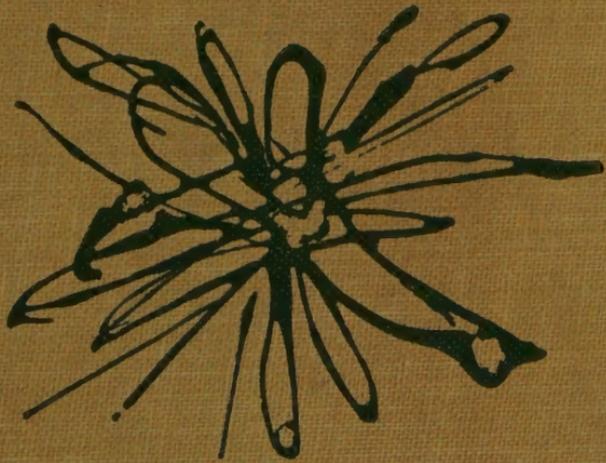


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This book brings to English-speaking readers for the first time the work of one of the most important of the fourteenth-century German mystics. Rulman Merswin, like the anonymous authors of *Theologia Germanica* and *The Cloud of Unknowing*, wrote in a highly symbolic manner, but the meaning of his message is not hidden in the wrappings, and its beauty is not dimmed by time.

Merswin was a prosperous Strassburg banker who at the age of forty renounced the world, dedicated his life and wealth to God, and joined the association of Christians who were known as the Friends of God. His remaining thirty-five years were spent in developing a religious retreat called Green Isle, in mystic contemplation, and in authorship. Two of his major works, reprinted here, are *The Four Beginning Years* and *The Book of the Nine Rocks*. In the former he describes the yearnings, agonies, austerities, and joys he experienced in the period immediately following his conversion. In the latter he dramatizes the struggle of the human soul to liberate itself from the corruption of the world and mount to the summit of spiritual perfection.

It is upon *The Book of the Nine Rocks* that Merswin's reputation rests. The rocks are elevated one above another, representing increasingly higher levels of spiritual attainment and being progressively more difficult to reach. In leaping from rock to rock, most men slip back



MYSTICAL WRITINGS OF RULMAN MERSWIN



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746

*Mystical Writings*  
of  
*Rulman Merswin*

*Edited and Interpreted by*  
THOMAS S. KEPLER

THE WESTMINSTER PRESS  
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IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF RUDOLF OTTO



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## FOREWORD

FIFTEEN years ago, when I collected and edited the devotional writings published as *The Fellowship of the Saints*, I came across the name of Rulman Merswin and his association with the Friends of God in the fourteenth century. In the process of assembling devotional materials for the anthology, I wrote to Rufus M. Jones and asked him if he knew where I might obtain Merswin's works in an English translation. He told me that he knew of no English translation, and that he had hoped sometime to write a book on Rulman Merswin.

Since that time I have deepened my interest in the Friends of God and particularly in Rulman Merswin. This has resulted in the translation of some of his writings from the Middle High German into English. The translation of two of these works appears in this book: *The Four Beginning Years* and *The Book of the Nine Rocks*. I am deeply indebted to two of my former students in the Graduate School of Theology, Oberlin College, who have aided me in the translation: Otto Betz and Roger Burlingame. This is the first time that any of Rulman Merswin's writings have been published in any language other than Middle High German.

I wish to thank the Widener Library, Harvard University, and the Cleveland Public Library for furnishing me with the following texts from which the translations have been made:

Rulman Merswin, *Vier anfangende Jahre des Gottesfreundes*.

Editor, Philip Strauch. Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1927.

Rulman Merswin, *Das Buch von den neunten Felsen*.

Editor, Karl Schmidt. Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1859.



## INTRODUCTION

# *Rulman Merswin: Friend of God*

TWO religious groups, composed of both clergy and laymen, came into existence in fourteenth-century Europe: the Brethren of the Common Life, and the Friends of God. Both gave a stimulus that brought to many people a new vitality in Christian living when the spiritual life of the church in Europe was at low ebb. Germany, one of the focal centers of the Friends of God, was divided in its loyalties to two rulers. One group, supported by many German princes, felt allegiance to Louis of Bavaria; the other faction, backed by Pope John XXII, paid homage to Frederick of Austria as emperor. Those loyal to Louis of Bavaria were eager for reform within the church and hoped to bring about a separation of the church from the state. At the death of Frederick of Austria in 1322, Pope John XXII excommunicated Louis of Bavaria and forbade priests to perform the Mass and the Sacraments (except Baptism and Extreme Unction) in the communities that held loyalty to Emperor Louis.

Outside of France, from 1309 to 1377, the popes were considered as hardly more than puppets of the French crown, since the papal residence had moved from Rome to Avignon (France) in 1309. From exile in Avignon eight popes ruled Western Christendom for the next seventy years, a period known as "The Babylonian Captivity." After the papacy was moved back to Rome in 1378 by Gregory XI, "The Great Schism" followed, with popes stationed at both Rome and Avignon until 1417, when finally the papal seat was placed solely at Rome.

Western Europe was disrupted by natural calamities in the fourteenth century: earthquakes took heavy toll in the Rhine Valley, completely destroying such places as Basle; nine tenths of the population in some localities were taken by a plague known as the Black Death in its two surges of 1347-1349 and 1358-1363; Strassburg, for example, suffered a loss of sixteen thousand persons. These catastrophes of nature, the schism within the church, civil war within Germany, and fear of the Ottoman Turks caused many to feel that God was bringing his divine judgment upon humanity because of indifference to the Christian faith. Many thus terrified by these calamities in the world were attracted to a mystical flight away from such mundane catastrophes. Some anticipated the fulfillment of apocalyptic hopes for the end of the present world. It was a great day for religious revival, and one of the fresh "movements" to answer the call for a vitalizing of Christianity was that of the Friends of God, with its chief centers of interest in Strassburg, Cologne, and Basle.

#### WHO WERE THE FRIENDS OF GOD?

The Friends of God based their name on John 15:14-15, where Jesus calls his followers friends rather than servants, if they heed his commands. The term, however, had been previously used. It described Moses (Ex. 33:11) and Abraham (James 2:23). The church fathers applied the name to Abraham, Moses, and the apostles. Martyrs were called "Friends of God" by Clement of Alexandria and Chrysostom. Eckhart, Mechthild, and Tauler apply the term to mystics. The expression grew to have two meanings: (1) that designating pious, devout, saintly persons; (2) that designating *true*, rather than *false*, Friends of God. To this latter group belonged heretics and fanatic groups, such as Brethren of the Free Spirit. Jan van Ruysbroeck made a further discrimination as he used the term: (1) "secret" Friends of God, in their annihilation of self-love for a pure love of God, were those who had reached the highest mystical stage; and (2) "ordinary Friends of God" were persons who still possessed some degree of

self-love and had thus not achieved the highest stage of perfection. By the end of the fourteenth century the term gradually began to go out of use. It is in oblivion in the fifteenth century.

The group originated in Basle, 1339-1343, and from there extended through the Rhine Valley to Constance, to the upper regions of the Danube, and northerly into the Netherlands. Areas in Bavaria and Alsace were touched by its members. Centers of its influence arose also at Groenendael, near Waterloo, where Van Ruysbroeck was prior, and at Zurich, Nürnberg, and Freiburg. Its main urban centers were Basle, Cologne, and Strassburg. Its members had no peculiar dress, no mode of worship, no set creed. It was not a "secret" society and never possessed any fear of ecclesiastical interference from Rome. It did not constitute a sect or a movement. "Neither in these [referring to the writings of the Friends of God] nor in any other writings of the time," says Preger, "do we come across statements which compel us to think of the *Gottesfreunde* as a formal society. Everywhere we find only a free association of like-minded friends with one another."<sup>1</sup> When Tauler and Merswin used the phrase "secret Friends of God," they were not referring to a secret underground movement, but merely to an individual holiness known to God but not to men. Most of its members remained within the church, where they were loyal to the dogmas, the disciplines, and the practices of the church. They frowned upon the life of a hermit.

All the Friends of God were orthodox Christians. In the political struggle most were partisans of the pope, though some paid allegiance to the emperor. Occasionally a member like Christina Ebner would attack the pope, but not the authority of the papacy. They viewed the church as the "body of Christ." Its members, however, had no idea of detaching themselves from the church. They felt that the sacraments were indispensable; they retained reverence for relics, saints, holy places, sacred days; they did not resort to heresy. Their purpose was to find a closer fellowship with God than that which the church encouraged. They felt that the revival of the life in the church could never be accomplished

by ecclesiastical officials, many of whom were immersed more with personal ambition than with deep spiritual disciplines. Their consecration was to groups like the Friends of God which they hoped might become instruments for revitalizing and deepening the spiritual life of communities.

All strata of society were within their membership; there were many peasants and laymen, though upper-class laymen and members of the clergy joined their fellowship. Many of the members had belonged to great religious orders. Friars, nuns, and monks belonged to the group. Dominicans, Franciscans, Beguines, were numbered in their membership. The Waldenses, however, were not in their group.

In order to obtain a closer intimacy with God they diligently practiced spiritual exercises and stressed asceticism. Though a few resorted to extreme bodily persecutions in their ascetic stress, such extremities were discouraged. The members were more concerned with contemplation of God than with speculation about theological ideas. Its devotees were usually orthodox in their thinking. They were concerned in becoming holy; they strove for saintliness; the love of God was the binding unity of their members; by humility and suffering they wished to imitate Christ. In spite of the difficulties of their period, they were determined to live their ideals in the midst of turmoil. Though some clergy belonged to the group, it was primarily a laymen's movement, with the belief that the church could be saved by unordained persons. As they felt themselves in contrast with the "children of the world," they held fast to certain basic principles in their living: (1) suffering; (2) humility; (3) martyrdom, if necessary; (4) mystical closeness to God; (5) growth toward spiritual perfection; (6) yielding of the whole self to God; (7) imitation of Christ, especially his Passion; (8) value of the Eucharist; (9) the intellectual pattern of the Dominicans, with their stress on returning to Jesus' religion; (10) authority of the Scriptures; (11) the closer uniting of men with God, and men with one another, through mystical piety.

Thus the Friends of God gave stimulation to a mystical movement in western Europe that became one of the most unique phenomena in the history of medieval culture. Except for Heinrich Suso, there was no extreme asceticism among its leaders. As Jesus had been their Savior, so they wished to become saviors of others; they viewed men's highest gift as that of giving themselves for others, so that they too might become Friends of God. In its mild sort of asceticism this fellowship believed that through a self-emptying the soul would find fellowship with God. Within the soul of man was the true "sanctuary" where God and man meet. Some of its members, amidst the tragic events of their time, gave stress to apocalyptic thought, by which they expected a sudden cataclysmic end of their age. Many of the members placed a sacred meaning around relics and visions. But the main stress of the movement was that of a mystical note by which its members hoped to find a close and warm fellowship with God as his Friends. Evelyn Underhill calls the group "a great informal society bound to the heroic attempt to bring life in the terribly corrupt and disordered life of the fourteenth century back into relationship with spiritual reality and so initiate their neighbors into the atmosphere of God."<sup>2</sup> Rufus Jones evaluates the fellowship as "one of the most important and remarkable expressions of mystical religion in the history of the Christian church."<sup>3</sup>

#### LEADERS OF THE FRIENDS OF GOD

Out of the Friends of God came a group of men and women of strong leadership, some of them well known by their writings. Though Meister Eckhart (1260?-1328?) is usually considered as earlier than the Friends of God activities, his personality and writings nevertheless gave a spiritual-intellectual stimulus to the leaders of the Friends of God, especially to two Dominicans: Heinrich Suso and Johannes Tauler. Suso (1300?-1365) became one of the great contemplative writers; his autobiography, not historical, portrays how one can evolve into the ideal mystic. Tauler (1300?-1361) was the eloquent preacher of his day. Suso's

writings compose the best prose of the fourteenth century. Tauler's sermons are masterpieces of eloquence; though often along orthodox scholastic patterns, they also show the influence of "his beloved master Eckhart" and contain "the authentic and unmistakable note of the real mystic."<sup>4</sup> Many of its members were great correspondents. Letters between Henry of Nördlingen and Margaretha Ebner give us the earliest epistolary literature in the German language. Other Dominican leaders within the Friends of God were the theologian John of Tarnback, Dietrich of Golmar, John of Sternengassen, and Nicholas of Strassburg. Dominicans Christina and Margaretha Ebner were the outstanding women leaders, active in their leadership especially at Engelthal and Medlingen in Bavaria. Tauler and Henry of Nördlingen carried their preaching to Basle; Suso was active in Zurich; Nicholas of Strassburg influenced nuns in Freiburg to become Friends of God. Jan van Ruysbroeck, a Friend of God, according to one tradition influenced Gerard Groote, who some believe was the author of most of *The Imitation of Christ* and who, with Florentine Radewin, founded the Brethren of the Common Life. However, the Brethren of the Common Life must not be considered as a group of the Friends of God, for it was different in many ways.

### RULMAN MERSWIN: FRIEND OF GOD

Another person, one of the most unusual and dramatic leaders of the Friends of God, was a Strassburg banker by the name of Rulman Merswin. He was born in 1307 to a patrician family of Strassburg, a family often mentioned in the Strassburg documents of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. The Merswin family had long been prominent for its benefactions to monasteries, churches, and religious houses.

Rulman Merswin has been the center of much controversy. He has been described as "a man of the world, cheerful, sociable, popular, and shrewd." He is depicted as "a man of watchful conscience and of great fear of God." Rufus Jones and Evelyn

Underhill speak of him in high terms of appreciation. James M. Clark depreciates Merswin as a second-rate sort of person, calling him an "impostor," a "windbag," a "writer lacking in creative faculty and of feeble imaginative power," "dull, monotonous, crude in phrase and full of sentimentality."<sup>5</sup> Though a debatable figure, he was an impressive person, a man endowed with energy and leadership, an individual who seemed deeply concerned after his conversion to add his money and his time to the strengthening of the Friends of God in their labors for a Christian community.

Rulman Merswin had given his life to the making of money as a Strassburg banker. Little of his time had been given to theological studies. Worried about the distressing conditions of the world and convinced that money alone was not the ultimate purpose of life, he, along with his second wife, renounced the world on Saint Martin's Day, November 11, 1347, though he did not obtain his "complete conversion" until 1350. Merswin at this time was forty years of age. His first wife had died early in their married years. His second wife, Gertrude von Bietenheim, the daughter of a local knight, was the widow of John Voeltsche-Bietenheim. In accepting conversion with her husband, she shared with him the vow of celibacy and the dedication of their wealth to a Christian purpose, though Gertrude at his conversion did not achieve "the light of grace." Both had been greatly influenced by the preaching of Johannes Tauler; so with the renunciation of the world they sought Tauler in 1348 as their adviser and confessor. The early years after Merswin's conversion were filled with many turmoils. In accepting celibacy he struggled deeply with sensuality. He worried about the Trinity. He was overanxious about eternal damnation. He resorted to extreme bodily persecutions, at times tearing his flesh and pouring salt into the wounds. These he quitted, however, after advice from Tauler. In 1350, three years after his conversion, God's grace entered his life and replaced his doubts and despairs with peace and serenity. The story of Merswin's conversion and its consequential happenings are described in *The Four Beginning Years*.

## THE GREEN ISLE RETREAT PLACE

In 1350 Merswin and his wife obtained an indulgence from Pope Clement VI. Nothing is known about them until January 2, 1367, six years after Tauler's death. On that date Merswin purchased from the Benedictines at Altdorf a run-down abbey at Green Isle, near Strassburg, as a retreat place for the Friends of God. It was located on the Ill River behind obsolete mills and tanneries. For 510 silver marks he received the right to use this property for one hundred years. On November 29, 1367, he purchased surrounding fields, along with the abbey and the church at Green Isle. "Modern research has shown that with the astuteness of a successful businessman he drove a hard bargain with the impoverished monks of Altdorf."<sup>6</sup> The Dominicans, the Austin Friars, the Cistercians, and groups of secular priests tried at different times to purchase Green Isle; but to no avail. In 1371, however, Merswin gave it to the Knights of St. John in Jerusalem, along with a fifty-pound annuity of Strassburg pfennigs. After this presentation the Commander of the Knights of St. John was supposed to be in charge of the retreat place; but he was really under the orders of Merswin and two other trustees.

Green Isle was opened as a retreat house for both clergy and laity. Entrants had to be twenty years of age and acceptable to the trustees. They paid a nominal sum of money for their expenses, helped to keep the place in repair, and promised not to bother the priests who lived there. Merswin used large sums of his wealth to put the retreat place in order. After the death of his wife Gertrude on December 6, 1370, Merswin made his home on Green Isle. In 1380 Merswin moved from Green Isle to a small house near the monastery, where he could pursue God in an undisturbed and quietistic way. He died on July 18, 1382, and was buried next to his wife Gertrude in the church at Green Isle. A short time before Merswin's death he wrote on wax tablets his instructions for the community at Green Isle.<sup>7</sup>

The retreat center at Green Isle was at first governed with

simplicity and with few regulations. The first custodian was Johannes Merswin, a bishop and a count, a brother of Rulman Merswin. Its pattern of worship, as permitted by Pope Urban V, was directed by four secular priests who had not taken monastic vows. Among the four priests was Nicholas of Louvain, who later acted as Merswin's secretary or copyist. This informal procedure for governing Green Isle did not work out smoothly, as friction arose among its leaders. On March 23, 1371, after the monastery had become a branch of the Knights of St. John, Green Isle was governed by three trustees: Rulman Merswin, Johannes Merswin, and a local knight named Heintzmann Wetzel. Though the Johannites owned Green Isle, they had little influence in its administration. These three trustees chose the priests to conduct worship; they passed upon those who applied for residence at Green Isle. Rulman Merswin, a highly individualized and energetic personality, retained almost monarchical control of the retreat, the other two trustees being more nominal than active. The bishop of Strassburg gave Rulman Merswin also the right to appoint priests for the Green Isle church, which Merswin helped to re-establish.

After Merswin's death on July 18, 1382, Nicholas of Basle became the leader of the Friends of God. In 1409, condemned as a Beghard, Nicholas was burned to death at Vienna. In the fifteenth century the Friends of God disappeared from the scene of history.

#### WRITINGS OF THE FRIEND OF GOD AND MERSWIN

Four days after Merswin's death a number of his letters were found among his possessions, many of them written by a mysterious person known as "the Friend of God from the Oberland." The head of the Order of the Knights of St. John, Henri de Wolfach, had Nicholas of Louvain copy these letters in his own hand, and also write a history of the retreat place of Green Isle. Three volumes of manuscripts resulted: *The Latin Memorial* (no longer extant), *The Great German Memorial*, and *The Small*

*German Memorial. The Book of Letters* was later copied and compiled.<sup>8</sup>

Numerous letters were found in the collection written by "the Friend of God from the Oberland." A short summary of the letters follows: (1) *History of a Captive Knight* (1349). One of the longer writings from the Friend of God to Rulman Merswin, it relates the friendship of two squires, their adventures in Prussia, the imprisonment and release of one of the squires because of his faith, the conversion of the castle lord and family. The lord thought that he had won victory over his vices after a two-year struggle; he and his wife move into a small home, give their wealth to the Preaching Friars, and erect a chapel to the Virgin Mary; in complete obedience to God after nine years he conquers his selfish pride. (2) *A Revelation* (1357). A tract received from God by the Friend of God at Christmas during a time of terrible earthquakes, its hope is that of converting all Christendom in time of awful disaster. (3) *Instruction* (1347-1363). This was written during the time of the Black Death (1347-1363) by the Friend of God as a warning to the world that God's plagues might destroy the world. (4) *The Book of the Five Men* (1377). This was written by the Friend of God to the brother at Green Isle who wished a tract from the great Friend of God. Written in five days, it describes the spiritual life of the Friend's associates in their mountain abode. (5) *An Edifying Story of a Young Man of the World*. Undated, this tells of a young noble who became a priest in the Order of Teutonic Knights. (6) *The Spiritual Stairway* (1350). The Friend of God depicts the spiritual steps by which Christian perfection is achieved. Karl Schmidt delineates the ideas of this treatise: "In a blooming garden the Friend of God saw laity and priests having a good time. In the wall was a narrow door which led to steep steps. Many go to the door and turn back to their pleasures; only a few dare to go through. Some remain sitting on the steps. Only the very few climb to the very top."<sup>9</sup> (7) *The Spiritual Ladder* (1357). The Friend of God at Pentecost describes to a member of the Friends of God the way

by which the Holy Spirit aids the Christian in his rise toward perfection. It discriminates between men loving God out of fear of hell and those loving God for Himself. It shows the various types of mysticism as lived by the Friend of God and his colleagues. (8) *The Story of Two Young Men of Fifteen*. This describes the childhood and conversion of both the Friend of God (the son of a merchant) and a friend of his (the son of a knight). It is autobiographical. (9) *The Book of the Two Men* (1346). Here a number of religious questions are asked and answered in dialogue between the merchant's son and the knight's son. (10) *The Book of the Master* (1369). This tract tells how a Christian layman converts one who is a "Master" of the Bible. After hearing the Master preach five sermons, he made his confessions to the Master, requesting that he preach on the theme "How to Obtain Perfection." After the Master preached three sermons on this theme, he was admonished as being too letter-bound to the Scriptures in his homilies. The Master then, after two years of ascetic discipline and suffering, started preaching anew, at first with tears and a breakdown. Then as the Master preached in nontheological language, his hearers were greatly affected, and for nine years before he died he lived a glorious, effective Christian life.<sup>10</sup> (11) *The Story of a Holy Recluse* (1377). Two women, one a woman of wealth named Adelaide, and the other a recluse called Ursula, tell of their experiences to the Friend of God. (12) *The Story of Two Sainly Nuns* (1378). This story resulted from the request of the prioress of a Bavarian nunnery to the father confessor of two nuns, Margaret and Katharine, that he write of their fellowship with the Bridegroom of the Soul. It tells of their fasting and bodily persecutions, of their conversations about natural and divine love, of the way they brought joy to the convent, of their deaths in 1355, after forty years of blessed service in the convent. (13) *Dialog Between a Young Priest Walther and an Older Convent Brother* (1347). An elderly monk tells a young man how to overcome sin. In a vision the young man sees a beautiful woman at the altar. Although the woman might be

“our dear lady,” Walther is warned that she might be one filled with evil spirits; hence he should guard his virtues with care. A year and a half later, after another vision, Walther is given devotional writings to read, composed of selections from Bernard, Augustine, Gregory, Dionysius, and Song of Songs. He reads these and lives virtuously for seven years before he dies. (14) *A Lesson Given in a Convent* (1350). Brother Gauthier, a sinful young priest, is written to by an elderly monk whose life is filled with the Holy Spirit. (15) *Story of a Man Imbued with the Wisdom of the World* (1338). A hermit, enlightened by God’s grace, advises a worldly-wise young man that the way of spiritual growth is through submission to God, allowing the Holy Spirit to become his tutor. He will learn more in this way, with a foretaste of heavenly bliss, than teachers of natural wisdom could teach him in a hundred years. (16) *The Spark in the Soul*. An elderly hermit under the guidance of the Holy Spirit speaks to a young monk who wonders why divine love seems lacking in his older friends. The essence of this tract is: There is the little spark in the soul which the Holy Spirit after many great trials causes to grow in each God-loving person until at last it becomes a great, ardent, passionate fire of love. (17) *Lesson to a Younger Brother of the Order* (1345). Instructions are given by an older brother of the Order to a younger member as to how the latter can overcome his sins. He is to guard against the devil, who might appear as a beautiful woman, an angel, or a monster. He is informed that a Christian who calls upon Jesus or makes the sign of the cross is safeguarded, for the devil cannot harm the Friends of God.

Along with these letters was another collection of twenty-two letters, which represents a correspondence between “the Friend of God from the Oberland” and others, among whom were Rulman Merswin and Nicholas of Louvain. These twenty-two letters were sent not only to those at Green Isle, but also to those in distant cities in Italy and elsewhere.

Besides these letters, there were other books attached to the name of Rulman Merswin, known, collectively, as *The Great Ger-*

*man Memorial*.<sup>11</sup> Among this collection were: (1) *The Book of the Banner of Christ*. This book entreats neophytes beginning the Christian life to enlist under Christ's banner rather than under Lucifer's banner. At a time when Christianity is in danger of destruction, Merswin invites people to accept spiritual poverty, to guard against wrong use of freedom, to remember that Christianity's future rests with a few loyal Friends of God, and thus to receive guidance and enlightenment from an experienced and wise Friend of God. Merswin relates his reticence in feeling worthy of being the author of this treatise, and his desire to keep his authorship secretive. The tract is probably a warning against persons becoming attracted to the Brethren of the Free Spirit. (2) *The Book of the Nine Rocks* (1352). The Holy Spirit instructs Merswin to show the nine steps, or rocky planes, by which man climbs the ascent to spiritual perfection. (More fully discussed below.) (3) *The Four Beginning Years* (1352). This is an autobiography of Rulman Merswin. It tells of his renunciation of the world, his intellectual and sensual struggles, and his meeting "the Friend of God from the Oberland." (More fully discussed below.) (4) *The Book of the Prevenient and Meritorious Grace*. This treatise, compiled from various writers, discusses the work of God's grace in salvation. (5) *The Book of the Three Stages in the Spiritual Life*. This is a compilation of materials from many writers, mainly writers of the Bible, Eckhart, Bernard of Clairvaux, Pseudo-Dionysius.

#### WHO WAS "THE FRIEND OF GOD FROM THE OBERLAND"?

Who was "the Friend of God from the Oberland"? According to tradition, this is the story: Rulman Merswin found the Friend's writings in a sealed trunk after the Friend's death. The Friend was a member of the laity, the son of a wealthy merchant, who was told, in 1337, to lead a worldly life. This he did until the death of his parents. In 1343, when he was kneeling before a crucifix on the eve of his betrothal to a woman named Margaretha, he decided to break that betrothal. He then became a mem-

ber of the Friends of God, and in 1349 he met Rulman Merswin, a man of forty-two who two years earlier had been converted from being a banker to being a devotee of the contemplative life. The Friend of God was deeply influenced by the preaching of one whom he called "the Master" (possibly Johannes Tauler). After hearing the Master deliver five sermons, he asked him to preach three sermons on how to reach perfection. The Friend of God thereupon criticized the Master for not practicing what he preached. Forced into five years of asceticism by ridicule of the Friend, the Master returned to his preaching activities with great success. When the Master suddenly died, the Friend of God fled. When the Black Death, in 1349, threatened the lives of thousands, the Friend of God, through his writings, warned people of their sins. He then went to a high mountain with seven friends: two knights, a cook, a messenger, a converted Jew, a lawyer, and a former canon of a cathedral. Only Rulman Merswin knew their locale. The Friend's influence gradually spread more widely among Christians, pagans, and Jews in Italy, Hungary, and Bohemia. The messenger, Rupert by name, delivered the Friend's writings and messages to Rulman Merswin; these were to remain hidden with Merswin until the death of the Friend of God.

After a visit with Pope Gregory XI, in 1377, the Friend of God, with his associates, preached warnings to Christians everywhere, entreating them to live up to their best in the light of the oncoming doom; the Judgment Day was thus postponed because of the prayers of the Friends of God. In 1382, the Friend of God, with Merswin and eleven other Friends of God, held a divine meal to pray for Christianity. Shortly afterward the Friend of God died. What became of him and where he lived was known by Rulman Merswin, but Merswin evaded replies. It was reported that Sister Margarete von Kontzingen had found the Friend in the Oberland. Just who "the Friend of God from the Oberland" was has remained an enigma for five centuries. Rulman Merswin carried the locality of the mysterious Friend of God to his grave.

Scholars, with much disagreement, have attempted to identify "the Friend of God from the Oberland" and his relationship to Rulman. Some of the interpretations of this mysterious person are: (1) Auguste Jundt, in 1890, viewed Rulman Merswin as a dual pathological personality who sometimes wrote as Rulman Merswin and at other times ascribed himself as an imaginary person, "the Friend of God"; or, if the Friend of God was an actual person, he was John of Chur. (2) Both Jacques Quetif and Jacques Echard, collaborating Dominican scholars, in 1719, thought of the Friend of God as a pure allegory. (3) Wilhelm Preger, in 1869, interpreted the Friend of God as an actual person with great insight into the piety and the mysticism of his era, who through his writings created the finest prose of the time. (4) Karl Schmidt, in 1875, described the "Master" in these mystical writings as Johannes Tauler, and the Friend of God as Nicholas of Basle, who produced the letters as "the Friend of God from the Oberland." (5) Philip Strauch said that Rulman Merswin created the character of "the Friend of God from the Oberland," and that since the letters were in Elsass dialect, they could not have been written in the Netherlands dialect of Nicholas of Louvain. (6) Karl Rieder, in 1905, felt that all the letters and mystical tracts in the library at Green Isle were written by Merswin. (7) Father H. S. Denifle, in 1870, interpreted the Friend of God as an imaginary creation of Merswin's mind; he was the ideal layman or pattern for members of the Friends of God to emulate; the Friend of God was similar in purpose to "Christian" in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>12</sup>

Out of the maze of these theories about "the Friend of God from the Oberland" and his relation to Rulman Merswin, what can be concluded? As a person reads the letters ascribed to the Friend of God, along with those by Rulman Merswin, he finds that the styles and the religious viewpoints of the two writers are similar; that many of the experiences of the Friend of God are akin to those of Rulman Merswin. My opinion is that Rulman Merswin is probably thus the author of all (or most of) these

letters, and in many cases uses the person of "the Friend of God" as a figure through whom he can describe his religious views. Anonymous authorship was not uncommon in the fourteenth century and is observed in other devotional classics of this period, like *Medulla Animae*, *The Book of Spiritual Poverty*, *Theologia Germanica*, *The Seven Words from the Cross*, *About Three Kinds of Spiritual Dying*, and *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Many of the writings assigned to the Friend of God are thus unrelated to the author's real name, a factor that added mystery to the writings and lent to the real author a sense of humility. Rulman Merswin thus speaks in some of the writings as "the Friend of God from the Oberland," and in other writings as himself. The same person seems to be the author of all (or at least, most of) the letters, and his name is Rulman Merswin.

These writings give a careful insight into the religious piety and views of the fourteenth century, as especially related to the Christian mysticism within the Friends of God. This literature shows especially the influence of three practical mystics: Meister Eckhart, Heinrich Suso, and Jan van Ruysbroeck. Although these writings never question the authority of the pope, the value of holy days and holy places, or the helpfulness of the sacraments, Merswin seems to infer in them that in the low ebb of Christian living the church through its ecclesiastical officials will never give to Christianity its needed reform and resurgence of spiritual life. Rather, it is through dedicated persons, Friends of God, that the revitalizing of religion and the church in his century is to occur.

#### THE FOUR BEGINNING YEARS

Though numerous treatises from Rulman Merswin and the "Friend of God from the Oberland" describe the mysticism of the Friends of God in the fourteenth century, two of the most important are considered in this volume: *The Four Beginning Years* and *The Book of the Nine Rocks*. *The Four Beginning Years* (1352),<sup>18</sup> which is autobiographical of Merswin, is addressed "to all dear Christian persons." It shows Merswin's

sensual struggles when he renounced the world; his initial desire to give away his wealth to atone for his sins; his vow to live as a celibate; his unhappy venture during his first year into ascetic practices, which Tauler discouraged; his yearning at times to become a hermit; and his terrible illness as a result of his spiritual tensions, which weakened him so that he was unable to make a pilgrimage to Rome. It also portrays the intellectual doubts through which he went regarding such tenets as the Trinity. Finally, in the fourth year of these "beginning years," doubts and perplexities, sufferings and temptations, are overcome; peace, power, and vitality come to Rulman Merswin as he feels himself wedded to God. Inspired anew, he is willing to go forth as a missionary of the gospel, and if necessary, to die the death of a martyr for God's cause.

#### THE BOOK OF THE NINE ROCKS

*The Book of the Nine Rocks* (1352),<sup>14</sup> described by Rufus Jones as "one of the greatest religious apocalypses of the Middle Ages, and the greatest literary creation of the Friends of God,"<sup>15</sup> gives the nine steps of ascent for the spiritual life. The steps are as follows: (i) Here men are struggling to get on the first rock; some confess their sins; some slip back. (ii) Here are those who have renounced their own wills and have allowed themselves to be guided by a Friend of God. (iii) Men are now tempted with self-sufficiency. While some falter here, others discipline themselves with severe asceticism in order to obtain heaven and escape hell. (iv) Some, still self-willed, are now resorting to mortifying the flesh in order to please God. (v) Those who have tried to sacrifice self-will are at this level; yet their self-will has not yet thoroughly died. (vi) On this rock are those who have given their wills to God or others; they are stable, except that they want God and others to recognize them, and thus give them comfort. (vii) Persons completely obedient to God's will are at this height. (viii) Here men have no personal desires; they can possess good things and not realize it, for they are selfless. (ix) On the ninth

rock there are but a few persons, in whom there is no personal desire. With this self-persecution they are able to enjoy everything that God enjoys; they have reached the pinnacle of self-disinterestedness. Here, unafraid, each individual loves all other men through God with an equal love, beholding the divine origin, and knowing that God in his true nature is a God of redeeming grace. Man's whole life, thus flooded by divine love, has become transfigured. It is the normative portrait for the ideal Friend of God.

While the main part of *The Book of the Nine Rocks* is concerned with the nine steps by which a Christian life emerges, other aspects of the book give an analysis of the wretched spiritual conditions of the time. As Merswin depicts the sins of his time, he shows how all people, from the pope down to the peasants, are jointly responsible for the low tone of spirituality. Such an analysis of the decrepit nature of Christendom makes it necessary in his mind that a movement like the Friends of God reform the age in which he lives.

Scholars find an especially close comparison of this book with *The Spiritual Ladder* by the Friend of God. James M. Clark speaks of the comparison as follows: "Parts of Merswin's *Book of the Nine Rocks* correspond word for word with parts of *The Spiritual Ladder* (*Die geistlichen Staffeln*) by the Gottesfreund. It is true that there are some differences between individual works. *The Book of the Five Men* has a different spelling and is in a different dialect from Merswin's treatises. But the language of the former does not resemble any known dialect of German and is obviously a synthetic form of speech, with a perfectly absurd orthography. . . . The difference in handwriting would not deceive anyone who looked below the surface. To write a manuscript labeled in the Gottesfreund's own hand and invent a new kind of spelling and a disguised hand, was all part of the game of mystification. Even the miraculous letter from heaven sent to the Gottesfreund is a typical specimen of Merswin's prose."<sup>16</sup>

## TENDENCY-LITERATURE

Most of the mystical literature associated with Rulman Merswin and "the Friend of God from the Oberland" lacks historical data; it is not genuine biography; it is fictitious. It is known as tendency-literature. It does, however, through its fictional and imaginative scenes and characters, portray the thought patterns of the Friends of God in the fourteenth century. It is apocalyptic, filled with visions, experiential rather than speculative, orthodox in the medieval spirit, mystical, naïve in many ways.

Merswin's tracts portray teachings that differ rather distinctly at times from those of Eckhart, of Suso, Tauler, Ruysbroeck, and other Friends of God. Merswin is more imbued with visions, dreams, miracles; he puts great stress on chastity, women, sex, marriage; he sanctions rigorous physical penances; he believes that God might allow Christianity to die; he is adamant in condemning people who neglect the Holy Eucharist; he is less hopeful than other leaders about the power of the Holy Spirit in the church; he stresses the value of confession; he depicts the judgment of the world more deeply than do the other writers of his day.<sup>17</sup> Yet in spite of these unique differences in Merswin's writings, he shares, in general, the larger viewpoint of the Friends of God in the fourteenth century. Although Merswin's writings contain his own ideas and interpretations, many of them are compilations from other writings, with his own views and interpretations interspersed.

In apocalyptic writings — such as *The Revelation to John* in the New Testament — the author's name is withheld or a pseudonym is used, and the book is a compilation of many other writings. Such features also characterize the tendency-literature writings of Rulman Merswin. Why did Merswin leave his writings with his name unattached to them? Was it because of humility? Did he wish to leave a note of mystery about them? Did he fear that his own name attached to his tracts might lessen their value? Whatever the reason for the anonymity, he was following the

pattern found in other mystical writings of the fourteenth century, such as *Theologia Germanica* and *The Cloud of Unknowing*. To have many of his writings under the pseudonym of "the Friend of God from the Oberland" intensified the mystery about his books.

For Merswin to incorporate the writings of Johannes Tauler, Heinrich Suso, Albert Magnus, and others into his own tractates is not considered plagiarism in tendency-literature. The Revelation to John borrows 245 times, some of them rather lengthy segments, from the Old Testament; it has many references based on the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and the earlier writings of the New Testament. As this custom of literary dependence was a characteristic of apocalyptic literature, so it was a feature of the tendency-literature of the fourteenth century. Although modern writers call this "plagiarism," it was not so considered in the mystical writings of Merswin's century. Anonymity and literary dependence were a part of the vehicle used by Merswin to portray the religious ideas of his century. Rulman Merswin is writing in the style and tendency of fourteenth-century German mysticism.

The mysticism of the Friends of God was a practical mysticism. Though some have viewed it as an escape from the tragedies of the time, it was more a reaction against the coldness and ineffectiveness of the organized church. Nor was it anti-intellectual. Eckhart, who lent great influence to the Friends of God, was a product of Scholasticism, which wedded reason with faith, philosophy with theology. The Friends of God were primarily advocates of the belief that by a closer relationship of individuals and groups with God there would come a deepening of the spiritual roots of Christianity. Because of the large losses of men in war, tournaments, and jousts a large number of unmarried women fled to the convents, especially those of the Dominican Order near Strassburg and Constance. Many of these women were wealthy, well educated, and of noble and patrician families.

Numerous mystical writings of this time were from sermons

preached to these women, from notes the women took from sermons, from pastoral guidance given to these women by Dominican monks. "The growth of mysticism was then due to the impact of Scholastic philosophy on educated women in the nunneries. The friars had to express theological and philosophical ideas in a garb that would make them intelligible to women. The nuns stimulated the pastoral work of the friars, and the friars encouraged the nuns to press on in search for spiritual perfection."<sup>18</sup> Although this accounts for but a part of the mystical writings of this time, it represents a large influence. As the influence of *Mystical Theology* of Pseudo-Dionysius, with its differentiation of the essence of God and the manifestations of God, left its influence on Meister Eckhart, so the continuing influence through Eckhart is evident in some aspects of the mysticism of both fourteenth-century Friends of God and twentieth-century religious writers, notably Rudolf Otto.

#### VALUE OF MERSWIN THE MAN AND THE WRITER

Rufus Jones summarizes well an evaluation of Rulman Merswin, the writer: "Rulman Merswin is to be considered, I believe, a notable figure and a significant literary creator, frequently to be sure a mere copyist and adaptor of other men's writings, but often reaching a high level of style and originality. He must be read and studied as a fourteenth-century person, not as a sixteenth- or twentieth-century Christian. He was of his time, not ahead of it. His ideal Figure is not an ideal Figure, any more than Bunyan's 'Christian' represents our ideal Christian today. But Merswin's work seems to me to be notable and distinctly significant."<sup>19</sup>

Though Merswin may be negated by some as one who "through ignorance or fraud brought the whole group of German mystics into disrepute,"<sup>20</sup> this seems a biased opinion in the light of the nature and purpose of tendency-literature. He is better evaluated in a balanced way in these words: "The writings of the great Friend of God, though often crude and most mo-

notonous, can be used as a basis for studying the mind of the laity of the fourteenth century with its distress over the divided church, and the corrupt clergy; it also shows the independence of the individual who would think and act honestly to the best of his ability." <sup>21</sup>

Although these writings represent a fourteenth-century mysticism, which vitalized the Friends of God in that Christian period, they still retain much interest for modern man, for they lead him into a deeper appreciation of the spiritual treasures of that period. Rulman Merswin's writings will probably never be classified as *great* literature, yet they give an excellent portrait of a period of religious history that did much to strengthen religious living among groups in the fourteenth century. They greatly help us to understand the basic tenets and drives of the Friends of God.

## NOTES

1. Wilhelm Preger, *Geschichte der deutschen Mystik im Mittelalter*, Volume 2, p. 296.
2. *Mysticism*, p. 552.
3. *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 242.
4. James M. Clark, *The Great German Mystics*, p. 47.
5. These expressions are from Clark, *ibid.*, "Rulman Merswin and the Friends of God," pp. 75-97. Critics feel that Clark is far too harsh in his evaluation of Merswin.
6. Clark, *ibid.*, p. 75. Clark bases his conclusion on research of Karl Rieder, *Der Gottesfreund vom Oberland*.
7. Green Isle is known as a well-ordered retreat place in the latter part of the fifteenth century, a center of literary activity, where books were copied and written. Merswin, apparently in his business astuteness, laid a strong material foundation for Green Isle.
8. In *The Latin Memorial* was a history of Green Isle; it also contained tracts of both Merswin and "the Friend of God from the Oberland." *The Small German Memorial* was a collection condensed from *The Great German Memorial*, edited by Nicholas of Louvain for laymen. *The Great German Memorial* was destroyed by fire, in 1871, in the Landesbibliothek in Strassburg. Two copies of *The Small German Memorial* still remain in that Strassburg library.
9. *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum*, Volume XXIV, p. 518.
10. For over four hundred years scholars looked upon Tauler as the "Master" in *The Book of the Master*, and the book was erroneously considered a biography of Tauler.
11. This was ordered in 1385 to remain always at Green Isle. At an unknown date it was removed to the Landesbibliothek in Strassburg, where, in 1871, it was destroyed by fire.
12. Rufus M. Jones, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, p. 111.

13. A fifteenth-century manuscript of *The Four Beginning Years* and *The Book of the Five Men* is kept today in the Bezirksarchiv of Strassburg.
14. An autographed manuscript of *Das Buch von den neunten Felsen* is today in the Landesbibliothek at Strassburg.
15. *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 267.
16. *Op. cit.*, p. 86.
17. For these evaluations, as I have paraphrased them, I am indebted to some correspondence from Dom C. F. Kelley.
18. James M. Clark, *op cit.*, p. 5.
19. *The Flowering of Mysticism*, p. 117.
20. Article on Rulman Merswin, by Philip Strauch, in *Realencyclopädie*, Volume XVII.
21. Anna G. Seesholtz, *Friends of God*, pp. 149, 150.

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*The Four Beginning Years*



## *The Four Beginning Years*

**A**LL who read this little book can be assured that everything that I have written here is the plain truth, in witness whereof there will be found my own seal hanging on a strap on this book.

In God's name, Amen. Beloved Christians, you shall all know indeed that it came to pass in A.D. 1347, that I, Rulman Merswin, gave up all my trading business and all the profit that I used to make, and all the natural, pleasant (lustful), social activities. This I did through God rather daringly, in the simple opinion that I could expiate my sins in this way. And since I took this first step so courageously and so simply of my own free will, my nature had been hurt very much, for I did much enjoy the pleasures of the world. You must understand that I had been living a simple life for about the space of ten weeks when it came to pass near Saint Martin's Day [November 11] that I was walking in my garden in the evening, intending to pray for a while. And as I was walking, there were arising in me many thoughts that caused me to see the untruth and falseness of this evil world, and the bitter end of it all; and I remember that I pondered also upon the many good things God had done for me, and upon his great love toward me, a miserable sinner, and upon Jesus' great suffering and his bitter death. And as I reflected upon the many good things God had done for me, I thought also how foolishly I had squandered all my days, and how inadequately I had shown my love

for God. And when I thought upon his greatness and my smallness, and when I regarded the great love of Jesus and contrasted that with my small love and wasted time, I saw that I was nothing in comparison with him. And when these thoughts and much more had been in my mind, there arose within me such a strong feeling of repentance for all my lost time and wasted energy that I hated myself for having failed to do what I ought. And as I was walking in my garden engrossed in these thoughts, I looked upward to heaven and asked for God's infinite mercy with great seriousness, and with a heart full of penitence; and I yielded my will to God and promised him that, if he would look upon me in the light of his merciful kindness, I would give away all my earthly possessions. And so it was that as I was walking in the garden in this penitent frame of mind it came to pass that a clear light quickly surrounded me, and I was taken up and swept up from the earth and carried in all directions back and forth throughout the garden. And as I was being carried in this way I felt as if extremely sweet words were being spoken to me. What this light was and this leading power and the sweet words, I do not know; God certainly knows, but it was all beyond my comprehension. When this happy hour was over and I came to myself once again, I found myself standing alone in the garden. And I looked around and saw no one nor anything else, but felt only a copious stream of tears flowing from my eyes, which I was unable to stop.

At the same time those tears gave me much strength and my heart became full of joy; and when I understood the meaning of this I wondered that God had done so many wonderful things for me, a miserable sinner. I experienced such great joy that I noticed my heart was beating irregularly. And in that same hour there fell also such abundant divine love upon me that I began to hate the world and all earthly things (including my own body). In fact, I so tortured my body this first year, and became so sick, that I was afraid I would die.

It was at this time that I took Tauler as my confessor; and when

he saw how strictly I regulated my life and denied myself many needful things, he feared lest I go mad and commanded me not to practice such austerities until later. I had to obey; but such obedience was very painful to me, for I took great pride in keeping my body under strict exercises. But when his order was no longer in force, I continued my exercises as before. But our dear Lord and our God taught me, in this very first year of my new life, that when I had an important problem that I brought seriously before him, he so enlightened me that I knew exactly what I had to do and what to avoid. Our dear Lord led me, in this first year, many times into terrible and great temptations, both in daytime and in night. Yet, through the grace of God, I was enabled to approach him with humbleness of heart and to pray from the bottom of my heart: "My dear Lord and my God, this suffering is painful to me; yet I beseech thee that thou wouldst not do what my miserable, sinful nature asks or wishes, but fulfill thy own most beloved will." And when it came to pass that God poured out his mercy, and let me understand that this thing must be so and that I had to endure suffering too, then I was comforted and strengthened. Then I realized that God permitted the devil to do his work so that he might purify me in order that he could dwell in me much better, since he likes to dwell in a man who takes his cross upon him and follows him, especially in suffering. And when it came to pass that the temptations of suffering did strongly attack me, then, with the help of God, I braved the temptation joyfully and humbly, since I knew that he did with these temptations of suffering as he would, and not as I intended. And when God saw that I endured the suffering bravely as he had intended, he came to my help with his merciful grace and delivered me from all the temptations of suffering and let me also experience great joy. Then my happiness was so great that I believe it was beyond human understanding. And when I experienced God's great presence, my happiness became so great that I had to use much effort to suppress my joy lest it break out from my heart, and I would utter a shout of exultation. And when it came to

pass that the merciful God did send me this great joyful gift beyond understanding, I thought it must be but a foretaste of the eternal happiness. It came to pass also after some time, according to God's will, that he allowed the devil to charge me boldly for all my sins that I had ever committed and also for all my forgotten sins; and besides this I had great remorse for all that God had bestowed upon me, a poor sinner: suffering and faithfulness and love.

Then, when I thought about all this, how it was in sharp contrast to my own wasted time and my meager love, I suffered such remorse that I began to hate my body and flesh, so that I turned upon it sometimes, beating it with such a sharply cutting whip of iron that the blood streamed out. When I saw this, I took salt and pressed it into the wounds so that it would pain and sting me terribly. You must understand that in this first year the world and all worldly things became in my eyes as nothing to me and of no value at all. Furthermore, if it would have been God's will, I would gladly have run away from this world completely, leaving my wife and wealth and all that I had in order to go away into a forest, where I would live penniless and where no one would have known me; so much had the world become a cross to me!

And sometimes I was so depressed as I thought of our Lord's suffering that I asked God fervently that it might be his will to let me become a leper in order to give proof that I no longer wished to be a part of this world and so become an outcast. And it came to pass that many times, when I received our Lord in the holy sacrament, I experienced such an exuberant feeling of mercy and happiness that I cannot describe it or express it in words, since it was beyond all reason. And it came to pass sometimes that God was hard to me in an extraordinary way, in that he let me fall into many terrible temptations consisting of manifold kinds of unchastity and disbelief. When these awful temptations beset me, I sometimes suffered sharp inward pain and had such terrific headaches that, at times, I was terribly afraid lest I

go mad. Sometimes it happened that I lost my reason, but as often as that occurred God came to my rescue, so that I recovered. At those times I yielded myself entirely to God and begged him to do with me according to his will and not as I might wish.

Often during this first year God let me endure great sufferings. But always he stood at my side ready to give succor; and as I realized this, my comfort and joy were so great that I forgot immediately all the suffering that I had been compelled to endure. This happened many times during that first year. And in that same year I thought so much about the suffering of our Lord that it gave me abundant comfort. At that time I imagined that I must cut my veins in order to bleed; and as often as I did so, I thought immediately of the blood of our Lord. Then I lost consciousness and all power or remembrance, and I became very ill, so that the brethren had to use all their strength to bring me back to self-consciousness. In this same first year it came to pass that when I got up in the night to begin the praying of my matins, immediately strange and extraordinary temptations fell upon me; and these temptations were so unclean and full of unchastity that I cannot speak about them, and so evil that I became very terrified. Then I would fall at once upon my knees and call upon God with much earnestness, that he might help me. But it did not help. Nothing that I did seemed to help me. I fell into a "cross-prayer" [prayer in which the praying man uses the form of a cross: he lies on the earth with outstretched arms], and it did not help. And when this great unclean temptation beset me until morning, I said to myself, "You ought to go into the church before the presence of your Lord and God and call upon him with great earnestness that, if it might be his will, he would take away this great unclean temptation." And so I went in and called upon the beloved mother of God and asked her from the bottom of my heart that she might request her child that, if it would be his will, he might take away the unclean temptation from me. But that did not help either. Instead, the temptation only increased. In this great suffering I remained in the church until the hour

when the church should be closed. Then I stepped out and went home, and went into my room, since I had no desire for food. And there I sat in my room, reading in a small book very good things about the suffering of our Lord, believing that if I read such things, my own temptations would cease. But this too failed to help; on the contrary, they seemed to increase with a vengeance. And since nothing helped me, I sat there in much pain and I thought: "Woe is me, a miserable sinner. I am to blame for all these sufferings, and I ought to give myself over to them and let God do with them and with me as he will."

In this mood I fell down upon my knees and asked him earnestly to come to my help. I confessed that I could not bear this suffering so patiently as I ought, and that I did not wish to suffer. But none of this helped me. Instead, the temptations seemed to be greater and more numerous than ever before. And then I became very sick. And when I recognized this, I began to call upon the sweet name of Jesus and asked him to come and help me, because I could not bear this. I prayed long and earnestly, but nothing helped. And when I saw that none of this was of any avail, I thought, "You are too ill to endure this for a long time; you ought to go out on the street among the common people and talk with them for a while; perhaps you might feel better."

With this intention I got up, and intended to go out; but when I stood up I felt much pain. I saw that I had many wounds on the lower part of my body, and that they were so swollen that I could not move. And when I saw my condition, I thought: "You are too sick to go anywhere. You should just lie in bed and commit yourself to God completely, and let him do just as he will; you should yield yourself entirely to him." So I went to bed grievously ill; and as I was lying thus in my bed my mind became clear, so that I began to speak, and I prayed: "O my Lord and my God, before I would break those vows which I did promise thee I would keep, I would sooner that my body would break in pieces and that I would suffer the most bitter and shameful death. Take me and do with me as thou dost see fit. Ignore my wishes

and fulfill thy own desires concerning me.”

While I was lying there in that mood and suffering great pain without finding any comfort, it happened that about the time of vespers [in the afternoon, sixth canonical hour] I fell asleep through sheer exhaustion. And as I was lying thus in this unconscious state it came to pass that a sweet voice did speak to me, saying, “Rulman, get up joyfully from your bed immediately!” Then my eyes were opened and I looked around, but I saw nothing. Nevertheless, I felt clearly that I had become happy, and I got up from my bed immediately. And as soon as my feet touched the floor I noticed at once that my body, which had been before very much wounded and swollen in its lower part, was now normal and all marks had disappeared. And I recognized too that I seemed to be full of strength, and I sensed such an immense happiness inside that I forgot all the pain and sufferings that I had had before. And when I saw these great miracles that had been wrought in me, I went immediately to the cathedral of our Beloved Lady and gave praise unto the Lord and to his mother for all the good they had bestowed upon me, the poor unworthy sinner.

Ah, all you beloved Christians, you must realize that our dear Lord Jesus Christ and the merciful and kind God did so many good things for me, his poor unworthy creature, in the first year of my stay at the Gruenenwoerth, that I cannot begin to recount them. In fact, so numerous were they that no missal [or perhaps just “book,” such as can be bought at the annual fair] would have been big enough to contain them. So much for the first year.

During the second and third years (the latter of which was a jubilee year in which people went to Rome [probably 1350; the first of these festivals was established in 1300]), God did work great and supernatural works in me, a poor sinner. During these two years I had such inconceivable temptations, so unclean and evil, that it would be harmful if I were to write about them. However, it would do no harm were I to write about one of them, how I was tempted by unbelief. It happened in this way, that the

devil did pose the question how it could be that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit could be in one essence and in one nature. I felt that if I did not believe this, I should be doomed to the everlasting torments of hell. Laboring under this temptation, I became so sick that I feared it would end in my death. And when I was ill for a long time struggling against this unbelief, and felt that I could no longer survive, it happened that on the day of the ascension of our Beloved Lady [August 15] I dared to go to a sermon. And so I put my round hat in front of my eyes and, because of my great illness, I lost consciousness. And on this occasion a very large stone appeared to me, higher and broader than a long spear, and on this stone had been carved the images of three big men, and from the mouth of the last one there went up a big, beautiful, white dove. And on this stone there was written above the first image "Father," and over the second one "Son," and over the third one "Holy Spirit." And I had the impression that a voice was speaking to me: "Now you may believe since it is so, as you have seen it on the stone. It may have three Persons, and in spite of this it is still one stone; and the three Persons are of one nature, belonging to one stone." After this had happened, I became conscious again and was somewhat disturbed because I was sitting among people and listening to a sermon. I was afraid lest someone had recognized me; so I stood up and entered [left?] the church, and realized that my faith had been so illuminated that I was never again tempted by unbelief of this kind.

But the other great and indescribable temptations were of lust, which I had to bear fully throughout these two years; and I had to suffer such great and painful torture that I never felt any kind of comfort either from God or from any creature. But when these two years were over I shortly afterward felt clearly that the merciful God had come to my assistance in a manner completely unknown to me. For surely if God had not done so, I would never have been able to endure those years, so terribly did I suffer from devilish temptation. Never have I experienced such

torture and agony of soul! I was so sick during these two years that I was not permitted to go to Rome in the year of jubilee [1350], nor was I able to wear a rough [hair] shirt or use whips or switches or pray in cross-form or engage in any other strenuous exercise. But I am certain that during these two years my will never was outside the will of God, since, whenever I was in pain or very sick, I always spoke with him with my whole heart and soul: "Lord, thy will be done, both now and in the world to come. Do with me, poor sinner, as thou willest and not as I will."

When I realized that I had lost during these two years much weight, and that the general state of my health was very poor, I was rather terrified. For I had enjoyed life before very much. Yet there was also a bright side to the picture, inasmuch as I had experienced something of the grace of God during this time. I began to feel that my precious life had been wasted, since it had been lived without any heavenly love and would be counted unworthy by my Heavenly Father. In contrast, the present time, with its suffering school of love, had taught me how the true worshipers must worship the Father in spirit and truth [John 4:23].

During the two years when I was tormented by untold sufferings of all kinds, God prevented me from letting anyone else know of my plight. I had to bear it all alone, even though there were times when I was sure that I was lying at death's door. However, it was then that I began to understand something about the grace of God; and it helped me exceedingly to know that I too could suffer patiently, as did my Lord. Truly, if I were to write down everything I endured during these two years, it would fill a rather large book.

As the fourth year began, God in his infinite mercy took pity upon me, a poor sinner; and, seeing my great sickness, did strengthen and help me, so that I soon forgot all the pain and suffering. In fact, I recovered so quickly, and regained my former excellent health so completely, that one would never have guessed that I had been ill at all. And along with my recovery came an

inner sense of the divine Being dwelling within me, so that I felt, whenever I looked at another man, that I could recognize in him that same kind of divine grace to some extent.

In this fourth year I was forced by God—much against my will—to write small books to help my neighbor. And I was aware, too, that the threefold powers—faith, hope, and love—had been strengthened in me and took on a new significance for me. I felt an extraordinary peace of mind and joy in the Holy Spirit. I felt also a kind of inner satisfaction, so that all worldly things had become as nothing to me. I found such serenity of soul as is impossible to imagine. This was such an indescribably exhilarating experience that, had God not restrained my heart, I am sure that it would have been broken into pieces; so great was my joy. I can give testimony, therefore (and I wish that you too might have such a glorious experience as I had), that one cannot find any satisfaction save only in God himself. When it came to pass that he entered into my very being, I felt such a satisfying and perfect happiness, a joy beyond joy, that I was not sure whether I was alive or in Paradise. And this great and joyful union I experienced for about eight or fourteen days, more or less.

In the meantime, when I did not feel myself lifted up to heaven, it happened sometimes when I was praying that I hoped I might have that wonderful sensation again. Yet, strangely enough, at the same time the thought terrified me, and I tried to stifle such a desire completely. This I did always because of humility, and so I prayed: “Ah, my Lord and my God, I know full well about thy mercies. Still I feel that I am wholly unworthy, that I should have been born and that I should dare to have such great desires arise within me. Truly, I am a poor sinner and am not worthy at all. I beseech thee, therefore, that thou wouldst show me mercy and not be angry with me; for I am deeply sorry about this, that I have dared desire for myself such a marvelous and joyful experience, since I, a poor sinner, know full well that thou wouldst never have a good time on this miserable earth by my will.”

Words of like import and many more I did utter with my whole heart to our Lord and to our God; and I looked upon myself as unworthy of all the marvelous mercies that had been bestowed upon me. And when it happened that I did not find these great and pleasant experiences within myself, I thanked the Lord truly in every way; I addressed praises to God, who had let me starve, but who had also given me life. And as I reflect upon the past, I cannot understand why God did treat me so gently, kindly, and marvelously. Still it must be only this, that I have always been eager to subject myself to God humbly in all things, and let him do that which he proposes. I do not seek anything save his honor and his will, both now and ever after—I do not try to have my way in any case.

Moreover, during this fourth year I received a marvelous (and great) gift, viz., I felt a great longing in my heart that if it would be the will of God, I should like to suffer. I wanted, of my own free will, to suffer in order to honor Jesus' suffering and his bitter death. Despite the fact that such a desire is wholly unnatural, it was my heart's desire, day and night, during this fourth year. I felt also in this same year a great longing (if it would be the will of God) to go to the heathen to tell them about my faith in Christ, no matter how long it would have taken or what dangers and tortures I should have been subjected to. Nay, I should have regarded it as a privilege to have met my death in the midst of such blessed labors all for our Lord's sake, for his great suffering and his bitter death.

About all these great and marvelous experiences I could not reveal a single word until such time as God would have it. Then one day God commanded a man in the Oberland to come down to me. And when he came God told me to speak with him about all this. This man was a perfect stranger to the people, but he became my secret friend. And to this man I became as intimate as to God, and did tell him all my secrets of these four years of my spiritual birth. And when I had told him all that God had revealed to me, he said to me: "Now, my dear secret friend, look

at the booklet with the inscription 'five years of my beginning.' Pray write down for me everything that transpired during the four years of your spiritual awakening." And I said to him, "This would be difficult for me; this, one should not ask." But he said: "Now I have written for you the five years of my spiritual beginning and I know very well that you would reveal this to no one. Likewise, I will tell nothing about you. I shall bring it up into the [Ober]land, my homeland, in which you are as unknown as I am in Strassburg. Therefore, just begin and write down your spiritual experiences during those four years; and write it in two booklets. One of these booklets I shall take home with me to the [Ober]land; and the other booklet you shall retain and hang your seal upon it, being careful to lock it up carefully so that no one can find it during your lifetime." I replied, "This is difficult for me; because I should not like anyone to find it either during my lifetime or after my death, lest one would ascribe to me what I do not deserve, but only God."

When he saw that it was difficult for me to do this, he said that his request was an order; so I had no choice but to obey. He knew full well that my unwillingness to write was because of humility.

In spite of the great inner joy that I had experienced during this fourth year, there was still a dark spot on my soul which, as yet, I had not discerned. But God, knowing that I was unaware of this blemish, helped me to erase it. This awful thing was an unchristian attitude of criticism of others. In spite of God's great mercy toward me, I found myself looking upon my neighbor and judging him, accusing him of being sinful and a failure in God's eyes. This was indeed a sin — that I dared look upon my neighbor as he was rather than as he could become in the future. And this weakness of mine continued for a rather long time, until God let it transpire one day, when one of my good friends did ask me to accompany him; and I did. And he conducted me to a stinking, dirty place, which was used as a common storehouse. And when I saw this foul place, he asked me to give him my opinion whether or not it would be possible to make it clean

and to build good things upon it. After he had asked me this question, and I had looked around this disgusting place for a while, I suddenly saw in my mind's eye what a good thing it could become. After giving a favorable reply to my good friend, he went on his way and I went into the church to pray to my Lord, as it was my custom. But when I tried to pray I found it impossible. And besides this, there seemed to be a voice inside me saying: "O you miserable creature, how inconsistent you are to imagine that a dirty and unclean place can be turned into something good and beautiful, but that such a transformation is impossible or improbable in a human being who was created in the image of God and became your brother as a result! Should you not regard him more justly and look at his good traits, and think more about what he can become? Whoever really desires to become a good man, a worthy vessel in which God's Spirit may dwell, can do so if he but turns to God." When I heard these things and pondered over them, I became terrified and begged God to forgive me, and vowed never to be guilty of such thoughtless behavior again. Thus, by means of this object lesson I got an understanding that was beyond price.

During this fourth year many things were revealed to me by the grace of God that would now seem strange and meaningless to the average Christian, and that many men would regard as incredible. It came to pass at the end of this fourth year that God let it be known to me that I had to remain in this world until such time as I might behold many marvelous works of God that he had ordained in manifold ways for Christianity.

You must truly believe that even if I had had the largest book in the world, I could not have written down all the marvelous things that happened to me. Ah, beloved friends of our Lord, I ask that you might pray seriously for me, for it is not easy to come back again into the eternal sphere, as many simple people believe. In order to enter the presence of God, one's soul must become again as clean and pure as when it left the divine source.

Please understand that these things, which I had to write concerning these four years of my experience, I did not wish to commit to paper; but I had to do it because it was an order. Even so, I requested my secret friend to be allowed to burn it. And this I did simply because of humility, since I was fearful lest the reader might credit me with things that are the work of God. And I was given to understand that, if I wrote down my experiences of these four years, I should never again be forced to write any more of my experiences, regardless of how great they were or how long I lived. And so it was that I undertook the distasteful task. And when I had finished writing about those first four years of my spiritual awakening, behold, it was A.D. 1352.

*The Book of the Nine Rocks*



## *The Book of the Nine Rocks*

LET all Christian men seriously take heed of this admonition and let them know that whatever Christian reads this or hears it read from beginning to end, he must better his life or else remain voluntarily in his sins. But if he is a good Christian and has bettered his life and wishes to please God so that he may arrive at a higher life, that man will be instructed by this book if he takes its teachings seriously into practice. He will be taught which is the true road ascending to his origin.

You will find very few men in these times who will read this book and take its teachings seriously, for then they would find and be shown how they live and how they go astray and what captivity has enslaved them and led them astray from the true road that ascends to their origin. This is a book which every Christian needs to read, be he sinful or saved; it will profit him to read it. Let him be soever holy or perfect, it will not hurt him to read it.

The first discourse is: how a man was compelled by God to write this book. The second discourse is: how this man was shown strange visions. The third discourse is: that this man was permitted to see and to hear the sins of Christendom. The fourth discourse is: that this man was permitted to see a terrifyingly high mountain, with nine rocks and Christians wandering on each rock, and one rock lying upon the other to the top of the mountain.

In the name of our dear Lord, Jesus Christ, let all our work be finished and perfected.

It befell at a time during Advent, before the celebration of our dear Lord's birth, that early one morning a man was commanded to go swiftly to his secret place, where he was accustomed to pray in private. The man was obedient and did as he was commanded. When he reached the place, he was urgently told to turn inwardly with all seriousness to his Lord and to his God. The man did all that he was commanded, and obeyed gladly. Joyfully he turned inwardly with all seriousness to the eternal truth.

Now when this man had turned seriously with all his might to the eternal truth, then it happened that he was shown supernatural visions, so that he was much afraid and called upon the eternal truth and said: "Tell me, my Beloved, I cannot understand what thou meanest by these strange and wonderful visions. Thou knowest well that I neither wish nor desire them, unless I see, Beloved, that thou willest them. If I see that thou willest them, then I shall gladly be obedient."

The man fought against these visions with all his strength and did all that he could to get rid of them. But when he had fought strenuously against them, he realized that the harder he fought and defended himself against them, the more they increased. This frightened him greatly, and he started up, saying: "Tell me, my Beloved, what dost thou mean by tormenting me with such strange visions, when thou knowest that I neither wish nor desire them? O Beloved, what dost thou mean, or what is the reason?"

Then the man was addressed inwardly: "Do not defend yourself any longer from the visions; you must endure them or have them till your death!" Whereupon he replied: "O my Beloved, do not be angry with me, for I cannot endure thy wrath. I will be completely obedient to my death!"

Now once the man had surrendered his will, all these spiritual visions were revealed to him inwardly and within the space of an Ave Maria. When he saw these terrifying visions he was much

afraid and wondered what God could mean by them. So he said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is the meaning, or what is the reason, that thou hast shown me so many strange visions?"

The *answer* came: "I tell you, do not be afraid of these visions; they are nothing but a likeness of other things that God wishes to reveal to you also and that are far more wonderful than these." The man replied: "O my Beloved, must I then see more great wonders? That is a sign that I am still in my infirmity."

The *answer* came: "Open your inner eyes and be obedient to God!" He replied: "O Beloved, that I will gladly do as far as I can. Thou knowest well, Beloved, that I have taken leave of all creatures to be obedient to thee till my death! O my Beloved, do with me now and forever as thou wilt, for thy will is mine."

The *answer* came: "Then if you wish to be fully obedient to God, open your inner eyes and behold!" With these words all these great wonders were revealed to him which are written hereafter.

When the man saw this sight he was afraid in his heart, although the vision lasted no longer than it would take a man to sing a mass. He said: "Tell me, Beloved, thou knowest well that I have taken leave of all creatures and seek no consolation but thee alone. O my Beloved, what dost thou mean by showing me such terrifying wonders?"

The *answer* came: "You shall soon discover what God means!"

Now when he had seen all these sights which stand written hereafter, he at once became sick at his soul and said: "O my Beloved, let me tell thee that what thou hast shown me has made me fear that thou art very angry with Christendom. O Beloved, I pity Christendom from the bottom of my heart. O Beloved, allow me to pray thee on behalf of Christendom! This I would do, although I realize that I am an unworthy creature and ought not so to presume."

The *answer* came: "It is good that you make little of yourself and are humble." He replied: "O my Beloved, I would rather be in hell for true humility than in heaven for pride!" The *an-*

*swer* came: "I will tell you; all that you have seen and heard has not come through your will, but it has been only for this: all that you have seen and heard you must collect and write word for word in a book, as God has determined for you, to help and to admonish Christendom."

The man said: "O Beloved, how will that help? Thou knowest Christendom has many books and many teachers too; but that does not help men on earth who pursue their own desires instead of improving themselves as they ought to do."

The *answer* came: "Tell me, where is your love? What kind of talk is this? You know well that before God would permit a man to be lost, he would suffer bitter death himself if it were possible! See for yourself what kind of love you have! If you had real love, though you knew that only one man would be improved by your writing, yet you would write, even though you knew for a certainty you would suffer death for it!"

This speech frightened the man to heart, and he said: "O my Beloved, consider thy boundless mercy and free me from this writing!" The *answer* came: "What talk is this, or what do you mean by saying you do not want to write?" He replied: "Beloved, I mean that I realize I am a very unworthy, base creature; and I know well that thou hast teachers who can impart it to Christendom. Thou knowest that I dare not because of the ordinances of holy church."

The *answer* came: "You are not the first on whom God has poured out this rich grace. It has happened often that God has infused his rich grace into men who were little better schooled than you. Therefore, do not marvel at this, but begin to write and do not put it aside for anything!" He replied: "O Beloved, do not be angry with me, although I realize I am unworthy and write with fear, yet I must do so." The *answer* came: "Will you then be obedient to God?" With streaming eyes, he replied: "O my Beloved, I will gladly be obedient to thee in all things, but only free me from this writing!"

The *answer* came: "What do you mean by this?" The man

replied: "O My Beloved, I fear that the evil spirits will make me proud of this writing." The *answer* came: "I tell you, give God the praise; to him it belongs, and suffer your discomfort! Behold, the affliction of the evil spirits you will have for a temptation, and after this you will suffer another temptation; for let no one assume that he can get rid of the cross without getting rid of God."

The man said: "O Beloved, I do not mean to flee the cross. I will willingly suffer all that thou desirest!" The *answer* came: "Then begin to write!" He replied: "Do not be angry with me, my Love, if I am loath to assume this great honor." The *answer* came: "How dare you presume, you miserable, stinking, whining worm? Give God the glory that is his and suffer your discomfort, and be the poor tool with which he wills to work!"

The man said: "O Beloved, do not be angry that I argue with thee. Let me tell thee, my Beloved, I believe that men will ignore it, for they pay no attention to Holy Scripture." The *answer* came: "Leave that to God! I tell you, Christendom will find written on its heart that this book is the truth. Were all books burned, still this book would be pure truth! And I tell you, I am not saying this to speak against Holy Scripture, for whoever speaks against Holy Scripture speaks against the Holy Spirit, because Holy Scripture flows from the Holy Spirit. If you believe this, you are right." The man replied: "Beloved, thou knowest that I believe it; for it is our Christian faith."

The *answer* came: "Since you yourself say it is Christian faith, tell me, why should God not write and work through his friends what he wishes, or is he less than he was a thousand years ago? You ought to know that Christian faith holds that God has worked great miracles, both in former times and in these, with his chosen. Tell me, why then should God not now work in these times with his friends what he wills and when he wills and how he wills?"

The man replied: "O my Beloved, I believe that thou art almighty now and forever; that thou mayst do whatever thou wilt."

The *answer* came: "Then begin to write, for I tell you there has not been such a need to admonish Christendom in many hundreds of years as there is now! You should know that Christendom lives wickedly in these present times; so begin to write!"

The man replied: "O Beloved, I am opposed to it with all my strength, and if I do it, I must be forced." The *answer* came: "If you will not have it otherwise, then God will force you with sufferings in spirit and in soul!" He replied: "Beloved, give me the sufferings, for when I realize all that thou hast suffered on my account, then I consider it only fair that I should suffer all that thou wilt impose on me. O Beloved, I tell you since I fear thy anger more than my sufferings, I will not flee them." The *answer* came: "I warn you, the long and the short of it is that you must do it!"

The man replied: "Do not be angry, Beloved, if I do not begin. The reason is that I know what a poor unworthy creature I am, and so I am afraid in my heart to take on so great a task."

The *answer* came: "I see that you will have it no other way, you must be forced to it!" Then it said: "I tell you, do not waste any more time, submit to the Holy Trinity, whom you have so long annoyed, and begin to write this very day!"

This command frightened the man so that he said: "Beloved, do not be angry; I will gladly obey thee and do it. O my Beloved, I realize that all that I have to write comes from thee, and I know that I, thy poor worm, am unworthy to do it. But, my Love, let me ask this one thing." The *answer* came: "What is that?" He replied: "I will tell you, Beloved; it is that no creature ever discover through whom thou hast written this teaching." The *answer* came: "What is this talk? You should praise God for the task!" He replied: "Tell me, Beloved, if I am to write, shall I also speak of my love to thee and all our words of love?" The *answer* came: "Why should you not write them? I tell you, this love is not like that of the world. Worldly love is much tainted with sin and brings remorse in its trail. I tell you, if you write anything in this book that you do not understand, ask me and I will explain it to you at once. And I will tell you truly that it is what God wills of you." The man replied: "O Beloved, you

have assured me long enough, although I maintain that I am unworthy both of writing this and of thy discourse."

Now the man had many more words with his Beloved for eleven weeks before he finally consented to begin to write. And many times during these eleven weeks he thought he was about to die. Also, there came to him many hidden illnesses of which one may not well write. Should he write all the talks and all the wonders that he had from his Beloved in the eleven weeks, it would be too much. You could write a huge book of all the talks that took place in the eleven weeks before God brought him to begin to write.

In these same eleven weeks the man had often to see and suffer all the great wonders that are written in this book. And when this happened he was much distressed over Christendom's sins, so that he became so ill he thought he would die. When these eleven weeks were over and the man was commanded by the Holy Trinity to begin to write this admonition to help Christendom, on a day, the same day on which this all began, on the same day, then, when this man was commanded, to begin to write, he submitted obediently to the Holy Trinity and said: "O my Beloved, I know that I am not worthy of this holy teaching; Beloved, I also realize that thou spoke the truth through Caiaphas; therefore, do with this poor sinner as thou wilt."

He said further: "Beloved, let us end this prologue and begin to write what thou meanest and what this prologue signifies." The *answer* came: "It certainly is time; you ought not delay any longer, but be obedient to the Holy Trinity and write everything word for word that you have seen and heard." He replied: "My Beloved, now I will gladly be obedient to thee and I will begin to write."

*Here the prologue ends, and what stands written hereafter are the very strange visions that were revealed to this man.*

The *answer* came to this man: "Now open your inner eyes and see where you are!" With these words the man looked around and saw a terribly high mountain, and the mountain was also

wonderfully broad. On top was seething water, and this seething water was terrible to look upon. In it swam many kinds of fish, large fish and small fish.

Now he was shown the brink of the mountain, and there he saw the great water flowing down the high mountain, falling over great rocks down to the valley where the fall shot up a tremendous spray. The water grew more frightening as it hit each rock, so that it terrified him, for it was terrible to look at and to hear. Then he saw that the fish crowded together at the top of the mountain, millions of them, and they all fell together in the water down the mountain to the valley over the great rocks, from one rock to the other.

The man could not imagine what this signified, so he said: "Tell me, Beloved, why do all these fish crowd together at the top of the mountain and then fall, all together in the water, down over these rocks?" The *answer* came: "God created this mountain and appointed it to be the source of these fish. And this is the nature of the fish: when they follow the bent of their nature they crowd together and fight with one another and then fall in the water down to the valley."

The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, whence come these fish, or where is their home?" The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look down to the valley!" He did this and looked down the mountain to the valley, and he saw the fish swimming in the valley and out of it on the current. He saw further that as they swam with the current their numbers decreased, because on every side there were men catching them. He saw that the fish swam through the water till they came to the lake. When they reached the lake they swam through it also, and when they had swum through it there seemed to be only half as many fish. The rest were caught on the way.

This amazed him and he said: "Tell me, Beloved, it seems that when the fish get to the end of the lake they can go no farther." The *answer* came: "That is true. When they reach the end of the lake they can go no farther; but before they return to

their source, there will be very few left." At this the man saw that the fish turned around and swam back to the lake and through it to the waterfall. Then he saw that the nearer they came, the fewer there were, for many fell into the nets that were laid for them.

When the fish returned there, the man thought there were very few left, scarcely one in a thousand. Then he saw that the fish leaped up the waterfall far enough to reach the first rock. They leaped over one another from one rock to the next. But many of the fish fell back down on the hard rocks to their death and very few were saved. Those fish which remained alive climbed over one another up the waterfall to the mountain over many sharp rocks.

When they had climbed these rocks to the mountain they came to the bottom of an enormous rock, a rock so high it astonished the man and he said: "Tell me, Beloved, must these fish climb this high rock also?"

The *answer* came: "I will tell you. The nature of these fish requires them to return to their source; else they will die." The man saw them swim and battle in their desire to climb the rock, but all fell back to their death on the sharp rocks except a very few. Those which reached the top of the rock swam up the mountain to their source. But when these fish had reached their source, it seemed as if they fell sick and could do no more.

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why did so few fish reach the mountain, and the few that did reach it seem to have fallen sick and can do no more?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you; you see for yourself that the mountain is hard to climb." He replied: "That is true." The *answer* came: "So the fish are ill from having climbed so far; but no matter how ill they seem and how few there are, they are happy to know they have returned to their source. This will strengthen them and make them fruitful, so that from these few fish there will grow many fish, and the water on this mountain will be full of them. You see for yourself that the fish that left here from the mountain were of a different color.

Now these which have returned to their source will be given a different name."

The man was much astonished and wondered what God could mean by letting him see this strange sight. Since he was so perplexed, he said: "Tell me, Beloved, I pray thee not to be angry that I should question thee." The *answer* came: "You should ask about everything that you do not understand, as far as possible and as far as it concerns you."

Then the man said: "I pray thee, my Beloved, what is the reason that I have been shown such strange sights?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you. All the things you have seen have been a likeness or a symbol of how men live in this present worldly time, and especially how badly it goes with Christendom."

He replied: "O Beloved, I am very much frightened at thy words, and I pray thee, as far as I dare ask, to give me as mean and lowly a death as men may have if it may cause thee to have mercy on Christendom." The *answer* came: "No, no; it may not be. You see for yourself how little even God's death could help; and how could yours avail?"

The man replied: "O Beloved, I am sure that thy death has saved many men." The *answer* came: "Let me tell you that this happens less often nowadays than Christendom believes." The man said: "O Beloved, I believe if Christendom realized how wickedly it lived, it would reform." The *answer* came: "No Christian can excuse himself this way. Any Christian who has reached maturity and received reason and discrimination from God is responsible for knowing and keeping the ordinances of Christianity."

The man said: "O Beloved, these are fearful words!" The *answer* came: "Cease your talk! You must see for yourself how men live contrary to all the ordinances of Christianity nowadays, and have forgotten all fear of God, and how badly it fares with Christendom." He replied: "O Beloved, as far as I dare ask, I beg thee to excuse me from this; for I know the sins and falsehoods of Christendom, and when I think of them it distresses me

and takes away my strength, so that I can do nothing." The *answer* came: "No, you must see much more than you now know. God wills it, and it cannot be otherwise. But you will see not only the foolish men, but also the men of good will, and how they are trapped and held back."

The man said: "O my Beloved, do with me as thou wilt now and forever; and do not change thy will, but perfect thy work in this poor sinner for thy glory, how thou wilt and when thou wilt and where thou wilt, whether it cause me pain or joy, my death or my life."

*Here this discourse ends. What stands written hereafter is how this man was shown the sins of Christendom and in how much danger it was and how all its ordinances were broken, both spiritual and secular.*

The *answer* came to this man: "Now open your eyes and see where you now are." With these words the man looked around and saw that he had been taken far down in a valley below a very high mountain. The mountain looked as high as if it reached to heaven. Then he saw the whitest rocks lying on the mountain, one upon the other up to the top of the mountain. And on each rock men were dwelling.

While he was looking he saw a great multitude of the loveliest, shining spirits falling downward from the mountain onto the earth. As soon as these lovely spirits touched the earth, they turned very black like a black coal. But all the while they were above the earth they were so radiant that he could scarcely stand to look at them.

This sight amazed the man and he said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is this great wonder I have seen?" The *answer* came: "The radiant, lovely spirits are the noble souls whom God has created and fashioned in his likeness. God sends them then from their source down onto earth to womankind as he has ordained and after the course of nature.

"When a woman becomes pregnant, and her time comes, then

God pours a noble soul into her womb." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why is it that when the souls touch the earth they at once turn as black as a coal?" The *answer* came: "The reason is, as soon as the noble souls reach the earth they are at once touched by inherited sin."

Then the man said: "Tell me, Beloved, what does this high mountain mean, and the fearfully large rocks on it?" The *answer* came: "You must see it all for yourself, but not at this time. I tell you, you must yet see in what peril Christendom lies." He replied: "O my Beloved, I will gladly be obedient to thee till my death." The *answer* came: "Then open your eyes and see and take notice, for God will have you see very shortly how badly it fares with Christendom these days and also how all the Christian ordinances have perished among men except for a very few."

With these words the man was immediately shown how very sinful Christendom was in these times. He was shown how all the ordinances of Christianity were perverted. He saw how few men were living at this time who sought God's honor and not their own self-love. He was also shown many hidden, secret sins, of which he dare not write because of the world's infirmity.

When he saw all this dreadful sight he was afraid at his heart, and he was so taken with pity for Christendom that he wailed and wept copiously till he became ill and weak. Then when he came to himself again and God had given him a secret strength, he arose and fell on the earth, lying as on a cross, and he said: "O my Beloved, and my only comfort, thou must see how I pity Christendom with heart and soul. O my only Beloved, I wish to sacrifice my life right now, if only thou wilt have pity on Christendom so that it will reform itself."

The *answer* came: "You say you will sacrifice body and soul to help Christendom. Tell me, how will that help, when God has poured out his blood and suffered bitter, shameful death — and it is of so little avail nowadays? I tell you, they have forgotten God's death in their hearts, except to abuse him and to take his name in vain."

The man replied: "O Beloved, I pray thee to consider thy boundless mercy and thy bitter sufferings and to take pity on Christendom." The *answer* came: "Tell me, how long shall God suffer this? You have seen and heard for yourself how Christendom lives without the fear of God." He replied: "O Beloved, I am sure there are still many men who have the true fear of God." The *answer* came: "Any man who has the true fear of God should not transgress any ordinance of Christianity. Now look about and see how many men there are in these times who hold the true Christian ordinances as they were commanded." The man said: "O my Beloved, I will not argue with thee, but, my Love, I pray thee that thou wilt have pity on holy Christendom."

*The following discourse concerns the popes.*

The *answer* came: "Tell me, you pray for 'holy' Christendom, but how holy are the men who are living in Christendom nowadays? You yourself see how Christendom lives contrary to all Christian ordinances, both clergy and laity. Tell me, I ask you, about the most elevated; tell me, have you seen or heard of many popes either now or for many years who have been canonized — as happened often before, when they were great holy men before God?"

The man asked: "O my Beloved, I pray thee, tell me the reason why so few of them are canonized nowadays." The *answer* came: "The popes who were canonized before lived quite a different life from those today. This is true not only of popes, I tell you, but of all the great heads of Christendom, either spiritual or secular. The holy popes who used to walk the earth were earnestly concerned to help Christendom with all the bodily and spiritual goods they could muster. Nor did they seek their own desires, but in all they did they sought the glory of God above all things and were constantly concerned to help Christendom, that God's glory might be perfected. All their goods and energies they devoted to God. And rather than oppose God in anything, they would

suffer the bitterest death for his sake. Many of the popes did suffer death gladly for God."

The man said: "O Beloved, it makes me so sad to think how the popes go astray after small things, when they might live a great life and become saints." The *answer* came: "You may think it strange, but it is because the light of true ordinances is extinguished in them. Look about you and see how the popes live in these times and have lived, and see if they are not more concerned about their own glory than that the glory of God be perfected."

Further it said: "Look about you and see if they are not concerned with worldly goods with which they may assist their friends, being greatly concerned to help their worldly friends to worldly honors. There have been very few popes in the last years who have not sought their own desires with all their power, instead of seeking God's glory above and in all things. That is the reason so few popes have been canonized for so many years." The man replied: "O Beloved, it gives me great pain that all men do not love thee in all things and above all things, and their neighbors as themselves."

*The following discourse concerns the cardinals.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and see how the cardinals live in these times. Tell me, have you ever heard it said that the cardinals strive that God may infuse them with his grace and work his heavenly works through them?" The man replied: "O my Beloved, I have never inquired much about that, nor have I heard much said." The *answer* came: "Then I may tell you how they live in these times.

"The cardinals are quite blinded with greed and also with pride in helping their worldly friends to greater worldly honors, and also with the expectation of becoming pope after the present pope dies." The man said: "O Beloved, perhaps they mean well by it." The *answer* came: "No, it is not thus. The men living nowadays have quite perverted the ordinances, both spiritual and

secular, beyond all measure. I tell you, when Christendom lived in honor long ago, then when a pope died all the cardinals were greatly afraid that God would cause them to be elevated to the papacy. This humility had a divine origin: they thought in their hearts that they were not worthy of that very great honor. And when it happened that a pope died, the cardinals fell humbly at the feet of God and prayed all the friends of God that they would ask him to reveal to them whom he wanted for their head, who was dearest to him and of most use to Christendom.

“Now see how these ordinances have perished and have been forgotten! I tell you, because this ordinance has perished and has been forgotten, therefore it is that you find so few popes canonized nowadays, although it happened often before.” The man said: “O Beloved, I believe thou meanest that the popes should be called by God rather than by men.” The *answer* came: “That is true; they used to be called by God rather than by men.”

*The following discourse concerns the bishops.*

“Now look about you and see how the bishops live in these times. The bishops should be concerned with how they can assist their subordinates by advice and true doctrine so that they receive the true Christian faith. And if he cannot do it himself, he should seek a true teacher whose life follows his teaching, and when he finds such a teacher he should give him authority and ask him to help instruct his people with good counsel and true Christian doctrine. A bishop should also lead a holy, pure, chaste life, so that all who see him or hear of him may be improved by his example.

“Likewise a bishop should always be concerned with seeking God’s glory in all he does, and with not seeking his own desires. Look about you; how much these ways have been forgotten! The ways of the great heads of Christendom are quite unknown, all forgotten. And that is why there are so few saints in these times.”

The man said: “Therefore I pray thee, Beloved, that in thy pity thou wilt not allow the way to be completely forgotten.” The

*answer* came: "Look about you and see if the bishops living in these times are not more concerned with accumulating worldly goods so that they may help their worldly friends, rather than with teaching God's true way. Look about you and see how all the true ordinances have perished. You and all men who have discrimination can see for yourselves with your reason how this has come about. I tell you, as soon as a bishopric is empty nowadays, immediately men begin to fight and argue and bribe for it. How true this is God knows who knows all things."

The man said: "O Beloved, have pity on Christendom, for I believe these things have become custom." The *answer* came: "I tell you, the good old customs have become a laughingstock, so God permits these to go their way. But this is how the bishops used to live: the bishops who lived formerly were truly humble, so much so that they had to be forced by God and men to become bishops. God dwelled with these bishops and many of them became great saints." The man said: "Beloved, have pity, since all men do not live according to thy will."

*The following discourse concerns the abbots and abbesses.*

The *answer* came: "Now see how they live in the cloisters where abbots and abbesses dwell. I tell you, as soon as a head dies there are at once two men fighting and clawing at each other and bringing the cloister into spiritual and worldly poverty. I tell you, it was not thus when the holy abbots and abbesses lived. Formerly, when a head died in a cloister, they took great pains in choosing another. This was because the people who used to live in the cloisters were truly humble and when men tried to force them to take charge, they resisted as far as they dared. This was real humility, and whoever was chosen had to be really commanded to obedience before he would consent. When he consented and became an abbot, he at once asked God for help and instructed the subordinates, his brothers. Also he left the cloister and preached and taught the people in the world. And he grew in love toward God and his fellow men.

“Look about you and see how these and all other ordinances have perished and been perverted. That is what is wrong with Christendom!” The man replied: “Therefore, have mercy, Beloved; I am very sorry and would give my body to death if I could improve things.”

*The following discourse concerns the mendicants.*

The *answer* came: “Open your eyes and see very clearly how the mendicants live and likewise the confessors and those who preach God’s word. Look about you and see how they live in these times. Tell me, how many confessors do you see canonized nowadays, although they used to be great saints before God?” He answered: “O Beloved, I am sure there are still many confessors on earth who are devout men.” The *answer* came: “You say there are still devout confessors; I will not argue that, but there are very few of them who know the true way and follow it in their lives. I tell you, most of these present-day confessors would not have been permitted to live in a cloister formerly. Nor would they have been permitted to hear confessions. The world is full of falsehood. When men find a confessor who is easy on them and praises their ways, they honor him and say he is well versed in the Holy Scriptures — quite forgetting his life. It is all false. But when they reach eternity they will find how profitable the comforting of such a confessor is.”

The man said: “O Beloved, the confessors say men are more infirm than they used to be and cannot be treated so harshly.” The *answer* came: “It is not true; that is false talk and false teaching and false interpretation. I tell you, God never intended sin to strengthen the soul!”

The man replied: “O Beloved, perhaps the confessors mean that people can no longer stand such harsh penances as before, because they are too infirm.” The *answer* came: “God asks only what man can do — to flee sin. I tell you, if God himself walked the earth in human form, he would say to the sick, ‘Arise and be well, and sin no more!’ He never said, ‘Go, and destroy your

soul and kill yourself! ' He said that a man should take up his own cross; this is all that is required of him."

The man said: "Beloved, how gentle these words are to those who have earnestly turned to thee!" The *answer* came: "But tell me, how many confessors do you find nowadays who seek God's glory above and in all things, and not their own desires, and who faithfully love their fellow men as themselves? Look about you; how many confessors are there now who do not seek their own gain? Very few of these confessors know the true way, and that is why so many of them fall into a deep pit and the men who followed them on top of them." The man replied: "O dearly Beloved, I am so tired of confessors; I would wish never to hear another!"

The *answer* came: "That is not good! If you are commanded to hear confessions, you must hear them; and I will tell you why: anyone who is ordained to hear confessions and yet refuses to do so because he does not want to tell people the truth, it goes ill with that confessor. If a confessor knows the truth, he ought not conceal it, even on pain of death." The man said: "O Beloved, have pity on Christendom."

*The following discourse concerns the teachers.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and see how many teachers you can find in these times who preach God's word from the pulpit and who dare to tell the real truth publicly, and who also dare to speak publicly of the great murderous crimes of Christendom and who dare publicly to admonish Christendom, sacrificing their lives to the greater glory of God." The man replied: "Beloved, perhaps they believe that even if thou wert on earth, thy teaching would be in vain." The *answer* came: "That is true; when Christ walked the earth in human form and preached many hidden doctrines, it was because his hour had not yet come. When the time came he spoke the truth from his mouth. But I tell you, it is very different in these times from when Christianity first began. Then the saints poured out their blood for the sake of the

truth; but for many years now there has been no blood poured for the sake of truth."

The man said: "Beloved, perhaps they think that if men were told the bare truth, as it is in itself, they would be all lost." The *answer* came: "I tell you, God would rather that the real truth were spoken publicly and straightforwardly in these times, and all the crimes revealed, than that it be concealed. You know, one man who walks the true way is dearer to God than one hundred thousand who walk the false way. And it were better for men to be left in great fear than to go and think they are doing what is right, when they are doing wrong."

The man said: "Beloved, I am sure there are many teachers nowadays who would risk their lives for the sake of truth." The *answer* came: "I will not argue that; there may be, but they are so few as to be almost miraculous! There are so few one might as well not speak of them. I tell you, it is because there are so few brave and true teachers nowadays that so few teachers are canonized." The man said: "O Beloved, I pray that thou wilt have pity on Christendom."

*The following discourse concerns the convents.*

The *answer* came: "Look about you and see how they live in the convents. I tell you, they used to live a very devout and pious life in the convents, so that whoever beheld them or spoke with them was improved by their example. Nowadays, I tell you, it has come to the point where a truly Christian person must flee them. This is because their actions and their speech and their conduct is no longer seemly or spiritual so that men may profit by them. I tell you, the nuns have completely forgotten the spiritual life. They sing with their mouths and pray with their mouths, but their hearts have turned from God. I tell you, it has come to the point nowadays, that if any man seriously tries to turn to God, he and his life are scorned and despised. This scorn is found both in monasteries and in convents. But those in the cloisters who scorn men who turn to God, whether openly or secretly, whether

in monastery or convent — they may bear a spiritual name in the eyes of the world, but in the sight of God they are his enemies, both men and women.

“Let me tell you more about the convents. There are very few women in the convents who are not ensnared and fallen into sin, so that they work against God. Some are snared by the sins of greed, some by pride and some by anger, some by disobedience and some by unchastity. And if they do not actually commit the deeds, they sin in their minds: some with proud and immodest dress and proud, immodest behavior; some with secret sins of which you dare not write — but those who do them know well what I mean!

“I tell you, many sins are committed in these convents, both secretly and openly, so that things are very bad. You know, the true ways of an inner, godly life have quite perished and been forgotten in the convents; and that is why so few nuns are canonized in these times, though formerly they were great saints before God.”

The man said: “O Beloved, I pity these women from the bottom of my heart, that they do not turn to thee, having been ordered to take leave of all creatures and to depend only on thee; then they would find comfort.”

The *answer* came: “Look about you and see how all the spiritual ordinances and the spiritual life have perished. See what has become of the ecclesiastical name, both in monasteries and in convents, whether closed or open, mendicants or others.” The man said: “Beloved, I am sure there are still cloisters that lead a devout and earnest life.” The *answer* came: “That may be true, but you know there are very few earnest cloisters left.” The man replied: “Then have pity, my Beloved; O my Love, how thy words have shamed me!”

*The following discourse concerns the secular clergy.*

The *answer* came: “We ought to bring this discourse to a close. Open your eyes and see how secular clergy live, and see

how the clergy destroy the good and how they misuse God's gifts so shamefully and with such pride and rapacity! See how unclerically and shamelessly they dress and act. Look about and see how few receive God's gifts and obey the established ordinances. See how all the ordinances have perished or been perverted. Look about and see how much honor the priests themselves give to the priestly office. See how many there may be who seek God's glory in all they do, rather than their own desires.

"You know, the true, godly, serious life has been forgotten by the priests." The man said: "Beloved, I am sure there are still true, enlightened priests who have the inner earnestness." The *answer* came: "That is true, but there are all too few of them. The inner life has been abandoned and forgotten by the priests. That is why so few priests are canonized in these days, although formerly they were great saints before God."

The man said: "O Beloved, I would gladly shed blood from my eyes if these inner, godly ways were known again as they used to be." The *answer* came: "That would be well indeed. But, you know, these inner ways are quite concealed from the clergy, both regular and secular; and they are to blame for it, since they have worked more to win honor than to win the Holy Spirit. I tell you, when the priests turn from God's grace, what does he do? God wills to share his grace, so he goes and takes it and gives it to those who already have much grace."

The man said: "Beloved, that is strange—to take from one who has little and to give to him who has much." The *answer* came: "Is it so strange? It is written in the holy Gospels. I tell you, when men refuse God's grace, he takes what they have and gives it to him who has much and keeps it earnestly." The man said: "O my Beloved, be thou thanked and praised that there are still men who receive thy grace!" The *answer* came: "But there are very few of them, and were they gone, Christendom would perish!" The man responded: "Beloved, be thanked and praised that there are still men who uphold Christendom!"

*The following discourse concerns the Beguines.*

The *answer* came: "Look about and see how the Beguines live nowadays. See what has become of their pious life. I tell you, they run about and talk much, but they have no inner seriousness." The man replied: "O Beloved, I am sure there are still Beguines who have a real inner seriousness." The *answer* came: "I will not argue that, but God knows how few they are. I tell you, most of the Beguines nowadays do everything from their own desires. If you doubt that, try to turn them from their own wills and see how large a following you will have! I tell you, the Beguines who lived in former times were quiet, simple, and well taught, and had a very deep inner earnestness, which was hid in God with his grace." The man said: "Then, Beloved, forgive the Beguines who are disobedient to thee, and all men besides, in true forgetfulness of self."

*The following discourse concerns the monks.*

The *answer* came: "Look about you and see how the monks live, the brothers in orders. But the true inner way is quite forgotten in these times." The man replied: "O Beloved, I am sure there are still men among the brethren who are truly pious." The *answer* came: "That is true; there are good men among them, but how many God only knows! I tell you, if God wanted to impart his inner grace for much reasonable talk, he would impart it to the brethren who live in these times. But it is not a matter of reasonable talk, but of a true and complete humble submission, and you know the brethren have sinned much in this respect."

The man replied: "Beloved, have pity that so many things have perished in Christendom. O Beloved, thou hast shown me so many sins that the clergy have committed, both regular and secular, that I fear the common people will turn from the clergy in disgust!"

The *answer* came: "No, it is not as you think. You must see for yourself that the common people also live as wickedly against

all Christian ordinances as the clergy. No one may accuse the other in this respect, for both are equally guilty!" The man said: "Beloved, have pity on Christendom." The *answer* came: "Now open your eyes and see how the common people live in these evil times, both man and woman; and see how wickedly they live contrary to all Christian ordinances."

The man replied: "O Beloved, have pity on thy people." The *answer* came: "You say that God should have pity on his people. Tell me, don't you know that God has given men his own will, and with that same will they live contrary to all Christian ordinances? How shall God have pity on them?" The man said: "I am sure that all men would gladly be thine and have a will to better themselves." The *answer* came: "You know, this long slumbering will leads many to eternal death nowadays." The man said: "Beloved, have pity that all men do not consider their eternal life."

*The following discourse concerns the emperors and kings.*

The *answer* came: "I tell you, open your eyes and behold the great secular rulers: emperor and empress, kings and queens. See how they live nowadays." The man said: "Beloved, who shall tell me how the nobility lives? I have never in all my days asked about that." The *answer* came: "Then I will tell you how the nobility lives and has lived in these times.

"Formerly there were great secular rulers who were truly humble, and when the Roman Empire needed a head, the secular rulers were so humble that none sought this great, secular kingdom, for each ruler thought in his heart that he was unworthy of that great honor and power. Now when it happened that God chose a king to rule the Roman Empire, he accepted the kingdom humbly from God, praising him and becoming his servant. The king asked God's aid and concerned himself to make peace and grace in Christendom, asking for God's aid. He fought bravely for justice, offering God his body, soul, and goods, that he might do with him as he pleased, then and forever.

“You know, the kings who lived in those days did not seek their own desires, but in all they did they sought the glory of God above and before all things. You see, in these times the emperor and empress, the kings and queens, were truly humble in all they did, and they were so godly that Christendom profited from their example.

“Now I will tell you how they live in these times. If I made distinctions, it would take too long. I will tell you in a word: the emperor and empress, the kings and queens, live very differently from those of former times; they live contrary to the old ways and against all true ordinances. I dare not say more; if you look with discernment, you will see how things stand.”

The man said: “Beloved, I pray thee that Christendom may return to the true ways.” The *answer* came: “Now look about and see how these ways have perished. I tell you the ways and ordinances have completely perished, and that is why so few emperors or empresses, kings or queens, are canonized nowadays, whereas formerly they were great saints before God.” The man replied: “Then, Beloved, have pity so that men in these times may turn to thee.”

*The following discourse concerns the dukes.*

The *answer* came: “Open your eyes and see how it stands with the dukes, the counts, the barons, and their wives. I tell you, the nobility used to seek God’s aid and offered body and life for God’s glory so that peace and grace would reign in Christendom, and especially in their countries. They likewise led an earnest, humble life, so that all who beheld them and their deeds were profited thereby. And their wives did the same, so that whoever beheld their behavior were profited by them. I tell you, when a wife would not fear God and was rebellious to her husband, the noble asked God’s help and compelled her with love and compassion to be obedient to him.

“The lords and ladies of former times had much seriousness and love for God, so that in nothing did they seek their own desires, but worked in all ways for the perfecting of God’s glory.

See how the secular rulers used to live; that is why they were very holy, both lords and ladies, and great saints before God."

The man said: "O Beloved, I am sorry that all men do not live according to the Christian ordinances, and especially each man to the ordinance that applies to him." The *answer* came: "Look about and see how willfully the lords and ladies live nowadays with all their self-will, both men and women, and with all possible pride. You know, they have forgotten all godly piety, and they have no fear of God, or when it comes they cast it out. They oppress their people and overtax them, and all this against God. Look about and see how all godly piety and fear of God have perished." The man replied: "Beloved, have mercy, that godly piety and fear of God are forgotten. It makes me very sad."

*The following discourse concerns the nobles and the knights.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and see how the nobility lives, the attendants, the knights, and the squires. See how they go with their fine clothes without any fear of God and act as if they had no reason, as if God had not made them rational creatures. See what has become of knightly zeal and honor; it has all perished.

"I tell you, the knight and the squire live in all possible self-will without any fear of God. And they live as proudly as possible. In the old days jousts were honorable. They learned to fight so that they might serve Christendom and help widows and protect holy men. Also they used to act sensibly and with respect, so that whoever beheld them was profited thereby. The knights of former times did not seek their own will in anything, but strove for God's glory above and before all things. Many of them became great saints before God. Look about you and see how all knightly propriety has perished." The man said: "O my Beloved, pity them and help them!"

*The following discourse concerns the burghers and merchants.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and see how the burghers and merchants in the cities live. They are in a very bad way nowa-

days, because they are blinded with greed and very seldom do they conquer it before death. You know, greed comes from pride, because each wants to surpass the other in possessions. Much wealth is won unfairly, sometimes even with the consent of the confessor, as God knows who knows all things. The conscience of the merchants in these times has become very weak.

“But the merchants who lived in former times were simple people and in spite of their trade good of heart. They were content with few possessions. God dwelled with these merchants because he found their hearts not full of greed, as are those of present merchants. You know, God cannot enter a perverted heart; God must dwell in a penitent heart.”

The man said: “Beloved, have pity on them through thy boundless mercy and grant that they may forget these temporal things before they die and learn to love the eternal good.”

The *answer* came: “If they do not turn from their greed before they die, it will be worse with them than they think or their confessors tell them.” The man said: “Beloved, how I pity these people, since they do not know their peril and think all is well with them.” The *answer* came: “That is not true; they know very well, but they do not wish to know. When God imparts to them that they should turn from trade and that he will help them, they turn to the evil spirits out of their proud greed to surpass others.”

The man said: “O Beloved, have pity on these people, for I am sure they think their goods fairly won.” The *answer* came: “They find many reasons to justify their greed. But I tell you this; you have heard that it is written: the rich man won all his goods fairly and yet went to hell, because he withheld from God his own. You know, this very thing is destroying the rich merchants in these times.”

The man said: “Tell me, Beloved, what should the merchants do to prevent this?” The *answer* came: “When God helps a merchant to amass great wealth so that he becomes a rich burgher,

then he should share his wealth with God who has lent it to him, so that he may not fall into the false pride of the world."

The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, there are many merchants who do not have the necessities of life. Should they leave the trade?" The *answer* came: "It is praiseworthy for a man to earn the necessities if he does so justly. But men nowadays make more than necessary, as much more as they can in order to equal or surpass their neighbors. But a poor merchant, after he has provided for his children, should assume a pious, spiritual life so that he may inherit eternal life."

The man said: "Beloved, with thy permission, let me ask thee one thing. Tell me, Beloved, why is it that thou givest some men an immense amount of worldly goods, more, I fear, than is good for their souls?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you. God is very merciful and he cannot endure not to give men something. Now when God sees that a man's heart is turned to these transient things, he gives them to him to fulfill his desires, and gives him transient goods and much worldly honor. But I tell you, it goes ill with a man who seeks his pleasure here in this world. The rich man has his pleasure here, and then burns eternally in hell. Many men who seem to have done well by themselves pass out of this world straight into eternal death. God's judgment is not like that of the fools who judge in their foolishness: God's judgment is just and hard and swift!"

The man said: "Beloved, let me ask one thing. Tell me, thou sayest the merchants live very wickedly: do they live more wickedly than do the nobles?" The *answer* came: "That I will not say. When the nobles live after the manner of the world, they do wrong; and in this respect the rich merchant is no better than are they, if he lives all his life in greed and pride and destroys his heart day and night in trying to amass great wealth."

The man said: "Beloved, they think they do well, and they receive the sacrament each year." The *answer* came: "That is the trouble: they think they do well. If they would see themselves in humility and earnestly inquire how they may approach God,

then they would do well. Otherwise, they do ill." The man said: "Beloved, have mercy on Christendom."

*The following discourse concerns the artisans.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and see how the artisans in the cities live nowadays. Look about and see how greedy they have become. See how full of pride and arrogance the men and women have become and how much jealousy and hate they have. You know that it has now come to the point where the artisans want to dress like their superiors.

"I tell you, the former artisans, men and women, were very simple and humble at heart in their dress and in their customs and behavior and acts. And so God was kind to them. But these humble ways have perished among the artisans; and that is why God cannot dwell in their hearts. You know, God cannot dwell in a heart that is full of pride."

The man said: "O Beloved, have pity on the artisans. Even though they are not humble, they need thy mercy. Beloved, I pray that thou wilt have mercy on the artisans."

*The following discourse concerns the peasants.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and see how the peasants in the villages live nowadays. They live like animals without any fear of God. They have become proud and wicked, and think evil thoughts, so that the evil spirit enters and possesses them. If the friends of God prayed for them, wonders would occur." The man said: "Beloved, if my poor prayer would help, I pray thee from my heart to have patience with them." The *answer* came: "God leads Christendom to the point where his judgment is justified." The man said: "Then have pity, Beloved, and grant it a happy end." The *answer* came: "Only God knows how it will end, for he knows all things. But I tell you, the peasants in earlier times were simple and humble, full of good thoughts and good will, and God was gracious to them."

The man said: "O Beloved, I do not know what to say! I am so filled with pity for Christendom."

*The following discourse concerns women.*

The *answer* came: "You are not through; you must still see many more terrible, shameful sins. Now open your eyes and your heart and look about to see what has become of womanhood and womanly virtue. See how all godly fear and modesty have perished among women. See how women behave in the cities. Women are much more ready to sin than are men."

The man said: "O Beloved, I am sure that there are still honorable women." The *answer* came: "I will not argue that; there are still some, but how many God only knows who knows all things. When I speak of women I do not mean all women; I mean the women who love the world and seek to serve it more than God. I tell you, womanhood has become a devilish, hellish putrefaction in these present times!"

The man said: "O Beloved, have pity on womankind from thy boundless mercy." The *answer* came: "Tell me, why should God pity them more than he does?" The man said: "Beloved, thy words frighten me, because I fear thou wilt withhold thy grace from them now and forget them after death. O my Beloved, do not do that, but consider thy boundless mercy and have pity on womankind, for thou rememberest that thou hast had pity on many poor sinners."

The *answer* came: "That is true, but those sinners sinned fearfully and then repented. But these bold women think they are pious women and many receive God's sacrament every year, which is more displeasing to God than is open sin, because they cause more damage than do open sinners."

The man said: "O Beloved, have pity on these women." The *answer* came: "You say God should pity these women, but tell me, how can he? Look about and see how unchastely the women live nowadays in their dress and behavior. I tell you, many women in these times claim to be pious, yet many commit a hundred mortal sins each day that they will not acknowledge; yet in conscience they are responsible for every one."

The man said: "O Beloved, tell me, why do they fall into sin

unknowingly?" The *answer* came: "Because when a man sees such a woman with her unchaste clothes and behavior, he usually wishes to sin with her, and in so doing he falls into mortal sin, even if the deed is not completed. But if the man falls into mortal sin, so does the abandoned woman, for she was the cause and the instigator. Further, if a man sees such an abandoned woman, in church, on the street, or wherever it be, and her immodesty attracts him so that he goes and finds a prostitute and sins with her, then the man commits a mortal sin and so does the prostitute; but the proud, abandoned woman whom the man saw first and whose unchaste actions and dress attracted him, she is responsible for both their sins; even though she took no part in the deed, and knew nothing about it, yet unknowingly she has fallen into mortal sin. Look about and see if such an abandoned woman will not commit a hundred mortal sins a day, and because her abandonment was the cause, she is responsible for every one."

The man said: "O Beloved, do not be angry if I tell thee, I have often heard say that many teachers assert a man cannot commit a mortal sin unknowingly; he must be fully conscious of what he is doing, and if he does not know, he is not responsible." The *answer* came: "That is not true. I tell you, any man who has reached maturity and received reason and discrimination from God is responsible for knowing and keeping the Christian ordinances. Otherwise, why would God give him reason and discrimination?" The man said: "O Beloved, have pity on Christendom."

The *answer* came: "I tell you, women have forgotten all godly manners and godly fear. In these times women live contrary to all modesty and only for their own desires. Thus it happens that when such a woman approaches death and receives the sacrament, her friends think all is well, but the devil comes and overpowers her and leads her to eternal death. This has happened to many such bold women in these times." The man said: "Beloved, what thou sayest about womankind is frightful. Beloved, if it were thy will, I wish all women could hear this, even from

their confessors. I am sure they would be shocked and would better their lives." The *answer* came: "Many of these false flattering confessors have already fallen into eternal death."

The man said: "O Beloved, my heart is touched for these poor women. Beloved, have pity on them." The *answer* came: "See for yourself if God should forbear. Women have strayed far from all spiritual ordinances, and further, they receive God's sacrament with a thousand mortal sins on their hands." The man said: "Beloved, thy words are so harsh. Tell me, what is the reason?" The *answer* came: "The reason is: when a woman has lived in mortal sin for a year, when Lent comes she goes to her confessor and confesses to him, but from her rebellious heart she does not confess to him all her real sins, nor the fact that she intends to resume them after Easter!"

The man said: "I am sure they earnestly confess before they receive the holy sacrament." The *answer* came: "Yes, they confess before, but they do not confess with all their Christian will never more to sin against God. You see, for a whole year they have lived wickedly and have been the cause of many men's undoing, but they neither repent nor are sorry because they intend to continue thus after Easter. Many Christian women receive the sacrament without admitting the thousand mortal sins of which they are guilty."

The man said: "O Beloved, I am quite amazed. It might be better for the confessors to refuse such women the sacrament than to grant them permission to receive it." The *answer* came: "A bishop who gives such a woman permission to receive the sacrament would fare better if God slew him on the spot. If the confessor dies without repenting, he will fall into a deep pit along with the women."

Then the man asked: "O my Beloved, what should a confessor do beyond admonishing men? If they do not repent, I know it grieves him." The *answer* came: "God will excuse it if it happens only once. But when it goes on for five or ten years, then that is wrong. When a confessor sees he has been deceived,

the next year he should refuse that woman the sacrament." The man said: "Beloved, then it would be better for such a woman to go without the sacrament." The *answer* came: "Yes. It would be better for her to swallow a hundred thousand devils than the holy sacrament. In these evil times men pay no honor to the sacrament."

The man said: "Beloved, then if men were refused the sacrament, they would fare better?" The *answer* came: "Tell me, you foolish creature, if a man came and spoke well to you, and then went and shut you in a stinking tavern, how would you like it?" The man replied: "O Beloved, thy words frighten me!" Then he said: "Beloved, I am so frightened I shall never again dare to receive thee in the sacrament!" The *answer* came: "No, do not be afraid. It is not what you think. Those men who have given themselves utterly to God, and there are few enough of them — God would rather they received him every day than a sinner once in a thousand years!"

The man said: "O Beloved, I know by thy boundless mercy that thou wilt not be so severe to these women as thy words appear." The *answer* came: "God has pity on the young child who has not yet matured enough to receive the sacrament. But these mature women who receive God's sacrament every year and every year promise God to improve, and then at once break their faith — it fares ill with them. That is because they are mature and responsible for keeping the Christian ordinances. When the soul leaves the body, it is no longer to be saved. It has fallen into the judgment of God and is shown the works of its stinking body, whether good or bad, and by them it judges itself."

The man said: "O Beloved, I am very sorry for these poor women who are ensnared by the world's false joys. Tell me, Beloved, if a woman is converted and repents of her sins and does penance, should she not be permitted to receive the sacrament?" The *answer* came: "Yes. Why not? She should be given it at once!" The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, will God's body be effective in a person who has sinned all his days and then repented

with sorrow and received thee, my only Beloved?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you; just as the sacrament is an eternal curse to him who receives it in sin, so it is an eternal blessing for him who repents and betters himself. When a man repents and betters himself and intends to guard himself from the false joys of sin, God's body is at once fruitful in him. God's body at once takes the noble soul from hell and places it in the temporary penitential fires."

The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, since the soul must be in the body to receive the sacrament, how can God's body take it out of hell and place it in the penitential fires?" The *answer* came: "The reason is that when a man is in mortal sin he is consigned to hell, but when he earnestly repents and receives the sacrament, God's body works fruitfully and takes the noble soul out of the eternal hell and places it in the penitential fires."

The man said: "O Beloved, I am surprised that these women are not afraid of the eternal hell which burns forever!" The *answer* came: "The reason is that the devil Lucifer watches over them, for they serve him well in these evil times. I tell you, Lucifer uses all his hosts and his might to ensure that these foolish, abandoned women do not escape him." The man said: "My Beloved, I am surprised that such delicate creatures as women can be so bold in these times. O my Beloved, have mercy on them."

*The following discourse concerns holy matrimony.*

The *answer* came: "Look about and see what has become of holy matrimony. Most of the people nowadays make a laughing-stock of marriage, because they live in it like animals after their own desires, and contrary to all the true ordinances of holy matrimony and all modesty. I tell you, God did not create matrimony so that men could satisfy their lusts. God created matrimony, both the old and the new, so that men could live a holy, spiritual life therein and obey all its ordinances."

The man said: "Beloved, the confessors say that nowadays

men are too weak to keep the ordinances of holy matrimony." The *answer* came. "That is not true. It is a misinterpretation and a false teaching. The truth is that a man who keeps the ordinances of holy matrimony will be stronger than the one who breaks them. God is not a destroyer of nature; God is a perfecter of love, and the soul to men who live according to his will. I tell you, many men nowadays live contrary to the established order of holy matrimony, and that is why human nature has become so weak in these times." The man said: "O Beloved, have mercy on human nature."

The *answer* came: "You say God should have mercy! Tell me, how long should he have patience? You see for yourself how full Christendom is of all sorts of low unchastity, both in marriage and without, both in convents and monasteries. There are not many men nowadays who are not tainted with some sort of sin, whether with the deed or with the intention. Tell me, what should God do in these times? I tell you, God once let the earth perish except for eight persons, on account of sin. Now if God were to let it perish because of sin, he would have to do it day and night, and a slight foretaste of this may occur very soon."

The man said: "O my Beloved, do not speak thus; think of the bitter, vile death by which thou hast ransomed us." The *answer* came: "I have told you before, why should God think of his death? His death has been quite forgotten by men living in these times; but they have not forgotten to curse by it, or to mistreat God with all sorts of swearing and profanity!" The man said: "O Beloved, have mercy on Christendom and warn it of what thou wilt do, so that it will not go blindly into destruction." The *answer* came: "You say God should warn them. I tell you, see for yourself how friendly and faithfully God has warned them not long ago, and see how vain it was and how little it helped and how unthankful the world was. They quickly forgot it, as if it had happened a thousand years ago. Now see how Christendom becomes worse and worse with every year."

The man said: "These words cut me to heart and to soul." The

*answer* came: "Christendom received this rich grace unthankfully and did not better themselves one bit from it. If God wanted to destroy the world, he would let each man murder the other, and great slaughter and distress would rise up in Christendom." The man said: "O Beloved, wait for a while. Consider thy boundless mercy which compelled thee to come from heaven down upon this wretched earth to help us poor sinners." The *answer* came: "What should God do? Look about and see how most of humanity is eager to slay and murder. You see for yourself that the men in the cities are full of pride and jealousy and hate. They fight and tear among one another. This comes from overweening pride; and because of his pride God hurled Lucifer and his followers into the depths.

"Now then, what do you want God to do, since you yourself see that Christendom is full of pride and Christians are ready to murder each other? They do not even recognize sin. These foolish men say, 'What we don't know doesn't hurt us.'" Then it continued: "Some men in the cities even act as if God were powerless!" The man said: "O Beloved, have pity on poor Christendom and think how these wicked Jews and heathens worked against thee with all their might and now are lost." The *answer* came: "You are right in saying that God should pity this *poor* Christendom, for not for a thousand years has Christendom been so poor as it is in these times. But you say that these wicked Jews and heathens have all perished. That is not true. I tell you, God is more pleased with some Jews and heathens nowadays than with many Christians who live against all Christian ordinances!" The man said: "O my Beloved, how strange that is! Tell me, Beloved, what is the reason?" The *answer* came: "The reason is, a Jew or a heathen, at whatever edge of the world he may dwell (if he is God-fearing and lives a simple and pious life, knowing no faith better than the one he was born in), if he found one that would enable him to love God more than he does at present, he would turn to it and risk his life for it—tell me, would not such an earnest, pious Jew or heathen be more pleasing to God than a

false Christian who has been baptized, but lives contrary to all Christian ordinances? I tell you, this a Jew or a heathen does knowing no better, but if he finds a better faith he will sacrifice his life to embrace it."

The man said: "O Beloved, how strange this seems to me, because it is written in Holy Scripture and it is our Christian faith that no one may reach heaven unless he has been baptized." The *answer* came: "That is true, and is true Christian faith. But when God finds an earnest Jew or heathen, wherever he may dwell, by his free will and his boundless love he comes to that man's help and finds many secret ways to save him." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, how dost thou manage to save such unbaptized men?" The *answer* came: "This happens in many secret ways unknown to Christendom. But I will tell you of one way that Christendom knows and believes in. When a good heathen or a good Jew nears death, then God comes to help him and illumines him with the Christian faith, so that he learns the Christian faith and from his heart desires baptism. But if baptism is not available to him and still he desires it earnestly, then God baptizes him in his good intention and miserable death. There are many good Jews and heathens who have entered the eternal life in this way.

"You know, the same thing happened to St. Paul. St. Paul was a pious, God-fearing man, and still was a persecutor of Christianity, thinking that thereby he did God a great service. Very few faithful, pious, God-fearing, humble men are lost; wherever they may dwell, God finds some way to save them. But there are many proud, unjust men in Christendom in these evil times who men think are pious and humble, and yet they land in eternal hell. I have told you before, God's judgment is not as it appears to foolish men. When the soul leaves the body it must immediately judge itself; it is shown all the sins it has committed on earth and by those sins it must judge itself."

The man said: "O Beloved, this sounds fearful! Beloved, if it were thy will to let men know about this harsh judgment, I am

sure they would better themselves, no matter how callous they had been." The *answer* came: "Look about and see how many men are called Christians who do not keep the Christian ordinances. There are many men nowadays who have not received God's body for five or ten or twenty years. Tell me, are they Christians? Perhaps people call them Christians, but they are not Christians in the sight of God—to him they are God-despisers.

"I tell you, all temporal things have their end. When a disobedient man and a God-despiser nears death, then his friends and his confessor come and talk with him and persuade him to receive the sacrament. And he often replies, 'No, I will wait awhile; I am strong and will recover.' See how these men love God! They never loved God during their lives, and so they cannot love him at death. Anything done without love is worth little to God.

"But when such a man really sees the approach of death, then he says, 'It is time; bring the sacrament to me!' And what does God do? God is obedient and has it brought. Then the man receives the sacrament with seeming humility and his friends and confessor are happy, saying to one another, 'We trust that God will give him a good passage; he has had an easy end and all is well with him.'"

The man said: "O Beloved, I thought that when a man received thee all would be well with him." The *answer* came: "If it was as it seemed, all would be well; the man would be saved at his death. But when men think he repented of his sins, it is actually nothing but fear and fright and sorrow over his friends and possessions, and all sorts of sins that the devil incites him to so that he will die without godly love. Since he did not love God while he lived, at death he does not know what godly love is, nor does he perceive the devil's wicked cleverness. Many men are thus confused at their death when the confessor and his friends think he is doing well. It is a bad thing that men save their repentance till their death, for the evil spirits have much power then."

The man asked: "Beloved, should not men know how much

grief and distress was connected with death? ” The *answer* came: “ Many souls pass from here into such dreadful pain that till the Last Judgment they do not know whether they are in hell or purgatory. These are the men who lived in sin till their death and then repented before death, but did not atone for their sins and so came to this bad end. God is very angry with these souls and does not even wish to think of them till the Last Judgment, nor does he wish his friends to pray for them. That is very different from what people believe, and it is because men do not dare to speak the truth as it is to the mass of Christians.”

The man said: “ Tell me, Beloved, what is the reason that the teachers withhold the truth from the masses? ” The *answer* came: “ There are many reasons. The first reason is that the masses do not wish to hear or to believe it. The second reason is that the teachers are afraid that if they told the truth, the masses would become worse and all would be lost, and that is because true Christian ordinances have been forgotten. The third reason is that if a holy and inspired teacher arises and wants to warn and instruct Christendom, the other teachers prevent him. These other teachers are flatterers and pervert what he has to say. Therefore, the people are weak and follow those teachers who say what they want to hear.”

The man said: “ O my Beloved, this injustice hurts me! Tell me, Beloved, can men do nothing to reform Christendom? ” The *answer* came: “ Yes, men can help it. There are still teachers, although very few, who do not seek their own desires.” The man said: “ Tell me, Beloved, what should Christendom do? ” The *answer* came: “ I will tell you. The heads of Christendom, both ecclesiastical and secular, should exert all their power to find a teacher who lives an upstanding life and seeks no worldly things. And when they find him, they should have him tell the truth, and people should believe him and not contradict his teaching. And they should stop believing the flatterers who claim to speak from Holy Scripture but whose lives are far from it.

“ Every city should try to find such a teacher so that they may

learn how to regain the Christian way; for they have gone far astray from it." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, if men would do this, could they find enough teachers to reach all of Christendom?" The *answer* came: "If Christendom were serious, and its heads and burghers sought earnestly, then God would provide enough for them. You know, God sent his disciples to the twelve corners of the earth, and he would do the same thing now if he saw that Christendom was serious; he would raise up new men to help Christendom."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, if Christendom were serious, and a chief or noble or a city sought earnestly, wouldst thou not have pity on them in particular?" The *answer* came: "If a chief or a noble found such a holy teacher and had him teach their land, then their land and people would be safe from all evil, both to body and soul. I tell you, these cities need such holy teachers to help them when God comes with his wrath!" The man said: "O Beloved, if all men heard this, how I would be comforted!"

The *answer* came: "Worldly men think this is a joke. When God tries to make them repent, they drive him from their hearts. If these worldly men were obedient, he would make great friends of God out of them. But the devil keeps them from knowing that they might be overseers of God's world." The man said: "O my Beloved, I am very sorry that the evil spirits have so much power in these times." The *answer* came: "The power that they have in these times comes from sin: greed with the Christians, and secret sins with the Jews. If God wished to destroy Christendom, he would certainly destroy it now for its public and private sins, as may happen very shortly unless Christendom repents."

The man said: "O Beloved, put away thy wrath and have pity on Christendom!" The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and see how far Christendom has fallen into unchastity and into the pools of greed and pride, envy and hate. God hates these sins above all others, because most other sins stem from them. There are so many sins nowadays that the cities and the cloisters are full of them. Clergy and laymen, the one cannot accuse the other. No layman

can say, 'It is the fault of the clergy.' And no priest can say, 'It is the fault of the laity.' They are both equally guilty, because they both live contrary to true Christian ordinances.

"You know, each accuses the other. But let them look to themselves! If a man looked to himself, he would see that he had enough to do on his own account. He would forget others and blame no one but himself. But each accuses the other, and each wants to excel the other — and true humility perishes! But God will bring a time when Christendom will wring its hands!"

The man said: "O my dear Beloved, how terrible this sounds! But I am glad that thou madest a liar out of the great prophet Jonah." The *answer* came: "I will tell you what the reason was. When Jonah warned the people they immediately bettered their ways in great humility, so that God had to pity them. But in spite of all the times the teachers have warned this people, it has done no good. When God tries to warn this people, they act as if there were no God, or as if he had no power. And so they go from bad to worse."

The man said: "Beloved, I am so distressed about Christendom. I wish thou wouldst have pity on it, Beloved." The *answer* came: "Why should God have pity or wait? You know most of the Christians smell of the cask." The man said: "Beloved, what dost thou mean by that?" The *answer* came: "See if it is not so. The reason is: God pours the soul fashioned in his likeness into the stinking cask of the body, and then God gives the body life and makes it a man. Now when a man has received discrimination to distinguish between good and evil, this power the body receives from the soul. When the soul leaves the foul, stinking body, you will find nothing more despicable than the stinking cask of the foul body. The soul has the power to perceive higher things and it directs the body. This is just, since the lesser should heed the greater and the better should overcome the worse. But this happens seldom in these times. The stinking cask of the foul body seldom is obedient to the noble soul.

"The soul is forced by the body to be obedient to this foul,

stinking cask, so that the soul comes to smell of the foul body until the Judgment Day. Now you see why I said that most men of Christendom smell of the cask. And there are very few nowadays who force the foul, stinking cask to be obedient and make it clean and bright so that it smells of the soul. That is how men are. I tell you, God appointed the stinking body to be obedient to the soul till death if the man would help with his free will. Few men nowadays know that."

The man said: "O my Beloved, have pity on Christendom and consider thy faithful love to it." The *answer* came: "You can see that God has been very good to Christendom, but the good that he did to them has been forgotten along with godly love, and all Christian ordinances have perished. Now see how boldly Christendom lives in these times. The people act as if they would live here forever. Tell me, how should God endure this? The eternal Father is very angry with Christendom, because Christendom has forgotten his son and all true Christian ordinances. And if Christendom does not repent, then the eternal Father will permit justice to silence mercy and all the friends of God until the time when he sends his only-born son."

The man said: "O Beloved, this discourse has left me weak, and I feel about to perish. O Beloved, I wish you would permit me to die." The *answer* came: "No, it is not yet time. You must still live and see and hear more." The man said: "O Beloved, thy will be done in this poor sinner, now and forever."

*Here ends this discourse. What we shall speak of now is how this man was shown a terrible, high mountain. On the mountain were nine huge rocks, lying one above the other up to the top of the mountain. On each rock dwelled Christians. Now we shall begin to speak of the first rock.*

No one may come to God who has not dwelled upon this rock. Any living man who wishes to be shown the source whence the noble souls come must have great courage. He must climb these great high rocks until he reaches the topmost one; then he will see

where he is. It needs a courageous man to dare this high mountain, and he will be a great saint in eternity.

The *answer* came: "We must end this discourse and this vision. If you saw more of this now, your human nature would rebel and become ill. Now you will see what will gladden you." The man said: "O Beloved, perfect thy will in me according to thy glory and not my will."

The *answer* came: "Then open your eyes and see where you are." The man obeyed and, looking about, said: "O Beloved, I see thou has led me to where I was before, below the high mountain; but the reason I do not know. I pray thee, Beloved, tell me what the reason is." The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look up." The man obeyed and looked up and saw the noble souls descending. From them came a blinding light that he could scarcely endure to see.

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, is a soul in the place of its origin as bright as these thou hast shown me?" The *answer* came: "If God showed you a soul in its origin and in its Godlike form, you could not stand to behold it; nor could you conceive what it was with your human reason. God has shown you these souls in forms you can stand to perceive so that you may write about them as a lesson and warning to Christendom."

The man said: "O Beloved, I will be obedient to thee till my death." The *answer* came: "Then open your eyes and look above." The man obeyed and looked up. He saw how dreadfully high the mountain was, high enough, so he thought, to reach to heaven. The mountain was also so broad that he could not see any end to it. Up the side of the mountain were huge rocks, so large that he was amazed when he saw them.

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, I cannot imagine why thou hast shown me this terrible, high mountain and these great rocks for a second time." The *answer* came: "Then open your eyes and see for yourself what is on this mountain and what sort of men dwell on these rocks." The man replied: "O Beloved, thy will be done."

*With these words the man was taken out of the valley and lifted up to the first rock.*

It was so high above the earth that he could see the whole countryside, the whole earth in fact. The man looked down from this rock and saw that a mist was drawn over the whole earth, except for the great mountain, which was bare. This sight astonished the man, and he said: "Tell me, Beloved, whether I am right or wrong. It seems that a mist has been drawn over the whole world except for this mountain." The *answer* came: "That is right. God has shown you this in a form you could endure. If God had shown you how deeply the world is caught in its sins, your human nature could not have endured it."

The man said: "But, my Beloved, I thought thou hadst shown me the sins of Christendom." The *answer* came: "That is true. God has let you see most of Christendom's sins. But God has not shown you how deep Christendom is caught in sin, nor the terrible pain and destruction it must suffer for it; that, your human nature is too weak to endure." The man asked: "Beloved, why is it that this mountain is not under the mist?" The *answer* came: "The reason is that the men who dwell on this mountain all live in the fear of God and without mortal sin."

Then the man said: "O Beloved, that gives me new strength!" The *answer* came: "What do you mean?" He replied: "What shall I say, Beloved? Thou knowest that I rejoice to find men in Christendom who still live in the fear of God and without mortal sin." The *answer* came: "Look about you and see how many men there are on this rock compared with those who lie caught in sin under the mist and who are called Christians." He replied: "Beloved, I cannot see." The *answer* came: "See it in your mind."

The man looked around at the men on the rock, and then under the mist at the men living there. He said: "O Beloved, I am afraid." The *answer* came: "What is the reason you are afraid?" He replied: "Why should I not be afraid, Beloved? I saw in my mind that for every man living on this rock there are a hundred

caught in their sins below and bearing the name of Christians!" The *answer* came: "You have seen well. Indeed, the proportion is even greater than a hundred to one." The man said: "This is a terrible thing! But tell me, Beloved, are there not many more men living on the great rocks above us?" The *answer* came: "I tell you, there are more men living on this first rock than on all the others together."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, what sort of men are these who live on the lowest rock?" The answer came: "They are rather coldhearted men who live without mortal sin, thinking they will live a simple life. They know nothing better." The man said: "I am sure they know of nothing better." The *answer* came: "They are still in a dangerous position, because they live so close to the mist."

The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, will not these men be saved?" The *answer* came: "Yes, they will be saved if they remain without mortal sin till their death. But they are in more danger than they know, because they try to compromise God and nature, which cannot be done. However, if they remain on this rock, and do not descend beneath the mist, they will be saved; but they must suffer great purgatorial fires and unspeakable torments until they have expiated the least sin they ever committed. Then they may enter heaven, but their reward will be small compared with that of other men, because while on earth they neither served nor loved God well."

The man looked about the rock and saw that many of the men thereon were quickly hurled down beneath the mist. This touched his pity, and he could not understand it. Therefore, he said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is the reason that some of these men are quickly hurled beneath the mist?" The *answer* came: "The reason is that they have fallen into mortal sin. This rock will not suffer anyone in mortal sin."

Then the man looked down the rock to the mist below. At the edge of the mist he saw men crawling about whose flesh was a dark yellow, as if they had died and lain under the earth for

a long time. This astonished him greatly, and he said: "Tell me, Beloved, who are these men?" The *answer* came: "These are men whom the evil spirit holds in sin beneath the mist, but they are repenting of all their sins. You see, as soon as a man thoroughly repents of his sins the evil spirit has no more power over him and must release him from the mist." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why are they this dark yellow compared with the men on this rock?" The *answer* came: "The reason is that these men have not yet completely repented. When they repent and confess, they are immediately placed among the men on this rock and they will appear just like them."

Once again the man looked down from the rock and saw many eager young people, men and women, clergy and laymen, monks and nuns; no one was left out. All the different types of people in Christendom were here, running about in a crowd under the mist. This sight amazed the man, and he felt sorry for these young people.

The man said: "O my Beloved, tell me why all these young people are running about under the mist." The *answer* came: "Now you see the meaning of the symbol of the fish who fell down from their source in the high mountain and swam through the sea, and how many of them were caught by nets on the way. When God showed you the likeness of the fish he had these young people under the mist in mind." The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, who are these young people who are in such a hurry to get under the mist?" The *answer* came: "These are all the young people in Christendom who have reached maturity. They should try to regain their source, but they act just like those foolish fish. They follow their nature and fall with their free will under the mist to the false world where the evil spirits have set nets. These evil spirits do everything in their power to catch these people in their nets and keep them in the false world under the mist. Look about, how many nets there are in these times and who can escape them!"

The man said: "O Beloved, truly it is a terrible thing to be in

the midst of those nets. It is just as it is in Christendom; if anyone wants to escape those nets, he must put forth all his strength and courage." The *answer* came: "You have spoken the truth!" It continued: "Look and see how these people fight among themselves. The farther under the mist they go, the more they are caught in the nets and the worse it is for them. The farther under the mist they go the harder it is for them to escape, because they are caught by more nets and kept from escaping."

The man exclaimed: "Beloved, I am amazed at the men in these times who are so foolish as to love temporal things above those which are eternal!" The *answer* came: "They behave like irrational beasts; they love only what is present. Open your eyes and see more." The man obeyed and looked all around the rock. He soon perceived a young daughter scarcely fourteen years old who was leading a pious, spiritual-looking man bound with a rope, and after him a worldly man bound with the same rope. Tied to this rope were two women also. The young daughter led them down off the rock and under the mist.

The man was amazed at this sight and said: "Tell me, Beloved, why does this young daughter lead a pious man under the mist by a rope?" The *answer* came: "The worldly man and one of the women are a married couple who have lived long in the fear of God, keeping themselves from mortal sin. God rewarded them with this young daughter, their eldest child. Now this daughter looked under the mist and saw the false joy of the proud people there. She fell and wished to join them. So she went to her parents and told them she desired another daughter like herself. Her father and mother should have raised the child to ascend this mountain to her source. This they did not do, but went to their confessor and told him the story in order to please their daughter.

"The confessor allowed them to do as they pleased, because he wanted the friendship of such rich people. He told them that pride is excusable, even though he knew that Lucifer and his host were cast out because of pride. The confessor taught them the false way. That is why the young daughter leads the confessor

downward and her mother and father and maid after him. She leads them all underneath the mist."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why are the mother and father guilty, when the confessor gave them his permission?" The *answer* came: "The father and mother were glad of the permission, though they knew in their own discrimination that it did not please God. The confessor likewise knew that God hates pride and that it was not the way to the eternal truth. The confessor taught these people the false way so that he could gain their friendship." The man said: "O Beloved, it is terrible that a confessor should teach such things." The *answer* came: "It is not a rare thing in these times. If you stay long on this rock, you will see many more such things."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why is the maid who served the couple also led under the mist?" The *answer* came: "The maid advised her mistress that she should raise her daughter in the way of these proud people. Now you see the meaning of this sight: a young daughter leading a confessor and her parents and their maid under the mist." The man said: "O Beloved, this is very different from what men usually think and believe." The *answer* came: "Men know enough, but the confessors are too free with them. Now be obedient and come to the end of this rock." The man replied: "Gladly, my Beloved."

With these words the man was led to the end of the rock. There he looked down from the rock and thought he was at the edge of the world. He said: "Tell me, Beloved, is it true what I think, that we are at the edge of the world?" The *answer* came: "You are right; you are at the edge of the world. Now look about you." The man obeyed and looked around. Suddenly he cried out in horror. The *answer* came: "What are you crying about?" The man replied: "O my dear Beloved, help me or I shall perish!" The *answer* came: "What is the matter?" The man replied: "I saw such a horrible thing at the rim of the world that I thought my heart would burst forth from my body! O Beloved, help me or I perish, for I cannot endure it!"

The *answer* came: "Why are you so afraid? Tell me, what is the matter? What have you seen to frighten you so?" The man replied: "O Beloved, should I not be frightened? Thou knowest well what a horrible vision thou hast shown me at the edge of the world! It is a vision as terrible and fearful as a high mountain, having great might and strength, and bound with a mighty chain. If thou wilt not have pity, the vision will draw the whole world down to destruction!"

The *answer* came: "Tell me, are you really so frightened by this vision? Is it right for a God-loving man to be so frightened over small things? God has shown you this in a vision so that you may write of it. If God had shown you this as it really is, your heart would have burst unless God had supported it."

The man said: "I cannot imagine how it could be more terrible. Tell me, Beloved, how is that possible?" The *answer* came: "The vision that you saw is the evil spirit Lucifer. If it were not for a few men living now, he has the power with those chains to pull the whole world down to destruction." The man said: "O Beloved, be thou thanked and praised that there are still some men living to defend Christendom! O Beloved, wilt thou not tell where these men dwell who uphold Christendom?" The *answer* came: "You shall see for yourself. They dwell on the highest rock of this mountain."

The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, does the evil spirit have much power over the men living on this lowest rock?" The *answer* came: "He has no power over them if they do not wish him to and keep themselves from mortal sins. But the evil spirit still has great hopes for the men on this rock, because he knows they are still attracted to worldly things and unprofitable thoughts. They try to win worldly honor and yet keep themselves from mortal sin, and so their lives are in much danger. They live very close to the mist, and the evil spirit still has hopes of pulling them under."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why do these men not ascend to their origin?" The *answer* came: "The evil spirit has

put his hook in these men so that they may not ascend the straight road to their origin." The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, what is this hook by which he holds them? What sort of men live on this rock?" The *answer* came: "They are like the fools in Christendom who try to make the best of God and their natures. This is dangerous, because they think that thus they are pious and keeping from mortal sin so as not to land in hell. These men think that they love God, and that is why they claim to be devout. Their way of living pleases them so much that they never wish to leave it for a higher. No, they will keep themselves from mortal sins and die as they are. And when one of them becomes discontent with his life and seeks a higher one, they refuse to follow him, for the evil spirit holds them back with the hooks of their desire for an easy life.

"These men, you know, live according to their comfortable desires. They think they have chosen a safe life, but in reality it is a very dangerous one, because they live so close to the mist. It serves the evil spirit well that they do not desire to climb higher. He knows that they have no true earnestness or love and are not dismayed at not ascending higher to their origin. He simply leaves them to their comfort-loving natures and watches over them. Now I have told you about the men who live on this rock."

The man said: "O my Beloved, I am shocked at this! Tell me, Beloved, will they not go to heaven when they die?" The *answer* came: "Any man who lives on this rock and keeps himself from mortal sin will go to heaven when his time comes. But before they reach God they must suffer the penitential fires until they have atoned for all their sins against God." The man said: "Beloved, I am surprised that these men who have escaped the mist do not try to ascend farther." The *answer* came: "How will they learn the way?" The man replied: "They should ask one who knows the way. O Beloved, they should ask of the man who has left the world and lives for thee."

The *answer* came: "They refuse to recognize any way that does not agree with their natures. They think they can compro-

mise God and nature. In a way they are right, but that is only because God overlooks many things now for their sake. If they knew the pains that the soul must suffer for each desire contrary to God, rather than commit the least little sin they would wish their heads to be cut off and each day to suffer a new death. These men living on this rock must forgo much of their eternal reward because of their earthly desires."

The man said: "O Beloved, I am surprised that all men do not desire to have divine love." The *answer* came: "It is very easy for you to talk, but it is very difficult for men who have lived a long time in their own desires." The man continued: "I know, Beloved, that there is no repentance, nor good, nor joy, nor peace, except in thee." The *answer* came: "That is true; but no one can find joy and peace in the Holy Spirit except the man who has given himself completely to God."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, may the men who live on this rock not obtain thy peace?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you; they too may obtain my peace, but not until they have learned the difficult lesson of overcoming their own natures. Now I have shown you the kind of men who live on the first and lowest rock. Now you must see the next rock." The man replied: "O my Beloved, thy will be done; I will gladly be obedient to thee till my death."

*Here ends the discourse concerning the first rock. Now we shall speak of the men who live on the next rock.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look about." The man obeyed and looked up from the first rock to the next. He saw some men from the first rock climbing up to the second. But when they reached it, some of them immediately threw themselves back down, while some remained on the second rock. Those who reached the rock above and stayed there he could no longer see. At this sight he was much amazed and said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is the meaning of what I have seen?" The *answer* came: "Those who climb to the second rock have realized

how dangerous it is to live here. They have summoned up all their courage and climbed to the next rock."

The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, why do some of the men at once fall back down?" The *answer* came: "The men who live on the rock above us lead a far more rigorous life than do those here. That is the reason that when these men climb up there and see that hard life they are discouraged and let in the evil spirit who says, 'You are still weak; you cannot endure it.' So they fall back here where men coddle their natures."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, who are the men who live on the rock above us?" The *answer* came: "Open your eyes; you must see for yourself." At these words the man beheld the second rock and found himself pleased with what he saw there, for the men lived a much more pious life there than on the first rock. But there were very few of them, compared with the men living on the first rock. Likewise, the second rock was much smaller than the first. The man wondered why this was so and said: "Tell me, Beloved, who are these men, for I like them much better than those below?" The *answer* came: "These are men who compel their natures to turn from the world and give up their own wills to be obedient to a friend of God who knows the true way."

The man said: "O Beloved, I know that I shall love these men, for I think that thou lovest them." The *answer* came: "That is true; God loves them better than the men on the lower rock. But as much as you may love them, they have still a very long way to go to their origin. The reason is that the devil is much afraid that these men will escape him and ascend to their origin; so he throws his hooks into them to keep them where they are." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, what hook does he use to keep them from going farther?" The *answer* came: "These men were very brave when they began, but they did not know the devil's clever tricks, and now he catches them with his hooks."

The man continued: "Tell me, Beloved, what hooks does he use to catch them?" The *answer* came: "The hook is this: the

devil whispers to their natures that they are still weak and can ascend no farther. Then he whispers to their minds that they have given up a world that they might still have enjoyed for many years. By this he creates in them a kind of spiritual pride of which they are unconscious. He also makes them think they need no one's help. Then he makes them so satisfied with their present life that they are willing to die in it." The man said: "O Beloved, how clever the devil is with all sorts of devious mischief. Tell me, Beloved, thou saidst that these men had given themselves to a friend of God. Tell me, why does he not tell them that the devil has caught them and is keeping them from going on?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you. Though it is true that these men were obedient when they were first converted, yet when the friends of God saw how the devil trapped them they were frightened and dared not instruct them further. The reason was that the friends of God know that if they instructed them of the way, they would not be obedient, but would become worse than before, and many would fall back under the mist."

The man said: "O Beloved, I pity the men who are trapped and can go no farther." The *answer* came: "The devil has thrown a hook into them to keep them where they are. The hook is that these men live according to their own wills." The man said: "O Beloved, when I first came on this rock I was very happy and thought these were very good men because their behavior was so much better than the behavior of those on the first rock." The *answer* came: "God loves these men much more than those on the lowest rock, because they discipline their natures much more. Also, they are much nearer to their origin."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, will these men also suffer the penitential fires when they die?" The *answer* came: "Your question is rather stupid! These men must suffer very severe torments, but it will be much less than for those below them, and their reward from God will be much greater than that of the others. He who wants to regain this origin must rise above this second rock and above all the other hard rocks that lie on this

mountain." The man said: "O my Beloved, I am sure that the man who has real faith in thee, who is courageous and takes leave of all creatures, and who desires to love only thee — he who so truly turns to thee will find ready help to climb all these great rocks!" The *answer* came: "That is true. God never abandons a courageous and steadfast man; he comes to his aid and leads him on. But there are few such brave men in these times." The man replied: "Have mercy on them, Beloved."

*Here ends the discourse concerning the second rock. Now we shall begin to speak of the men who live on the third rock.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look above." The man obeyed and looked up to the third rock. He saw some men climbing up to that rock, and when they reached it some of them fell right back again, while others remained on the rock. The man looked down from the rock and saw a man running fast and jumping from the first rock over the second and onto the third. This surprised him and he said: "Tell me, Beloved, what does this mean?" The *answer* came: "Are you surprised to see this man jump from the first to the third rock?" The man insisted: "Tell me, Beloved, what it means."

The *answer* came: "I will tell you. It is not strange that it surprised you, for it happens very seldom nowadays. Formerly it happened quite often that a man was so converted to the eternal truth and so completely surrendered all temporal things to seek his origin that with God's help he could jump over all the rocks to the very top one of this high mountain." The man said: "Beloved, that is clear. Tell me also, Beloved, who are the men who live on this third rock?" The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and see for yourself."

With these words the man was upon the third rock. He looked about and was happy because the men were so much better than those on the lower rocks. But there were very few of them compared with the men whom he had seen on the others. The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, who are the men that live on this third

rock?" The *answer* came: "They are men whom God loves more than those on the other rocks. The reason is that these men have accepted much harder exercises from God. They have even invented difficult exercises for themselves so that they may reach heaven and avoid hell. They will suffer little of purgatory. Also, they have left more of the world's distractions than have the men below."

The man said: "O Beloved, these men please me more than any I have seen." The *answer* came: "That is true. These men are better than the others you have seen. But as good as they seem, they have still a long way to go to their origin. The evil spirit is frightened for these men and has thrown his hook into them so that they may not go farther." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, what hook does the devil use to catch these men and keep them?" The *answer* came: "The hook is that these men are still somewhat attracted to the ways of the world. All their severe exercises are from their own wills. This is the hook that the evil spirit uses to keep them from going on."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, must these men also suffer the flames of purgatory?" The *answer* came: "If they commit any sin on this third rock, they must suffer terrible pain, but not so much as the men on the lower rocks. Also, their eternal reward from God will be greater, because they disciplined their natures more than the men did below them." The man said: "O Beloved, I pity these men for not breaking away from the devil's hook and going onward to their origin."

*Here ends the discourse concerning the third rock. Now we shall begin to speak of the men living on the fourth rock.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look above." The man obeyed and looked above. He saw how some of these men climbed up to the fourth rock. When they reached it part of them quickly fell back down, even under the mist. When he had seen this he saw a man slip out from under the mist and with a mighty leap jump up to the fourth rock. This amazed him, and he said:

“Tell me, Beloved, what does this mean?”

The *answer* came: “These are men who have climbed to the fourth rock after much effort and then allowed themselves to be overcome by the evil spirit and their own natures, so that they fall back under the mist.” The man said: “O Beloved, I am sorry that these men have done so badly.” The *answer* came: “It is to be pitied. It will be very difficult for them to get back up.” The man said: “Tell me, Beloved, how was it that one man could run so fast from under the mist and jump over these three rocks to the fourth?” The *answer* came: “I will tell you. The man you saw running out from the mist and jumping up to the fourth rock was one who greatly repented his sins under the mist. He even wept blood from his eyes. He set himself to such hard exercises and so overcame his nature that God came to his aid and helped him join the company of those who live on the fourth rock.”

The man said: “Tell me, Beloved, who are these men who live above us on the fourth rock?” The *answer* came: “Open your eyes and see.” With these words the man was on the fourth rock. There he looked about at the men living there and was happy, because their behavior was so much better than that of the men on the rocks beneath them. He said: “Tell me, Beloved, who are these men and what are their exercises here on this rock?” The *answer* came: “I will tell you. These are men who have tried earnestly to put down their natures and have been obedient to all the works of divine love that they knew how to effect.”

The man said: “O Beloved, be thou thanked and praised that there are still such men in Christendom who earnestly exercise themselves day and night. Tell me, Beloved, are these not exceptionally good men?” The *answer* came: “These are good men, but they are not exceptional, because they still have a long way to go to their origin. But they are much nearer their origin than are all the other men you have seen. But I tell you, the devil has cast a very great hook into them to keep them from going on to their origin.” The man said: “O Beloved, this makes me very

sad to hear that such men are caught with the evil spirit's hook. What is this great hook with which he has caught them?"

The *answer* came: "The hook with which he has caught them is that all their work stems from their own natures." The man said: "O Beloved, I wish these men would desire nothing but surrender. O Beloved, do these men have anyone to instruct them about the way?" The *answer* came: "These men are badly trapped. But if they wish to be freed, they should find men who with God's help could lead them on the right road. No self-willed man may reach his origin in these times. God tries hard to see if these men wish to be freed. But it is no use, because the evil spirit has caught them securely with the great hook of their self-will from which comes all their works and exercises. The evil spirit perceives this, and when God shows these men the light of surrender he comes at once and throws in the hook of satisfaction with their own works."

The man said: "O Beloved, I am sorry for these men who have gone so far and yet do not know enough to abandon their own wills. Tell me, Beloved, do they know that thou thyself gavest up thine own will to thy Heavenly Father unto death?" The *answer* came: "Yes, they believe that, for it is Christian faith. But you know, the evil spirit is very much frightened for these men and does all he can to keep them in their own wills so that they cannot go farther. For he knows that if these men were once truly humble and obedient and surrendered themselves to men of God who knew the way, if that happened and they were given by God the hardest exercise of all, then they would be taken a long way that before they did not know of."

The man said: "Beloved, nevertheless, I still like these men, for their behavior is so much better than that of the men I saw before." The *answer* came: "No matter how good they seem they are easily moved to anger and to some other vices. No matter how they guard against it, it still happens." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why cannot the men prevent it?" The *answer* came: "They are still stubborn men and unpracticed in self-surrender."

They do not know real surrender."

The man said: "I thought they were very good men and dear to thee." The *answer* came: "God loves them best among all the self-willed men you have seen, but they still have a long way to go to the true road that leads to their origin." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, must these men who have exercised themselves so much day and night also have to suffer the penitential fires?" The *answer* came: "Any man who is led by his self-will must be taken to purgatory and lose some of his eternal reward. But his suffering is much less than that of the men below us." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, do these men not find thy heavenly secret grace which thou used to show thy friends?" The *answer* came: "All the men on this fourth rock live after their own self-will and not true surrender. While these men live in society they are unaware of the secret heavenly works that God does among his secret friends."

The man said: "O Beloved, if thou wilt not be angry, I should like to ask one thing of thee." The *answer* came: "Tell me, what do you want?" The man replied: "O Beloved, I should like to ask, if it be thy will, that thou show this unworthy creature thy secret heavenly friends." The *answer* came: "It shall be as you ask, but you shall have to climb a long way from one rock to the next before you may see the true, secret heavenly friends of God. And further, then you must behold even the source."

The man was frightened at this and said: "O Beloved, I only asked thee to show me thy heavenly friends, and now thou sayest that I must behold the source. O my Beloved, that was not what I intended. Let me pray thee, Beloved, if it be thy will, release me from this great honor, for I know that I am a poor, miserable, unworthy creature and am frightened to death." The *answer* came: "Let me tell you of God's mother: true, humble surrender, with a real surrender of her free will in pure obedience, led God's mother above all the ranks of angels and of saints."

The man replied: "Beloved, that is only proper; whatever thou dost for thy dear mother she has deserved. But what thou wishest

to work in me causes me much trouble." The *answer* came: "You have heard me say that God's mother was obedient unto death." The man said: "O Beloved, be not angry; I will be obedient unto death, and do as thou wilt. O my Beloved, I know that a real humble surrender would help many men if they would turn from their own wills and direct themselves to true obedience."

*Here ends the discourse that was concerned with the fourth rock. Now we shall begin to speak of the men who live on the fifth rock.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look above." The man obeyed and saw that the fifth rock lay far above the fourth. He also saw that very few men from the fourth rock tried to make their way to the fifth, and of them not many succeeded. Of those who reached the fifth rock the greater part fell back down. That so few men remained on the rock above surprised him, and he wondered what the reason was; so he said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is the reason that so few men remain on the fifth rock?" The *answer* came: "The rock is very high and difficult to climb. But he who climbs to the fifth rock and remains there has reached the start of the true road to his origin."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, who are the men who live above us on the fifth rock?" The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and see." With these words the man was upon the fifth rock. He looked about and was happy, because the men who lived here seemed to lead so wonderful a life compared with the life of those he had seen before that it amazed him. The rock was large and beautiful, far more so than those he had seen previously, although there were very few men living on it. He wondered what kind of men these were and said: "Tell me, Beloved, who are these men and what kind of life do they lead on this fifth rock, for they please me more than any of those whom I saw before?"

The *answer* came: "I will tell you. The men who live on the fifth rock are those who have given up their own wills and rendered them back to God. They firmly intend never again to live

according to their own pleasures and also intend to inquire of a man who has gone upon and knows the true way. They will submit themselves to him in God's stead till death." The man said: "O Beloved, these men please me immensely, for they seem to be such good men." The *answer* came: "That is true; they are good men and dear to God, because they have reached the true road. If they remain on the road, they will be even dearer to God than they now are."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, are these men near their origin?" The *answer* came: "They still have a long way to go to reach their origin." He continued: "Why is that, Beloved?" The *answer* came: "The reason is that the evil spirit has seen that these men have reached the true road. This frightened him and he has cast a great hook into their natures so that they may not go farther on the road." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, what great hook did the evil spirit cast into them to keep them where they are?" The *answer* came: "The hook that he used was unsteadfastness. He has caught them all with this hook." The man said: "Are all the men on this rock like that?" The *answer* came: "Yes, they are all like that; the evil spirit has caught them all with the hook of unsteadfastness."

The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, in what way are these men unsteadfast?" The *answer* came: "These men on the fifth rock at times run back down to the fourth in order to live according to their own desires, as the men there do. These men run back and forth like lightning, sometimes on the fourth, sometimes on the fifth rock. They never remain steadfast on this rock." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why do they not remain on the fifth rock?" The *answer* came: "Because they have not completely given up their own wills."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, are not the men who live on this fifth rock better than those on the fourth?" The *answer* came: "These men are very dear to God, because they have given up to him their own wills. Even though they are not constant, most of the time they are obedient." The man said: "Tell me,

Beloved, if these men die on the fifth rock, must they endure the fires of purgatory?" The *answer* came: "They must suffer great torments, but much less than the men who live below them. Likewise, their eternal reward from God is much greater." The man said: "O Beloved, how happy is he who comes to thee, and what an easy thing it is!"

*Here ends the discourse concerning the fifth rock. Now we shall begin to speak of the men who live on the sixth rock.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look above." The man obeyed and looked above to where the sixth rock lay far above them. He saw very few men from the fifth rock climbing up there, and those who did attempt it fell back so quickly that it seemed as if they must break their necks. He also saw how few men remained on the sixth rock, scarcely one in a hundred. This made him wonder what the reason was, and he said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is the reason?" The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and see." With these words the man was upon the sixth rock, where he could see the most attractive and lovely men, far more so than any he had seen before. The sixth rock was very large and beautiful to see compared to the others, even though there were few men living on it. The sight made him very happy, and he said: "O Beloved, how much these men please me. Tell me, Beloved, who are these men who live on this rock?"

The *answer* came: "Do they please you?" He replied: "Very much, Beloved; they please me more than any I have seen before." The *answer* came: "They are also pleasing to God." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, who are these men?" The *answer* came: "These are men who have surrendered to God and submitted their wills to the friends of God in his stead and intend to be obedient and steadfast unto death." The man said: "O Beloved, these men please me greatly. Are they the men who have reached their origin?" The *answer* came: "Your question is stupid and childish. These men have still a terribly long and high way to climb to reach their origin."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is wrong with them?"

The *answer* came: "Their fault is that the evil spirit has cast a very great hook into them to catch them and keep them from going onward. The evil spirit was much frightened for these men, because he knew that they were on the true road. They are nearer their origin than any you have seen." The man said: "O Beloved, tell me what kind of hook the evil spirit used to catch these men and hold them?" The *answer* came: "The hook is that these men want consolation or knowledge of God more than other men have." The man said: "Beloved, I thought such a desire was good." The *answer* came: "You talk foolishly. What they want is not bad, but it is not the quickest way to their origin. You see, as soon as they desire more consolation and help from God than from other men, that is a secret, heavenly sin whereby they wish to be like other men and not allow God to work his works in them how, when, and with whom he will."

The man said: "O Beloved, perhaps it is because these men know no better." The *answer* came: "They know what they are doing. And this is how the evil spirit hooks them and holds them still." The man said: "O Beloved, I like the men on this rock very much. Tell me, Beloved, will they also have to suffer the fires of purgatory?" The *answer* came: "If they die on this rock, they must suffer great torments, but their flame will be much less and softer than that of any of the men below them, and their eternal reward from God will be greater." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, for what fault must these men suffer the fires?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you. The reason is that these men still secretly cherish their natures and will not surrender them completely." The man said: "O Beloved, how needful it is to recognize these secret desires and destroy them as long as we live!"

*Here ends the discourse concerning the sixth rock. Now we shall begin to speak of the men who live on the seventh rock.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look above." The man obeyed and looked above to see the seventh rock lying far above him. He saw how few men went up from the sixth to the seventh

rock; and those who reached it fell quickly down again. Very few remained on the rock above and this amazed the man, so that he said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is the reason that so few men remain on the seventh rock? Beloved, it seems to me that there are not many men living there. Tell me, what sort of men do live on that rock?"

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look above." The man obeyed and looked. With these words he was standing on the seventh rock and looking about. He saw that this rock was very large and beautiful, compared with all the rocks he had seen before; likewise, the men, as few as there were living there, were far more lovely and beautiful to see than any he had seen on the other rocks. At this surprise he said: "Tell me, Beloved, who are the men that live on this seventh rock?"

The *answer* came: "The men who live on this rock are those who have completely surrendered themselves to God and intend with all their will to remain faithful to him till death. They are busied with disciplining their natures as far as they know how. These men would be obedient to God in all things. Whatever they perceive that God wants of them they will do, whether it concern outward works of love or an inner desire to wait upon God's will." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why are these men so much more lovely to see than any of the others?" The *answer* came: "You see, God has shared his luminous grace with these men and illuminated them with his grace. That is the reason that they are more lovely to behold than the others."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, are these the men who have reached their source?" The *answer* came: "These men have still far to go to the source." The man asked: "O Beloved, I cannot imagine why these men have not reached their origin." The *answer* came: "I will tell you why. There are very few men nowadays who live near the source, as you shall see for yourself." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why are these great men hindered from reaching their origin?" The *answer* came: "The reason is that the evil spirit has cast a great hook into these men

to keep them from going onward." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why is it that the evil spirit has cast a large hook into these men in particular, and only a fishhook into the others?" The *answer* came: "The evil spirit is very much afraid that he will lose these men; that they will escape him and reach their origin."

The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, how has the evil spirit managed to keep them from going on?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you. God has given them his grace and sometimes they use it to benefit their natures. This they are not conscious of. But the evil spirit who advises them realizes it. When these men do not find the comfort they want from God they go and take the holy sacrament of God's body in the hope of obtaining comfort." The man said: "O Beloved, I think they accept their suffering gladly in order to receive their Beloved into themselves." The *answer* came: "You are still simple. It is not as you think, and you shall see other men who have perished thereby. I tell you, the men on this rock have used this desire and others too much to their own consolation, and they are responsible for it."

The man said: "O Beloved, I am sorry that these good men let themselves be misled in such a little thing." The *answer* came: "No matter how small it seems to you, yet these men must suffer great fires of purgation because of using this grace for the benefit of their natures. Still, they will suffer much less than the men who live on the sixth rock below us, and their eternal reward from God will be much greater than theirs." The man said: "O Beloved, now I see that very little things may keep a man from reaching his origin, and it is right that it be so."

*Here ends the discourse concerning the seventh rock. Now we shall begin to speak of the men who live on the eighth rock.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look above." The man obeyed and looked above at the eighth rock which lay so terribly far above the seventh. Wonderfully few men went up from the seventh to the eighth rock; but as few as there were, as soon as

they reached it they turned their heads around and all except a very few fell quickly back down. This surprised the man, and he said: "Tell me, Beloved, what men live on the eighth rock above us?" The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and see." With these words the man was on the eighth rock and saw many radiant men, much lovelier than he had seen before. He said: "O Beloved, these men make me very happy, much more so than those on the seventh rock below us." The *answer* came: "You have seen well, for these men are very dear to God."

The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, who are the men who live on this rock?" The *answer* came: "The men who live on this rock are those who have climbed above all the other rocks and surrendered themselves in obedience to God, that he might do his will with them now and forever." The man said: "O Beloved, now I am happier than before; if only there were more of them!" The *answer* came: "Tell me, how could there be more? You see for yourself that there are very few men who have given up the transient things of nature to honor God alone. Tell me, how can those who cannot give up the temporal things be satisfied with the eternal alone?"

The man said: "O Beloved, I think that men today are foolish enough to think that when thou sayest they must despise all temporal things they must give away all their worldly goods and turn away from them." The *answer* came: "It is true that whoever wishes to join these men on the eighth rock must be free of all temporal goods." The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, what dost thou mean?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you. Whoever wishes to join this company must have his corporal goods as if he did not have them. He must be free from them, so that they may be a furtherance to God, rather than a hindrance. Whatever goods they have, these men have also, because they do not set their hearts on them, but receive them from God. They do not possess them, but God allows these men to take what is needful, and all else they share with God from whom it is."

The man said: "O Beloved, be thou thanked and praised for

all good things! O Beloved, how happy I am since I have seen these men on the eighth rock, because I believe they have reached their origin." The *answer* came: "That is not true. These men have still a long way to go to their origin. But they are much nearer to it than any others you have seen." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why are these men so much more glorious than any others I have seen?" The *answer* came: "Because these men have received much more luminous grace from God than any of the others you have seen, but all in the form of visions, except for one thing."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is that one thing which thou hast shown these men not in a vision?" The *answer* came: "At times these men are shown a brief glance at their origin, but no words or images can express it." The man said: "Beloved, I believe that these men have escaped purgatory." The *answer* came: "That is not true; these men must also enter the penitential fires." The man said: "O Beloved, I am surprised that they must so suffer. Tell me, Beloved, why must these men suffer purgatory and not reach their origin?" The *answer* came: "The reason is that the evil spirit has cast two great hooks into these men, so that they cannot escape. The evil spirit is very much afraid that they will escape him, for he knows that they are on the true road." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why has the evil spirit used two hooks on them?" The *answer* came: "One of his hooks is that these men have seen enough of their origin to desire more." The man said: "O Beloved, perhaps they know no better and think it is right." The *answer* came: "It is not right. You see, these men still have a bit of self-will hidden in them of which they are not conscious and have not destroyed." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is the other hook that the evil spirit uses to keep them from their origin?" The *answer* came: "God has shown these men very strange wonders on the way, and they have a desire for them that they themselves do not know about. But God knows it, and he cannot reveal them to them, for he knows the secret desire that lies hidden in their nature though

unknown to them. This is the other hook that the evil spirit uses to keep them from reaching their origin."

The man said: "O Beloved, I see it must be a man who has completely surrendered himself and destroyed his nature to its roots and learned the way of nature with an illumined reason who can ever approach his origin." The *answer* came: "At last you perceive the truth. Now you must see the righteous men for yourself." The man said: "O Beloved, thy will be done. Beloved, I am sorry that these enlightened men must also suffer purgatory." The *answer* came: "Forget your pity. If there were more of these men in Christendom, it would be far better than it is. I tell you, the men who live on this rock will suffer much less than those below us, and likewise their eternal reward from God will be much greater." The man said: "O Beloved, let him be joyful who has thy help in climbing these great rocks."

*Here ends the discourse concerning the eighth rock. Now we shall begin to speak of the men who live on the ninth rock where the origin can be seen.*

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look above you with joy." The man obeyed and looked above at the ninth rock, which lay so far above them that he could scarcely see it. It was so high it seemed to reach to the heavens. He saw how few men from the eighth rock climbed up to it, and of them, as few as there were, most fell quickly back down as if to their deaths. Here he saw how bravely they made the attempt, but as soon as they reached the ninth rock they fell back down. Very few remained on the rock; it seemed, though he could not be certain, that scarcely three men remained there. He wondered what this was and what it meant and said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is this wonder that I see?"

The *answer* came: "Tell me what you see that surprises you." The man replied: "O Beloved, I cannot see quite up to the ninth rock, but I see a few men trying to reach it, and then falling back down as if to their deaths, and they act as if no one lived up there.

Scarcely three men have reached it and stayed. Tell me, Beloved, what is this which I have seen?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you. You yourself have seen that the rock is very high, you saw how hard it was for men to climb even to the first rock. That is because so few men in these times will risk their lives, and so when they reach the ninth rock and see how the men live there they are frightened and fall back down."

The man said: "Beloved, I hear there are men on the ninth rock, but I cannot see how anyone could live there." The *answer* came: "Truly, men live on the ninth rock, but there are very few of them." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, is the rock so small and narrow that not many can live there?" The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look above with joy." With these words the man was on the ninth, high rock and saw that it was of great size and great beauty. He thought that if all the rocks he had seen before were put together, they would not be so large or beautiful as the ninth rock alone. He was surprised, however, that so few men dwelt on this wonderful rock; yet the sight of them gave him more joy and comfort at their presence than any of the other men he had seen all told, for their behavior was so lovely he wondered what men they could be. He said: "Tell me, Beloved, who are these few men who live on this beautiful rock?"

The *answer* came: "God did not create this rock so that a few men could live on it; God created this ninth rock for many men if they would prepare themselves for it. On this rock stands the gate to the origin whence come all things created in heaven and on earth." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, why do these men look so ill outwardly and yet inwardly like shining angels?" The *answer* came: "You say these men look outwardly as if they were very ill. Tell me, should these men not be ill after climbing all these great rocks? You see, in these men there is not a single drop of blood and marrow left; it has all perished and been destroyed. Now consider whether these men should not be ill." The man replied: "O Beloved, do not be angry, for I cannot un-

derstand what thou meanest that these men have lost all their blood and marrow. Do not be angry, Beloved, and tell me how they still can live."

The *answer* came: I will tell you. Because by his will these men have lost blood and marrow, the same Lord has given them pure luminous blood and marrow for the old. Tell me, do you believe that?" The man replied: "Yes, Beloved, I believe it now and see that thou canst do all things." The *answer* came: "Now in yourself all the blood and marrow have perished. Tell me, why did you ask such a childish question?" The man replied: "O Beloved, I see that all things stand open to thee and nothing is hidden. But I tell thee in all truth that I do not know that a single drop of blood has been lost through thy will. I know well, Beloved, that thou hast poured out thy blood through me and hast emptied thy veins for my sake. O Beloved, how should I pour out my blood for thy sake?" The *answer* came: "You shall not unless it is permitted you, for all your blood and marrow have perished." The man said: "O Beloved, I did not know it." The *answer* came: "It is true, though it seems you have forgotten. The overwhelming divine love that is in you has made you forget."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is the reason that the men on this ninth rock shine inwardly like bright angels?" The *answer* came: "God has filled these men with luminous grace so that it must shine forth from them; but they neither know it nor wish to know." The man said: "Beloved, are there many of these men, for I think them to be the righteous men?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you. As few as they are, for their sake God permits Christendom to continue. You see, if these men were gone, God would immediately let Christendom perish. God has given to the evil spirit Lucifer power to destroy it with the mist."

The man said: "O Beloved, be praised that there are still such men whom thou wilt spare. Tell me, Beloved, it seems that there are very few men here. Were there not at some time more than

there are now?" The *answer* came: "A few short years ago there were many more men living on this ninth rock than there are today." The man said: "O Beloved, permit me to say that I think thou shouldst have sent these men to help Christendom." The *answer* came: "God would never suffer that these men should live among false Christians, who bear the name of Christ but live contrary to all Christian ordinances."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, what sort of life do the men on this rock lead? Do they know that they are near their origin?" The *answer* came: "They are not certain of it. You see, at times these men are shown a little glimpse of the origin, so that they may see it shining and streaming out. But these men have so given themselves to God that when he sends them some sweet comfort they are more frightened than if God had let them perish. This is because they desire nothing but to follow the vision of Christ simply in faith. They do not wish any comfort, nor do they desire it; they have been so converted into the faith that they have no desire for knowledge. They are completely humble, and they think themselves unworthy of all divine solace and do not desire it."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, have these men no desires?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you. They have no desire, except how the glory of God may be perfected. They have completely surrendered to God; they are pleased with whatever God does with them. If he gives to them, they are happy; if he takes from them, they are still happy. They accept whatever God does in all things. These men are frightened more by the sweet than by the bitter, because they love the cross." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, have they no fear?" The *answer* came: "They have no fear of hell or of purgatory; no fear that they will not reach heaven; no fear of death and no fear of life; no fear of the evil spirit. All fear has left these men, except for one childlike fear. This childlike fear is none other than that they think they are not so perfectly following the vision of Christ as they ought. And this childlike fear is their purgatory."

The man said: "O Beloved, I can ask no more for the sheer loving, burning joy that the sight of these men causes in my soul." The *answer* came: "Then I myself will tell you more about the men who live here on this ninth rock. They are completely humble, and they think nothing of themselves and all the works they have done; they consider themselves below other creatures and they contend with no creatures at any time. They love all men equally in God, and whomever God loves they love also. These men are dead to the world, and the world is dead in them. All their works of reason, which they used to practice out of self-will, are dead in them. These men God loves in everything they do, for they themselves desire nothing now or ever. These men have lost themselves and all creatures that ever were created, in time or in eternity. They live in unknowing and desire not to know. They have not looked into the origin, nor do they desire to do so, because they think themselves too unworthy. The devil has beset them with all kinds of temptations that men can conceive and beyond human conception; yet they have no desire except what God gives them, and that they receive joyfully. To them all creaturely things have become crosses and they have endured them. If God gave them the cross again, they would receive it with joy, because they know that their Lord and their God has gone before them with the cross. Other than that, they desire nothing till they die. These men are unknown to the world, but the world is well known to them. The men who live on this ninth rock are the righteous men and those who truly pray to God in spirit and in truth."

The man said: "O Beloved, I have a fear; explain to me, Beloved." The *answer* came: "Tell me, what is the cause?" The man said: "I thought of the Gospel where it is written: 'You shall not throw precious pearls among the swine,' and I feared that some men who read this book would grow angry at it." The *answer* came: "God knows, have no fear. You see, the last teaching about the ninth rock is more necessary to Christendom than everything else written in this book. The reason is that if anyone

decides to join the company of those on this rock, he will be dearer to God and help Christendom more than a thousand other men who live on the lower rocks and who are disobedient and live after their own self-will."

The man said: "Beloved, permit me to say one more thing. I fear that if men do not become angry at this book, they will still be amazed at it and think it an unintelligible work when they read of the nine rocks." The *answer* came: "I know that many unintelligent men will be amazed by it; but rational, godly men will understand that one must portray these things in images if men will comprehend it, for God is too great for man to conceive him. Tell me, you say you fear that some men may not understand it and think incomprehensible all that I have had you write of the nine rocks. There are still men who will understand it, even though they be few. If I had had you write of the nine choirs of angels and how they are formed, then that would have been incomprehensible, for men cannot conceive it."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, may no one reach the origin unless he lives with these men on the ninth rock?" The *answer* came: "Yes, it happened to St. Paul; but he had to carry a heavy cross all his life and finally lose his head. You see, unpracticed virtue is not to be trusted, more so now than for many years. The safest way is to climb to this ninth rock through practice in strict self-surrender; there he will find peace."

The man said: "O Beloved, I fear that many men have run about foolishly for so long that they cannot reach the peaceful men on this ninth rock." The *answer* came: "You have said the truth. And you see how especially in these times so few men walk in the true road." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, and explain why so few men walk in the true road." The *answer* came: "Do you know many men nowadays who would really wish to live among these men on the ninth rock?" The man replied: "I think there are still men who would gladly dwell among the men who live on this rock." The *answer* came: "That is true; they would gladly join this company if it could be done in their own

way. But I tell you, they would not accept the works that the men on this rock do."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, are these men on the ninth rock free of purgatory?" The *answer* came: "Whoever remains on this rock till his death is free of purgatory." The man said: "O Beloved, I am a little afraid; dost thou mean that a man can still fall from this rock?" The *answer* came: "Do not be surprised; it often happens that a man falls from this rock, even underneath the mist." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, what is the reason that these good men fall from the rock?" The *answer* came: "The men who fall from this rock are those who let the evil spirit advise them, so that their own desires are aroused and they do not withstand them as they ought. From here the devil and all his host were cast. The men who are cast from this ninth, high rock become the most harmful men in all Christendom. The reason is that these men use the great gifts that God has given them to lead the rest of Christendom astray. Christendom ought to flee these men more than the evil spirit. And all simple Christians ought to beware, for their number increases."

The man said: "O Beloved, I am surprised that the evil spirit dares to go among these great men who live on the ninth rock." The *answer* came: "Do not be surprised; God himself was tempted by the evil spirit. The evil spirit is afraid of the men who have looked in the origin, and therefore he does all he can to trap them." The man said: "O Beloved, I see now that no one may assume he is free from the evil spirit." The *answer* came: "That is true; as long as soul and body are together he does not give up."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, how much dost thou love the men who live on this rock?" The *answer* came: "God loves these men above all others. If it happened that one of these men prayed God for a thing, and all the rest of Christendom prayed for the same thing, God would rather hear the one man who lived on this rock than all the rest of Christendom." The man said: "O Beloved, I feel that my heart leaps in my breast for joy at the sight of these men. O Beloved, since the presence of these men

gives me so much joy, what must be the joy of him who enjoys thee eternally without hindrance!" The *answer* came: "Cease this talk. I refuse to answer it, for even if a man had all the senses of mankind up to this day or ever, he could never comprehend the joy of love that God has with his friends in the eternal beatitude. Therefore, do not ask about this. Ask about Christendom and see in what a bad way it is." The man said: "O Beloved, this poor, miserable creature dare not; but it would be good if one of the great men on this ninth rock prayed for Christendom." The *answer* came: "There are very few living on this rock now, as Christendom may yet realize." The man replied: "O Beloved, I have confidence in thy boundless mercy as long as there is yet one man alive in Christendom whom thou pitiest."

The *answer* came: "When God's righteousness can no longer endure it and he thinks it time, then he will take from these men all power to pray so that they cannot pray for Christendom." The man said: "O Beloved, surely the time has not yet come when thou wilt let the world perish, for the number is not yet full." The *answer* came: "That is true; the number has not yet been reached when God will let the world perish. But I tell you, once God let the world perish because of sin except for eight people, and from these eight people came a new world. Tell me, do you believe that God still has that power?" The man replied: "O Beloved, I do not only believe; I know that thou canst do all things."

The *answer* came: "God is especially provoked at Christendom now, because he knows that all true Christian ordinances have perished; and God will not endure that for long." The man said: "O Beloved, if it be thy will, let us end this discourse; for I fear that we have made it too long."

The *answer* came: "Tell me, what do you want to ask now?" The man replied: "Tell me, Beloved, how long wilt thou leave these men on the ninth rock, who have poured out their blood and marrow to thy glory?" The *answer* came: "Tell me, what do you mean?" The man said: "Beloved, I meant how long wilt

thou leave these men on the ninth rock before showing them the origin?" The *answer* came: "God shows some men on this rock the origin, but it is a burden to them as long as they live, as it was with St. Paul. To some men God shows the origin as soon as they reach this rock; others he lets remain here two or three years, some five or eight years, and some he leaves here all their days and reveals to them the origin at their end; and to some he withholds it until the soul leaves the body."

At this the man was amazed and said: "Tell me, Beloved, why dost thou reveal the origin so unequally to the men on this rock?" The *answer* came: "Do not ask that; it is not for you to know, for it is a secret work of God. Be content with the ordinances of God, for he knows what is proper for a man, what he needs and what is good for him." The man said: "O Beloved, I know that I am responsible for keeping the ordinances of God, but even if I were not responsible, I should do so gladly for love." The *answer* came: "See how few men there are nowadays who are humbly obedient to God, except for the few men who live on this high rock." The man replied: "O Beloved, wilt thou not be angry if this poor sinner question thee?" The *answer* came: "If you must pray, pray God for what is possible." The man said: "O my Beloved, I know that what I want to pray is untimely and too early, and also that it is impossible for me; but I know that it is not impossible for thee to accomplish." The *answer* came: "Very well, tell me what your prayer is." The man replied: "Only Beloved, I wanted to pray thee, that if it were thy will, thou shouldst let me live among these men here on the ninth rock. O Beloved, do not be angry; I know that I am too ill and sinful for it. But Beloved, if it be thy will, help me to be a servant of these men, even though I know I am too unworthy to be one." The *answer* came: "You must know that God is too good to disregard humility. God has looked not only upon the words you have said, but also into your heart and soul full of more humility and divine love than you can express. Therefore, God will not be satisfied to join you to this company; you must see the origin for

yourself." (The man replied: "O Beloved, I am surprised that thou wouldst show such a poor sinner the origin.")

*(This last discourse tells how the man was compelled by God to see the origin for himself.)*

(The *answer* came: "Open your inner eyes and obey; you must see the origin for yourself. Now open your eyes and see!" \*) The man was frightened to heart and said: "O Beloved, thou makest me afraid when thou sayest that I am humble and obedient and that thou wishest me to see the origin for myself. What dost thou mean, Beloved?" He continued to say: "I know that I have nothing except from thee; it is all thine. O Beloved, do not give me this honor." The *answer* came: "Even as God has appointed the evil spirits to test his friends, so he tries some to see if any pride has grown up in them, and if so, to cast it out. Now open your eyes and be obedient and look into the origin." The man said: "O my Beloved, I pray thee from the bottom of my heart and soul to release me from this honor." The *answer* came: "Your prayer does you no good, for it can be no other way — you must see the origin for yourself. Then you must write everything that can be expressed with words and conceived by the human mind." The man replied: "O Beloved, I cannot say why thou shouldst show me the origin when thou leavest thy great friends for years here on the ninth rock amid the severest exercises." The *answer* came: "You must be obedient and surrender your will to it. And this vision will trouble you to the end of your life." The man said: "O Beloved, thy words compel me, for thou hast suffered for this poor servant and it would not be just if he fled suffering now. Very well, Beloved, do with me as thou wilt, now and forever."

With these words, as soon as the man surrendered his will to God, in that instant he was led up to the gate of the origin and made to look into it. But it seemed to him that it lasted only a

\* The addition of the three parenthesized sentences are found in Codex E and are footnoted in the German.

second. When the vision was over he was so possessed by joy and light that he left himself, and from that time lost consciousness. When he came to himself again, he found himself so full of joy and light that it frightened him. And the overwhelming joy made him ill. The man thought to himself and said: "Who are you that you should be filled with such overwhelming joy?" He sat for a long while in thought, and the more he thought the less he could understand what had happened. Then he decided to write about these things as he had been commanded. But all his senses and reason could not express what he had seen; no words could describe it. Then he thought of expressing it in pictures and formulas; but again he could not, for it was beyond all pictures and formulas. Then he thought he would reason about it and teach by reason and concepts; but it was beyond all reason and all human concepts. The more he thought about it the less he knew, because it was greater than anything he had ever seen or heard of. This amazed him and he said: "O Beloved, tell me what thou meanest. Thou saidst I had to see the origin and then write about it so that men could conceive it. Now thou hast made me see such a great wonder that I cannot express it in words. I have tried with all my reason, but no word will describe it. Nor can I describe where I have been or what I have seen and heard, except for one thing: that I know my heart and my soul are full of an overwhelming joy which frightens me, for I know it will be hard to control."

The *answer* came: "You must do it as far as you can, because men nowadays refuse the divine gifts, not knowing what they are." The man said: "If all Christians knew, Beloved, what joy and peace were here, they would stream here quickly in great droves."

The *answer* came: "Truly, a man may find more joy in an hour with God than the whole foolish world in all its desires ever can. If a man had all the human joys, they would count as nothing compared with the joy that God has with one of his friends here." The man said: "O Beloved, I am surprised that my heart does

not burst with joy. O Beloved, please tell me, if I may ask it of thee, what I have seen that I can find no words to describe." The *answer* came: "I will tell you. You have seen the origin. You are surprised that you cannot express it with words and comprehend it with your senses, but do not be surprised; even if a man had all the human senses that are or ever shall be, he could never attempt to describe the least thing that you have seen. Therefore, give up your human reasoning, for what you have seen is beyond human reason and is beyond comparison."

The man said: "O Beloved, I know that thy works are too great to be comprehended by the senses; but still I remember that thou saidst I should look into the origin and then write about what I had seen. If this is thy will, Beloved, then tell me what thou meanest and where I have been so that I may comprehend it." The *answer* came: "I will do so gladly, as far as I can in words. Your soul has beheld the origin where all created things are made. When your soul beheld the origin it was filled with an overwhelming joy at all created things, and at that time the creator of all creation became the bridegroom of your soul. You have been in the great school of which the Holy Spirit is the schoolmaster. When your soul entered, it saw that the school was full of letters containing the true light of understanding. And when your soul saw these letters, it was overcome with joy and leaped into the midst of them, rolling over and over until it, too, became full of the light of understanding. And then the great schoolmaster took your soul and filled it so full of love that it overflowed into your human nature."

The man said: "O Beloved, if I had not been such a stupid lout, I might have understood that without asking thee." The *answer* came: "What do you mean?" The man replied: "What shall I say? Thou knowest what I mean. Beloved, as soon as thou hadst me look into the origin, my soul and my nature took on a new and overpowering love. The love in my soul gave rise to a great pity for all the poor souls in purgatory, so that it would have suffered all their torments in order to free them. Then I

found also a love that was beyond nature. This is what I mean, Beloved; as soon as I looked into the origin I conceived such a love for thy passion and death, that my corporeal nature wished to suffer; and that is certainly contrary to nature. Nevertheless, my bodily nature desired to suffer the meanest death imaginable, had it been thy will, to honor thy death. And likewise I conceived the desire to suffer for all sinners and for all men."

The *answer* came: "These great supernatural gifts you received while your soul was in the great school where the great school-master dwells. No one may come to this great love unless he visits here. And see how many men in these times find themselves in that position." The man said: "Were it thy will, I would wish myself in hell to honor thee, so that all men might know about these things which thou hast shown me out of thy boundless mercy." The *answer* came: "If any man wished earnestly to free himself from human desire and struggle bravely and boldly over these nine high rocks, God would help him, even as he has helped you."

The man said: "O Beloved, I would wish this for every man as I would for myself. But, Beloved, whence comes the great feeling of wonder than I find within me?" The *answer* came: "It is the result of your having been in the great school where wonders are found." The man said: "O Beloved, I am amazed that thou shouldst work wonders with this poor, miserable, unworthy, unpracticed, and uneducated creature." The *answer* came: "I advise you not to dwell overly on the great wonder that God has worked in you. Because, if God wills and when he deems it time, he will take from you all these precious gifts and leave you as poor and ignorant as before."

The man said: "O Beloved, be not angry that I question thee. Thou art so dear to me that thou mayst do as thou wilt with me." The *answer* came: "What do you mean by that?" The man replied: "Beloved, I mean that thou art very dear to me and everything thou dost pleases me. If I could have any wish, I would wish for nothing else. Give to me, or take from me, I rejoice equally."

The *answer* came: "Look about and see for yourself how it was in the case of St. Peter; he was very bold until the time of crisis came and then his boldness left him." The man replied: "O Beloved, I know that all that I am and have is thine, and thou shouldst do as thou wilt with thine own now and forever."

The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look down from the rock underneath the mist that is drawn over the world." The man obeyed and looked down under the mist and saw the men who were called by the name of Christian but lived contrary to all Christian ordinances. Among these foolish men he saw two men in particular: one shone very brightly and went under the mist like a shining angel; the other was very dark and sinister to behold as an evil spirit, even though he had the form of a man. The man said: "O Beloved, who are these two men, and why does one shine brightly while the other is dark and sinister?" The *answer* came: "Why do you ask me? You have received discrimination from God." The man said: "O Beloved, as long as thou art with me, I would like to hear it from thee."

The *answer* came: "Tell me, what will you do when God withdraws his presence from you?" The man answered: "O Beloved, all that I am and was and will be is thine and not mine. My own is poor and worthless. Therefore, do with thine own as thou wilt." The *answer* came: "You compel me by your humility to answer you. The first man under the mist, who looks so black and sinister, is an evil spirit, and he had his abode here with the men on the ninth rock." The man said: "O Beloved, what happened to him then?" The *answer* came: "He was driven out in the same way that Lucifer was. He found selfish desires within himself and communicated them to the people about him, in order to increase his self-esteem. This man is one of the most terrible in all Christendom with his false teaching. He is more to be avoided with his evil doctrines than all the other evil spirits there are." The man said: "O beloved, are there more false men than this one?" The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look about." The man obeyed and looked under the mist where he saw

so many of these false men dwelling that he was frightened and said: "O Beloved, I am afraid of the harm that these men do to Christendom."

The *answer* came: "It is true that these are the most harmful men in all Christendom, because they lead simple, godly men astray with their false teachings. And these false and destructive teachings are increasing nowadays." The man said: "Therefore, have pity, Beloved; is there no way by which men can learn to recognize them?" The *answer* came: "These men teach a false and easy doctrine of heaven that has no love in it, and men in these times follow them gladly. I warn you; look for yourself and see how badly it stands with Christendom."

The man said: "O Beloved, I would pour out my blood to remedy this if it were thy will. Tell me about the other man whom I saw under the mist, light and shining as an angel." The *answer* came: "This man, too, used to live here on the ninth rock. But when God revealed the origin of all created things to him, he conceived so much compassion for his fellow men that he ran down under the mist to see whether, with God's help, he could convert some poor sinner and help him to escape the mist. This man appears bright to your inner eyes. He sees truly in what a plight Christendom lies, and he has such compassion for Christendom that he would suffer bitter death to help a sinner escape. This is because he knows well how severe God's judgment is against this time, and he knows that he warned men through thirty-three years of suffering until his death."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, are there many of these radiant men in Christendom?" The *answer* came: "There are so few of these glorious men who have seen the origin that I will not even reveal them to you, for it would only trouble you." The man replied: "O Beloved, have mercy, since there are so few of these men and Christendom has so much need of them. Thou hast shown me indeed who these two men are; now tell me, do the men who look into the origin of things still have fear?" The *answer* came: "Yes, they still have fear; but their fear is a loving,

childish fear. They have no other fear than that they are not serving their Lord and God hard and long enough and that they are not following the vision of Christ as they think they ought to do. And yet their fear is so full of love and childish simplicity that God does not allow them to remain in it long.

“These men fear neither hell nor purgatory, neither man nor the devil; they do not fear missing heaven, nor do they fear dying. All fear has left these men except for this one loving and childish fear, which they will have at times till they die.” The man said: “Tell me, do the men who have seen the origin still have to suffer?” The *answer* came: “Yes, they still have to suffer; but they do not desire anything other than to follow the vision of Christ until they die. Their greatest suffering is that they know how badly things are going in Christendom. They sympathize with Christendom. They are so full of divine light and their inner eyes are so wide open that they can see plainly how men are caught and held from going on to their origin. The radiant men suffer with these poor captives, and this cross they carry to their deaths for the sake of Christ, their chief.”

The man said: “Tell me, Beloved, are the men who have looked into the origin assured of eternal life?” The *answer* came: “You know that you yourself have given up all things and become one with God. What should God do with his own? Do you think he will give them to the evil spirit? I tell you, when these men die their souls take but a single step into eternal life. God said to Mary Magdalene (*sic*): ‘Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken away from her’; and with those words she was assured of eternal life. Tell me, what would you have God do with these men? These glorious men who have looked into the origin can never be satisfied with anything but God; nothing in all creation, temporal or eternal, can satisfy them except God himself.”

The man said: “O Beloved, how comforting are thy words.” The *answer* came: “Yes, it is comforting to those who have given up all selfishness and turned to the eternal truth. But for those

who refuse to do so it is meaningless." The man said: "O my Beloved, how foolish and stupid Christendom is not to see the great wonders that thou wouldst do for every man who with his own free will desired to learn to live with thee and to be obedient in all things."

The *answer* came: "Tell me, what shall God do? How shall he impart his divine grace to Christendom in these times? You see for yourself that Christendom flees from God. There are very few men with whom God can work his divine secret ways. Most of Christendom live as though they had no reason, but were nothing other than mangy dogs." The man said: "O Beloved, then have pity that the world has left its senses." The *answer* came: "Open your eyes and look under the mist." The man obeyed and saw that the people in Christendom lived senselessly and without any fear of God and contrary to all true Christian ordinances, both clergy and laity. And the man succumbed to an overwhelming pity for these people and, praying for Christendom, he said: "O my own dear Love, please let me suffer, miserable, unworthy creature that I am, in the hope that Christendom may reform!" The *answer* came: "Do not talk like this. You know that much blood and many lives have been poured out for the sake of Christendom; but they have cast it aside and forgotten!"

The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, why is it that the true Christian ordinances have been perverted and Christendom is now so ill and weak?" The *answer* came: "I will tell you why. Before, Christendom so loved its Lord and its God that it would come before him in everything. No one would undertake any great thing unless he first had divine counsel. Before, when a chief of Christendom died, whether ecclesiastical or secular, to whom the keys of authority had been given, then Christendom in all humility would, with Mary Magdalene, fall at the feet of Christ and pray God to give them a ruler whom he loved and who would be most useful to Christendom. And this is what God would do then: he would give them for a ruler a man who had beheld the origin. Such a man could truly care for Christendom,

because he had the Holy Spirit for a helper. In all things the Holy Spirit was his heavenly adviser. And from these men chosen by God came great heroes who had great and eternal honor in the presence of God. Look about and see how it is now! I will tell you how it is: now, when Christendom is in distress and a man appears who has beheld his origin and would advise them by the counsel of the Holy Spirit, they hold his advice in scorn and call him a fool, both the clergy and the laity. See what has happened! How little Christendom heeds these men who have seen the origin. But if Christendom came to one of these men and asked him to teach them the true Christian ordinances, he could do it easily, for the Holy Spirit would be his adviser."

The man said: "O my Beloved, consider at how dear a cost thou hast ransomed Christendom with thy precious blood! O eternal Love, in thy eternal wisdom think of some way to help Christendom and put it in better order." The *answer* came: "Cease your praying. God has tried many times to help Christendom, but it was no use; Christendom grows worse and worse. Let us end this discourse. Tell me, how many men can be found in these evil times who would willingly seek the nearest way that leads to the origin of all created things? You see for yourself that nowadays even the so-called good men are slaves to their natures."

The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, what are these men called who have beheld the origin?" The *answer* came: "These men have lost their names; they are nameless, for they have become God." The man replied: "Beloved, I am surprised to hear that thou sayest a man can become God!" The *answer* came: "Do not be surprised. Whomever God permits to see the origin becomes by grace what God is by nature." The man said: "Tell me, Beloved, how much dost thou love these men?" The *answer* came: "With all your senses and abilities you could not comprehend how much God loves them."

The man said: "Beloved, I am surprised that every man does not burst his heart trying to join this noble company!" The *answer* came: "God invites every man, but very few accept his

invitation." The man said: "Beloved, hast thou chosen these men in particular?" The *answer* came: "God suffered death equally for all men. But whoever breaks away from his own selfish will, him has God chosen. That man has he chosen who does his will.

"No man can blame God, even the evil spirits. Whoever chooses to take the true upward road will be helped by the evil spirits without their knowing it. No one may blame anything but his own selfish nature. But few men nowadays choose to travel the true road with a devoted life—to humbly dare their own lives following the way that Christ traveled. You saw for yourself that when many men tried to climb the high rocks following the vision of Christ, most of them fell back because of their stubborn natures or found that they could go no farther."

The man said: "O Beloved, I am sure that there are still men who would ascend the true road if they but knew of it." The *answer* came: "No one is guiltless; whoever knows the best way will take it. Whoever has reached the age of reason, even though he lie bound in sin under the mist, will know that God is merciful, and if he strive with all his might and courage, he will know that God will have pity on his struggles, will offer him his hand to lead him out from the mist if only he will follow him with his whole heart."

The man said: "O Beloved, I would give my heart for thee if I might; for thou hast shown me such marvelous wonders with such luminous understanding that there is nothing more that I can desire, except that thy will be done in all things." The *answer* came: "It is not surprising that your heart is full of joy; for the joy that you have seen is compared with the world's joy as the sea is with a drop of water."

The man said: "O Beloved, I am surprised that all Christians do not love thee so much that their hearts throb in their bosoms." The *answer* came: "There used to be some Christians, but the love of men in these times is turned in upon their own selves. We must end this discussion; otherwise, we shall go too far and make it too long. Tell me, now do you understand what

God meant in showing you that high mountain where the fish swam down and so many were caught, and how few fish there were that returned to their home in the mountain: how they had to climb up past the waterfall where so many of them fell back to their deaths? You were surprised at the small number of fish that managed to return. Tell me, do you understand now what God meant in showing you that vision? ”

The man replied: “ Yes, Beloved, now I understand clearly; I see that it was a symbol of all the things thou hast shown me.” The *answer* came: “ And now I must take leave of you; we must put an end to the visions, for you have written enough for the time.” The man said: “ O Beloved, I fear that Christendom will not believe what I have written in this book.” The *answer* came: “ If Christendom does not believe, it will merely show in what a bad way they are. The mass of Christians will not believe anything but their senses and put no faith in the true friends of God. Christians give no heed to the friends of God; they neither ask their advice nor follow them; and for this, God will give them cause for sorrow.” The man said: “ Beloved, most of the friends of God are unknown to Christendom.” The *answer* came: “ That is true; but the real friends of God are acquainted with Christendom’s falsehood.”

The man said: “ Tell me, Beloved, if Christendom now wanted to ask the advice of the real friends of God, they would not know how to find them.” The *answer* came: “ The mass of Christians in these evil times is not worthy of acquaintance with the real friends of God, for God knows they would not follow them, but persecute them. God knows how these Christians like to run after the false pharisees with the cunning words.” The man said: “ O Beloved, it is true that men are attracted now to those who have clever words and do not believe that thou canst work wonders among thy true friends.”

The *answer* came: “ Whoever does not believe that God can still work wonders among his friends as he did in the old age and the new, he is no Christian, for he does not believe that God is

all-powerful." The man said: "But many Christians nowadays say that Christendom has at last come into its own and needs no one to instruct it as it did before." The *answer* came: "Tell me, has Christendom come into its own? Christendom has never in a hundred years been so far from its true self. God showed Christendom his power some time ago, although mildly, and many perished. But since that time Christendom has grown worse and worse; and God saw that it had not helped at all. Christendom has never before stood in such need of someone to lead it on the upward way as it does now. Now Christendom runs about like crazed sheep."

The man said: "O Beloved, most Christians do not believe the friends of God and ask, 'What do they say?' God did not even let his own mother know what he was doing." The *answer* came: "In a way you are right. God did not tell his mother what pertained to the Father. But he did tell her what pertained to her: many great wonders; and he did the same with his dear disciples, each as he could receive it; and after that to his saints, both in the old and in the new age, as they have written. God had this power and will have it eternally; even today he works his secret, heavenly works among his friends on earth. Whoever does not believe this must forever go astray."

The man said: "O Beloved, this is a discouraging thing for all men who are just beginning to escape from under the mist and are guarding themselves against sin and improving their lives, and yet who are not ready to believe the friends of God, because they do not know what they say." The *answer* came: "Do not be surprised that these beginners do not understand the friends of God. How should they understand God's friends when they have practiced no virtue? These beginners need to go to a friend of God whom they trust in the place of God and converse with him alone, guarding themselves from the pharisees with the clever words who are so well versed in Holy Scripture. If anyone wants to hear discourses, let him go to public lectures and keep away from the pharisees. The time is drawing near when all simple

Christians will have to flee to the cross of Christ."

The man said: "O Beloved, I am sure that if any simple man found the courage within him to give up all things and live only for thee, thou would not leave him long in misery, but would come quickly to his aid with thy ready grace." The *answer* came: "God is as ready as ever to show forth his grace if he finds a man willing to receive it. But most men nowadays want to have everything, and God does not give his grace to such. The reason that so few people in these evil times receive God's grace is that they do not turn in steadfast and humble surrender to the eternal truth. If anyone had the courage to do so, God would be just as ready in this evil age to impart his grace as he ever was."

The man said: "O Beloved, if there were more men who would seek thy grace, perhaps thy anger would soften and thou wouldst have pity on Christendom." The *answer* came: "You say God would have pity on Christendom. I tell you, for hundreds of years God has not had so much pity for Christendom as he has now in these wicked times. The reason is that the Father would have let Christendom perish a long time ago had not the Son prayed for a delay."

The man said: "O Beloved, consider thy bitter death and harsh sufferings and have pity on Christendom and help it to reform." The *answer* came. "What would you that God do? You have seen that Christendom has left all true ordinances and become carnal and shameful without any fear of God. That is why the Father will no longer put up with it."

The man said: "O Beloved, for the sake of thy loving compassion, have pity on Christendom." The *answer* came: "Christendom has sunk so low that the righteousness of God can no longer endure it. And when that time comes, neither your prayer nor that of any man will avail. Pity will be silenced." The man said: "O Beloved, I do not know what I should ask, for all I desire is that thou wouldst pity thy people." The *answer* came: "We must put an end to the discourse and these visions." The man said: "O Beloved, permit this unworthy creature to ask one more

question." The *answer* came: "Ask on, and be sure that it is no more than one."

The man asked: "Tell me, Beloved, does every man to whom thou showest his origin experience the same joy?" The *answer* came: "Whenever God shows a man his origin, the joy at that hour is to the joy of the world as the great sea to a drop of water. Whoever on earth is shown the origin gains a vision of the perfect joy. But this vision, compared with the perfect inward and eternal joy, is as a drop of water compared with all the water that God ever created.

"Do not be surprised that God has shown you many visions and has spoken to you in images. That is the only way men could understand. When St. Peter was shown the vision, he completely forgot himself and without knowing what it was, he said, 'Here it is good.' And when St. Paul was shown it, he did not know what had happened to him, whether his soul was still in the body or not. St. Paul had to carry a cross all his life and finally offer up his head.

"Now I tell you, you shall carry an inward cross to your grave. I will speak with you no longer. God has done nothing with you but what he has done with his dear friends before." The man said: "O my Beloved, I desire nothing else than that thy precious will be done now and forever and that I may follow the true vision of Christ as far as it is possible for me till my death."

Now when the man had finished writing all the wonders in this book, God took away from him all these gifts and left him as poor as he had found him. And he gave him superhuman temptations. The man knew that he would have them all his life, but he desired nothing else than to suffer.

This book was begun during Lent of the year that men count one thousand three hundred and fifty-two years after God's birth. Let no one inquire who the man was who wrote this book, for he trusts to God's goodness that no one will find out as long as he lives. Whoever reads this book, let him read it from beginning to end; otherwise, he will not properly understand the sense of what

is written in it. And whoever reads this book from beginning to end, or hears it read, and does not reform his life, let him be afraid, for God will give him his deserts now and in eternity.

The power of the Father, the wisdom of the Son, and the love of the Holy Spirit help us to reform our own lives in accordance with the lessons of this book. Amen.

Remember in God the poor man through whom God has written this.

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**Merswin, Rulman, 1307-1382.**

Mystical writings. Edited and interpreted by Thomas S Kepler. Philadelphia, Westminster Press [c1960]

143 p. 21 cm.

Contains a translation of the author's *Vier anfangende Jahre* (The four beginning years) and *Das Buch von den neun Felsen* (The book of the nine rocks)

Bibliography: p. 35-36.

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