

Readings for Week 2: The Way of *Life*

1. Look ahead now and never mind what is behind; see what you still need, and not what you have; for this is how meekness is most quickly won and defended. Now you have to stand in desire, all your life long, if you are to make progress. . . . This desire must always be at work in your will, by the power of almighty God and by your own consent. One point I must emphasize: He is a jealous lover and allows no other partnership, and he has no wish to work in your will unless he is there alone with you, by Himself. He asks no help, but only you yourself. His will is that you should simply gaze at him, and leave him to act alone. Your part is to keep the windows and the door against the inroads of the flies and enemies. And if you are willing to do this, all that is required is to woo him humbly in prayer, and at once he will help you. Call upon him then, and let us see how you get on. He is always most willing, and is only waiting for you. So what are you going to do? How will you move him? (*Cloud of Unknowing*, chapter 2, Paulist Press, 1981, pp. 118-119)

2. Lift up your heart with a humble impulse of love; and have himself as your aim, and not any of his goods. Take care that you avoid thinking of anything but himself, so that there is nothing for your reason or your will to work on, except himself. Do all that in you lies to forget all the creatures that God ever made, and their works, so that neither your thought nor your desire be directed or extended to any of them, neither in general nor in particular. Let them alone and pay no attention to them. This is the work of the soul that pleases God most. (*Cloud of Unknowing*, chapter 3, pp. 119-120)

3. It is the easiest exercise of all and the most readily accomplished when a soul is helped by grace in this felt desire; otherwise it is extraordinarily difficult for you to make this exercise. Do not hang back then, but labor in it until you experience the desire. For when you first begin to undertake it, all that you experience is a darkness, a sort of cloud of unknowing; you cannot tell what it is, except that you experience in your will a simple reaching out to God. This darkness and this cloud is always between you and your God, no matter what you do, and it prevents you from seeing him clearly by the light of understanding in your reason, and from experiencing him in sweetness of love in your affection. So set yourself to rest in this darkness as long as you can, always crying out after him whom you love. (*Cloud of Unknowing*, chapter 3, pp. 120-121)

4. Pay careful heed then, to this exercise, and to the wonderful way in which it works within your soul. For when rightly understood, it is nothing else than a sudden impulse, one that comes without warning, speedily flying up to God as the spark flies up from the burning coal. Marvellous also are the number of such impulses that can

take place in one hour in a soul that is properly disposed for the exercise. Yet in one stirring out of all of these, a man can suddenly and perfectly have forgotten every created thing. And equally quickly, after each impulse, because of the corruption of the flesh, the soul falls down again to some thought or some deed done or undone. But what matter? For straightaway it rises up again as suddenly as it did before. (*Cloud of Unknowing*, chapter 4, p. 126)

5. If you ever come to this cloud, and live and work in it as I bid you, just as this cloud of unknowing is above you, between you and your God, in the same way you must put beneath you a cloud of forgetting, between you and all the creatures that have ever been made. It seems to you, perhaps, that you are very far from him, because this cloud of unknowing is between you and your God. However, if you give it proper thought, you are certainly much further away from him when you do not have this cloud of forgetting between you and all the creatures that have ever been made . . . [and] their works and circumstances. . . . For though it is very profitable on some occasions to think of the state and activities of certain creatures in particular, nevertheless in this exercise it profits little or nothing. . . . Everything that you think of is above you during this time, and between you and your God. (*Cloud of Unknowing*, chapter 5, pp. 128-129)

6. Detachment from things does not mean setting up a contradiction between 'things' and 'God' as if God were another 'thing' and as if His creatures were His rivals. We do not detach ourselves from things in order to attach ourselves to God, but rather we become detached from ourselves in order to see and use all things in and for God. (Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, chapter 4)

7. And I gave myself to him, indeed, reserving nothing. . . . In that sweet draught of God, wherein, as we have said, the soul is immersed in God, it surrenders itself, most willingly and with great sweetness, to Him wholly, desiring to be wholly His and never again to have aught in itself that is alien from Him. God grants it, in the said union, the purity and the perfection which are necessary for this; for, inasmuch as He transforms the soul into himself, he makes it to be wholly His and empties it of all that it possessed and that was alien from God. Wherefore the soul is indeed completely given up to God, reserving naught, not only according to its will, but also according to its works, even as God has given Himself freely to the soul. So these two wills are surrendered, satisfied and given up the one to the other, so that neither shall fail the other, as in the faithfulness and stability of a betrothal. (John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 18)