

“This translation—the first into English—of *The Life of Jesus Christ* by Ludolph of Saxony will be welcomed both by scholars in various fields and by practicing Christians. It is at the same time an encyclopedia of biblical, patristic, and medieval learning and a compendium of late medieval spirituality, stressing the importance of meditation in the life of individual believers. It draws on an astonishing number of sources and sheds light on many aspects of the doctrinal and institutional history of the Church down to the fourteenth century.”

— Giles Constable  
Professor Emeritus  
Princeton University

“Milton T. Walsh has taken on a Herculean task of translating *The Life of Christ* by the fourteenth-century Carthusian, Ludolph of Saxony. He has more than risen to the challenge! Ludolph’s text was one of the most widely spread and influential treatments of the theme in the later Middle Ages and has, until now, been available only in an insufficient late nineteenth-century edition (Rigollot). The manuscript tradition of *The Life of Christ (Vita Christi)* is extremely complex, and Walsh, while basing his translation on the edition, has gone beyond in providing critical apparatus that will be of significant use to scholars, as well as making the text available for students and all interested in the theology, spirituality, and religious life of the later Middle Ages. His introduction expertly places Ludolph’s work in the textual tradition and is itself a contribution to scholarship. Simply put, this is an amazing achievement!”

— Eric Leland Saak  
Professor of History  
Indiana University

“Walsh has done pioneering work unearthing the huge range of patristic, scholastic, and contemporary sources that Ludolph drew upon, enabling us to re-evaluate the *Vita* as an encyclopedic compilation, skillfully collating a range of interpretations of the gospel scenes to meditational ends.

“This translation will hopefully stimulate further work on the late medieval manuscript tradition of the text, its circulation, use and readership. It will prove an invaluable tool for scholars researching the late medieval engagement with the humanity of Christ, while simultaneously catering for general readers and religious practitioners interested in learning more about a traditional and influential imaginative meditational practice.”

— Christiania Whitehead  
Professor of Middle English Literature  
University of Warwick



CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES: TWO HUNDRED SIXTY-SEVEN

# *The Life of Jesus Christ*

## PART ONE

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Volume 1, Chapters 1–40

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Ludolph of Saxony, Carthusian

*Translated and Introduced by*  
Milton T. Walsh



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Dedicated to the Memory of  
**ARCHBISHOP JOHN R. QUINN**  
1929–2017

*Never have I known a truer friend, a more trustworthy brother,  
a more genuine father. In him there was no arrogance,  
no haughtiness, no putting on airs; but justice, humility, and  
prudence claimed the whole man for themselves.*

Peter the Venerable, Letter 192



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# Abbreviations for Works Cited

Unless further identification is needed, *Sermo* or *Hom* refers to a sermon or homily by an author, followed by its number. When the citation is from a biblical commentary, *Com* is followed by the biblical reference, e.g., *Com* Matt 28:4. Bracketed references in this list refer to modern critical editions of the works.

Citations given in italics in the text are from sources Ludolph uses without attribution. Biblical texts that may come from a Latin Diatesaron are given in bold print. The bold letter **R 1**, etc., refers to section headings from L. M. Rigollot, *Vita Iesu Christi* (Paris: Palmé, 1865, 1870, 1878).

Allegoriae	Richard of Saint Victor (?), <i>Allegoriae in vetus et novum testamentum (Liber exceptionum)</i> .
Amoris	<i>Stimulus amoris maior</i> ; this is a fourteenth-century expansion of the <i>Stimulus amoris minor</i> written in the late thirteenth century by James of Milan; the material cited by Ludolph is not in the earlier version; in A. C. Peltier, <i>S. Bonaventurae, Opera Omnia</i> , vol. 12 (Paris: Vives, 1868).
Aquaeductu	Bernard, <i>Sermo in Nativitate Beatae Mariae, "De aquaeductu"</i> [SB 5]
Attr.	Attributed to
Brev in Ps	Ps-Jerome, <i>Breviarium in Psalmos</i>
Bruno	Bruno of Segni/Asti (biblical commentaries, homilies)

Burchard	Burchard of Mount Sion, <i>Descriptio terrae sanctae; Burchard of Mount Sion</i> , translated by Aubrey Stewart (London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1896).
CA	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Catena aurea</i>
Caillau Aug	Caillau, <i>Augustini operum</i> (Paris, 1836).
Caillau Chrys	Caillau, <i>Chrysostomi opera omnia</i> (Paris: Mellier, 1842).
Chromatius	Chromatius of Aquileia, <i>Tractatus in evangelium S. Matthaei</i> [CL 9A]
CL	Corpus Christianorum Latinorum
CM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
Cognitione	Ps-Bernard, <i>Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanis conditione</i>
Compunctione	Chrysostom, <i>De compunctione cordis</i>
Conf	Augustine, <i>Confessiones</i> [CL 27]
Cons	Boethius, <i>De consolazione philosophiae</i> [CL 94]
Cratandri	<i>Tomus Operum Ioannis Chrysostomi</i> (Basel: Andrew Cratandri, 1523).
Creat	Ps-Isidore (seventh-cent. Irish), <i>De ordine creaturarum</i> (Monografías de la Universidad de Santiago de Compostela 10, 1972).
CS	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CSP	Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum Paravianum
Cumm	Cummianus, <i>Commentarius in Evangelium secundam Marcam</i>
David	David of Augsburg, <i>De exterioris et interioris hominis compositione</i> (Quaracchi, 1899).
De civ Dei	Augustine, <i>De civitate Dei</i> [CL 47–48]
De cons	Augustine, <i>De consensu evangelistarum</i> [CS 43]

De doc	Augustine, <i>De doctrina Christiana</i> [CL 32]
De exc	Eadmer, <i>De excellentia Virginis Mariae</i>
De gen ad lit	Augustine, <i>De Genesi ad litteram</i>
De inst	Aelred, <i>De institutione inclusarum</i> [CM 1]
De iudicio	<i>De iudicio et compunctione</i> ; S. Ephraem Syri, <i>Opera Omnia</i> (Venice: Gerardi, 1755).
De laud	Arnold of Bonneval, <i>De laudibus Beatae Virginis Mariae</i>
De moribus	Bernard, <i>De moribus et officio Episcoporum</i> (Ep 42) [SB 7]
De Trin	Augustine, <i>De Trinitate</i> [CL 50–50A]
De util trib	Peter of Blois, <i>De utilitate tribulationum</i>
De Vitry	Jacques de Vitry, <i>Historia Hierosolymitana: The History of Jerusalem</i> , translated by Aubrey Stewart (London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1896).
Dial	Gregory the Great, <i>Dialogues</i>
Dialogus	Ps-Anselm, <i>Dialogus Beatae Mariae et Anselmi de passione Domini</i>
Drogo	Drogo of Ostia, <i>Sermo de sacramento dominicae passionis</i>
Durandus	William Durandus, <i>Rationale divinorum officiorum</i> [CM 140]
Elmer	Elmer of Canterbury, <i>De humanae conditionis</i>
Eluc	Honorius of Autun, <i>Elucidarium sive dialogus de Summa totius Christianae theologiae</i>
En Mark, Luke, John	Theophylact, <i>In quatuor Evangelia enarrationes</i>
En Ps	Augustine, <i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i> [CL 38–40]

Ep	Epistle
Ep John	Augustine, <i>In Ioannis Epistulam ad Parthos tractatus</i>
Erasmus	Erasmus, <i>Origenis adamantii operum pars secunda</i> (Basel, 1545).
Étaix	<i>Opus imperfectum</i> , chapters not found in Migne: Raymond Étaix, <i>Revue bénédictine</i> 84 (1974).
Ety	Isidore, <i>Etymologiae</i>
Exp Acta	Theophylact, <i>Expositio in Acta Apostolorum</i>
Exp Luke	Ambrose, <i>Expositio Evangelii secundam Lucam</i> [CL 14]
Exp Or Dom	Jordan of Quedlinburg, <i>Expositio Orationis Dominice</i> , in Eric Leland Saak, <i>Catechesis in the Later Middle Ages I: The Exposition of the Lord's Prayer of Jordan of Quedlinburg, OESA</i> (d. 1380) (Leiden: Brill, 2014).
40 hom	Gregory the Great, <i>XL homiliarium in Evangelia</i> [CL 141]
Fratres	Ps-Augustine (early fourteenth cent.), <i>Ad fratres in eremo</i>
Fronton	Chrysostom, <i>Opera Omnia</i> (Paris: Fronton du Duc, 1687).
Gaufrid	Gaufrid of Clairvaux, <i>Declamationes de colloquio Simonis cum Iesu</i>
Gennadius	Gennadius of Marseille, <i>Liber de Ecclesiasticis Dogmatibus</i>
Gorran	Nicholas of Gorran, <i>Enarratio in Quatuor Evangelia et Epistolas B. Pauli</i> (Lyon: Annisonios, 1692).
Grimlaicus	Grimlaicus, <i>Regula solitariorum</i>
Guigo	Guigo de Ponte, <i>De contemplatione</i>
Habitat	Bernard, <i>In Psalmum 90, "Qui habitat," Sermones 17</i> [SB 4]

- Haymo Haymo of Auxerre, *Homiliarum sive concionum ad plebem in Evangelia de tempore et sanctis* (Migne wrongly attributes to Haymo of Halberstadt)
- Henry Henry of Friemar, *Explanatio passionis dominicae*; <https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:234049>.
- Hiez Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Hiezechihelam prophetam* [CL 142]
- Hist AA Peter Comestor, *Historia libri Actuum Apostolorum*
- Hist ev Peter Comestor, *Historia evangelica*
- Hist sch Peter Comestor, *Historia scholastica*
- Hom Acta Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Acta Apostolorum*
- Hom ev Bede, *Homiliarium evangelii* [CL 122]
- Homiliarius Paul the Deacon, *Homiliarius doctorum*
- Hom John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Ioannem*
- Hom Matt Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Mattheum*
- Hugh Hugh of Ripelin, *Compendium theologiae veritatis*; in A. C. Peltier, *S. Bonaventurae, Opera Omnia*, vol. 8 (Paris: Vives, 1866). The work is also attributed to Albert the Great and appears in vol. 34 of his collected works edited by Borgnet (Paris: Vives, 1895).
- Int nom Jerome, *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* [CL 72]
- Jordan Jordan of Quedlinburg, *Opus Postillarum et sermones de tempore* (Strassburg: Hussner, 1483); sermons 189–254 are also known as *Meditationes de Passione Christi*.
- Laon Anselm of Laon (?), *Enarrationes in Evangelium Matthaei*
- Laudibus Bernard, *De laudibus virginis matris super verbi Evangelii: "Missus est angelus Gabriel"*; *homiliae quatuor* [SB 4]

Legenda	Jacobus de Voragine, <i>Legenda Aurea</i>
Lib de pas	Ps-Bernard, <i>Liber de passione Christi</i>
Lib specialis	Mechtild of Hackborn, <i>Liber specialis gratiae</i>
Lombard	Peter Lombard, <i>Liber sententiarum</i>
Lucilium	Seneca, <i>Ad Lucilium epistolae morales</i>
LV	Bonaventure, <i>Lignum Vitae</i>
Lyra	Nicholas of Lyra, <i>Postillae perpetuae in universam S. Scripturam; Biblia Sacra, cum Glossa Ordinaria, primum quidem a Strabo Fuldensi Monacho Benedictino Collecta, Tomus Quintus</i> (Antwerp: Keerbergium, 1517).
Mai	Mai, <i>Novae Patrum Bibliothecae</i> (Rome: Sacri Consilii, 1852).
Manipulus	Thomas of Ireland, <i>Manipulus florum</i>
Manuale	John of Fécamp, <i>Manuale</i>
Martin Braga	Martin of Braga, <i>Formula vitae honestae</i>
Massa	Michael de Massa, <i>Vita Christi</i> (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek: <a href="http://bildsuche.digitale-sammlungen.de/index.html?c=viewer&amp;lv=1&amp;bandnummer=bsb00082134&amp;pimage=00082134&amp;suchbegriff=&amp;l=en">http://bildsuche.digitale-sammlungen.de/index.html?c=viewer&amp;lv=1&amp;bandnummer=bsb00082134&amp;pimage=00082134&amp;suchbegriff=&amp;l=en</a> ).
Med	Anselm and others, <i>Meditationes</i> , in <i>S. Anselmi opera</i> , edited by Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1946).
Med red	Anselm, <i>Meditatio redemptionis humanae</i> , in <i>S. Anselmi opera</i> , edited by Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1946).
mor	moral: the Postilla of Nicholas of Lyra often presents moral interpretations in a separate category
Mor	Gregory the Great, <i>Moralium libri sive expositione in librum Iob</i> [CL 143–143b]

Moribus	Ps-Seneca, <i>De Moribus</i>
MVC	John de Caulibus, <i>Meditationes Vitae Christi</i> [CM 153]
Ogerius	Ogerius of Locedio, <i>Tractatus in Laudibus sanctae Dei genetricis</i> , in <i>De Mariaklachten</i> , edited by J.W. De Vries (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1964)
Opus Dan	Jordan of Quedlinburg, <i>Sermones de Sanctis</i> in <i>Opus sermonum patris Iordani Augustiniani</i> (Paris: Hichman, 1521).
Opus imperf	Ps-Chrysostom, <i>Opus imperfectum in Matthaem</i>
Orat	Gregory Nazianzen, <i>Orationes</i>
Orthodoxa	John Damascene, <i>De fide orthodoxa</i>
Pelagius, Ad Dem	Pelagius? Prosper?, <i>Ad Demetriadem</i>
Peniteas	William of Montibus, <i>Peniteas cito</i> , in Joseph Goering, <i>William de Montibus (c. 1140–1213): The Schools and the Literature of Pastoral Care</i> (Toronto: PIMS, 1992).
Peraldus	William Peraldus, sermons. These were mistakenly attributed to William of Auvergne and are found in <i>Guilielmi Alverni, Opera omnia</i> (Paris: D. Thierry, 1674).
PG	J.-P. Migne, <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> (Paris, 1856).
PL	J.-P. Migne, <i>Patrologia Latina</i> (Paris, 1844).
Posteriorum	Richard of Saint Victor, <i>Posteriorum Excerptionum</i>
Prosper	Prosper of Aquitaine, <i>Sententiae ex Augustino delibatae</i>
Quaest 83	Augustine, <i>De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII</i> [CL 44A]
Quaest Ev	Augustine, <i>Quaestionum Evangeliorum libri duo</i> [CL 44B]
Quatuor	Eadmer, <i>De quatuor virtutibus Beatae Virginis Mariae</i>

- Quis dabit Ps-Bernard (Ogerius?), *Meditatio de lamentatione beate virginis*; text in Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).
- Radbertus Paschasius Radbertus, *Ep 9 Ad Paulam et Eustochium, de Assumptione* [CM 56C]
- Reg past Gregory the Great, *Regulae Pastoralis*
- Roland *Chrysostomi opera* (Paris: Guilielmum Roland, 1546); (Venice: Pezzana, 1703).
- SB Sancti Bernardi Opera (Rome, 1957–1963).
- SC Bernard, *Sermones super Cantica Canticorum* [SB 1–2]
- Sedulius Sedulius, *Carmen paschale*
- Selecta Origen, *Selecta in Psalmos*
- Sent Isidore, *Sententiae*
- Septem diei Ps-Bede (thirteenth cent.), *De meditatione passionis per septem diei*
- Sermone monte Augustine, *De sermone Domini in monte* [CL 35]
- SHS *Speculum humanae salvationis* (Lutz and Perdrizet, *Speculum humanae salvationis*, Mulhouse, 1907–1909).
- Spiritu Ps-Augustine, *De spiritu et anima* (twelfth-cent. compilation of various authors)
- St Cher Hugh of Saint Cher, *Postillae in sacram scripturam, Tomus sextus*
- Stim Eckbert of Schönau, *Stimulus Amoris*
- Suso Henry Suso, *Horologium sapientiae*
- Super unum Peter Cantor, *Super unum ex quatuor*
- Synonyma Isidore of Seville, *Synonyma de lamentatione animae peccatricis*

Syrus	Publilius Syrus, <i>Sentences</i>
Tr John	Augustine, <i>In Evangelium Ioannis tractatus</i> [CL 36]
VC	Ludolph, <i>Vita Christi</i>
Vera et falsa	Ps-Augustine (eleventh cent.), <i>De vera et falsa poenitentia</i>
Voragine	Rudolphus Clutius, ed., Jacobus de Voragine, <i>Sermones Aurei in Omnes Totius Anni; Sermones de Tempore in omnes Dominicas</i> (Augsburg and Cracow: Bartl, 1760).
Vor Quad	Rudolphus Clutius, ed., Jacobus de Voragine, <i>Sermones Aurei in Omnes Quadragesimae Dominicas et Ferias</i> (Augsburg and Cracow: Bartl, 1760).
Werner	Werner of Saint Blase, <i>Liber Deflorationum</i>
Zachary	Zachary of Besançon, <i>In unum ex quatuor</i>



# Introduction

Although Ludolph of Saxony, Carthusian, produced a very detailed *Life of Jesus Christ*, little is known of his own life. From his name it is inferred that his place of origin was the province of Saxony; he was born at the end of the thirteenth century. It is also believed that for many years he was a Dominican friar. Ludolph entered the Carthusian monastery near Strasbourg in 1340, where he clearly made a favorable impression on his fellow Carthusians, for he was elected prior of Coblenz in 1343, just three years after joining the Order. He resigned five years later, the reason being, according to the chapter of 1348, to settle a qualm of conscience. What this was is not known, but it has been suggested that he may have considered his election faulty because a prohibition announced at the chapter of 1319 barred anyone who transferred to the Carthusians from a mendicant order from holding office.<sup>1</sup> Following his resignation Ludolph lived at the charterhouse of Mainz and subsequently returned to Strasbourg, the house of his profession, where he died on April 13, 1378.

Ludolph has been credited with several works (even, incorrectly, the *Imitation of Christ*), but the two major writings that are surely from his pen are the *Expositio in Psalterium Davidis* and his most influential book, the *Vita Iesu Christi*. This magisterial work presents the entire sweep of the life of Christ, from the eternal generation of the Son through his incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection, concluding with the Last Judgment. Drawing extensively on the fathers, later spiritual writers, and contemporary sources, Ludolph

<sup>1</sup> Sr. Mary Immaculate Bodenstedt, S.N.D., *The Vita Christi of Ludolph the Carthusian* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1944), 3. Bodenstedt's doctoral dissertation, the most comprehensive examination of the *Vita Christi* available in English, has been reprinted in Ludolphus the Carthusian, *Vita Christi: Introductory Volume* (Salzburg: *Analecta Cartusiana* 241, 2007).

created an encyclopedic resource that proved to be an immensely popular spiritual text for several centuries. In the opinion of the noted Benedictine medieval scholar, André Wilmart, "It is one of the most beautiful and erudite works to have come down to us from the Middle Ages. . . . Almost all of the patristic literature can be found incorporated in it."<sup>2</sup>

The many surviving manuscripts of the *Vita Christi* testify to its popularity. The first printed edition was produced in 1472, and since then more than sixty editions have appeared. Like other works in the same genre, Ludolph's book was translated, and its popularity increased. Indeed, one scholar has noted that because of this translating impulse, "the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were the great age of thirteenth and fourteenth century spirituality."<sup>3</sup> A Castilian translation of Ludolph's work read by Ignatius Loyola during his convalescence was instrumental in his conversion, and Teresa of Avila directed that every convent of her reform include "the Carthusian" in its library. The *Vita Christi* was read by Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi and Robert Bellarmine and was recommended to Jane Frances de Chantal by Francis de Sales.<sup>4</sup> Its influence was not limited to Catholic circles: Ludolph's book was a favorite among the followers of the *Devotio Moderna*, and it is probable that Luther and other reformers had been nourished by it. It is known that the great Protestant theologian Martin Bucer possessed a 1516 edition of the *Vita Christi*.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Ludolph's influence extended into the future through the

<sup>2</sup> "C'est l'un des plus beaux et savants ouvrages qui nous viennent du moyen age. . . . Presque toute la littérature patristique s'y trouve incorporée" (*Revue bénédictine* 47 [1935]: 268).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Sargent, "Bonaventure English: A Survey of the Middle English Prose Translations of Early Franciscan Literature," in James Hogg, *Spätmittelalterliche Geistliche Literatur in der Nationalsprache*, vol. 2, ed. James Hogg, *Analecta Cartusiana* 106 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1984), 176.

<sup>4</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, "Reminiscences" 5, in *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings*, trans. Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 14; Teresa of Avila, "The Constitutions" 8, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington: ICS Publications, 1985), 3:321. For information about the influence of the *Vita Christi* on many saints and authors over the centuries, see Bodenstedt, 53–92.

<sup>5</sup> I. Backus, P. Fraenkel, P. Lardet, *Martin Bucer Apocryphe et Authentique: Études de Bibliographie et D'Exégèse* (Geneva: Cahiers de la Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie, 1983), 46.

writings of later authors, such as Henry Herp and Francisco de Osuna, who drew on his *Vita Christi*. The Anglican writers Lancelot Andrewes and William Austin did the same. Sometimes sections of Ludolph's work were published under other names or anonymously. There is an element of poetic justice in this, for, as we shall see, Ludolph himself often used the writings of other authors without attribution.

## The Genre of a "Life of Christ"

Why did "lives of Christ," culminating in Ludolph's book (which incorporated many previous works of the same type), appear in the fourteenth century? We might say that for the first thousand years of the Christian faith, "the life of Christ" was the gospels. This is patently true, but several important points must be made. First, the gospels were not read as a biography of Jesus as we understand the term. Before the modern era, history and biography were related more to rhetoric than to science: the intent was not so much to describe events and analyze their causes and consequences but to inspire virtue. This does not mean that authors were less conscientious or that readers were more credulous than people today, but it does mean that they had a different understanding of the value of history. Second, for Christians in the first millennium, the life of Christ was not only recorded in the gospels; it was found in the whole Bible. Every page, indeed every detail on every page, was understood to be about Jesus Christ; all of the events recorded in the Old Testament were considered part of his life story. Third, his "life" projected forward as well as backward: the biography of Jesus continued in his Body, the church, and in the lives of individual members of his Body, and it also offered hints about the world to come. These presuppositions are the basis of a spiritual reading of Scripture and foundational for what has been called the "four senses" of biblical interpretation (literal, allegorical, moral, eschatological).<sup>6</sup> In this understanding,

<sup>6</sup> The classic study on this topic is the four-volume work by Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'écriture* (Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1959). Three of the four volumes have been translated into English as *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vols. 1–3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998, 2000, 2009).

creation, salvation history, the church, and the life of every single human person are all part of “the life of Christ.”

The primary place where this reading of the life of Christ went on was the liturgy. The great masters were the fathers of the church, who delivered their insights in sermons. For the most part they were not composing scholarly commentaries for the learned; they were teaching their people basic doctrines revealed by Christ’s life, death, and resurrection and offering them moral instruction drawn from Jesus’ example. Liturgical feasts and customs, the sacred images in churches, the association of Old Testament texts with the various events in the life of Christ—in all of these Christians experienced the life of Christ as a present reality. Public reflection on his life was complemented by a personal appropriation through meditation. The pattern of this reflection is described very simply by an early Carthusian writer: “Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will opened to you by contemplation.”<sup>7</sup> This mental prayer or meditation was a matter of ruminating, chewing over the word of God.

Beginning in the eleventh century there was a growing emphasis on the humanity of Christ, and especially on his sufferings, which blossomed with particular intensity two hundred years later in the life of Saint Francis. The Franciscans and other mendicants were great proponents of this spirituality, but they were the inheritors of a tradition that emerged first in the monastic context of meditation on the Scriptures. The prayers of Saint Anselm, for example, “introduced a new note of personal passion, of elaboration and emotional extravagance which anticipated some of the chief features of later medieval piety.”<sup>8</sup> Every detail of Christ’s behavior was seen as exemplifying various virtues and providing patterns for Christians to follow. Peter Damian wrote, “Clearly the life our Savior lived in the flesh, no less than the Gospel he preached, is proposed as the way of life we must embrace.”<sup>9</sup> The great Cistercian figures of the twelfth century, such as Aelred of Rievaulx, William of Saint-Thierry, and Bernard of Clairvaux, continued to develop the practice of meditat-

<sup>7</sup> Guigo II, *Scala Paradisi*; PL 40:998.

<sup>8</sup> R[ichard] W[illiam] Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer*, Birkbeck Lectures, 1959 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 47.

<sup>9</sup> Letter 87, To Oldericus of Fermo 4.9; PL 144:314D.

ing on the humanity of Christ and encouraged the use of imagination in pondering the gospel scenes, inviting their listeners and readers to picture themselves as actually present at the event being considered. According to Giles Constable, "This 'mysticism of the historical event,' as it has been called, combined an ardent concentration on the human life of Christ with an effort to personalize and interiorize His experiences on earth, which occasionally came close to an assimilation or even an identification with Christ."<sup>10</sup>

Both a flowering and a radical shift in this spiritual current took place in the thirteenth century with the growth of the mendicant orders, especially the followers of Saint Francis. By his intense poverty, humility, and sufferings, the *Poverello* became a living icon of Christ. The mendicant way of life opened a new chapter in the history of meditation on Christ's life: no longer was the matrix the monastic community; it was the town square and the daily lives of ordinary Christians. Bonaventure translated the vision of Francis into words, and in his *Lignum Vitae* and *Vitis Mystica* he penned devotional reflections on events in Christ's life. Toward the end of the thirteenth century the Franciscan James of Milan wrote a book called the *Stimulus Amoris* containing several meditations on the passion, a work that circulated under Bonaventure's name.<sup>11</sup>

Michelle Karnes, in *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages*, has suggested that an important shift occurred in the nature of meditations on the life of Christ because Bonaventure's spiritual writings, and those of his immediate followers, were based on a sophisticated theory of cognition that Bonaventure had developed.<sup>12</sup> He combined the thought of Aristotle, who taught that all

<sup>10</sup> Giles Constable, "The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ," in *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 203.

<sup>11</sup> Bonaventure's *Lignum vitae* did much to popularize this affective form of meditation, but Marsha Dutton has demonstrated that the great Franciscan was inspired by a work of Aelred, *De institutione inclusarum*; thus the roots of this approach pre-date Bonaventure by nearly a century. Marsha L. Dutton, "The Cistercian Source: Aelred, Bonaventure, Ignatius," in *Goad and Nail: Studies in Medieval Cistercian History, X*, edited by E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 151–78.

<sup>12</sup> Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

knowledge is derived from the senses and that “species” (cognitive images) link sensory and intellectual cognition, and of Augustine’s Neo-Platonic understanding that the Father contains the forms of all things, the Son is the expression of those forms, and the Holy Spirit is the link between them. For Bonaventure, this meant that (1) Christ is involved in every act of cognition, for it is by the divine light of the perfect “species” of the Father that the human mind is able to perceive the reality beneath the appearances of things, and (2) just as the mind can move from the material appearance of something to an intellectual apprehension of it, so in Christ incarnate we can move from the material creation of his body to the spiritual reality of his divinity. Therefore, human cognition is a journey from this world to God through Christ, and meditation is a journey from Christ’s humanity to his divinity.

This affected the shape of meditations on the life of Christ, including Ludolph’s, in several ways. Where the earlier meditations of the Anselmian type were marked by a sense of distance from the events being considered and expressed an ardent longing to be there, texts by Aelred and Bonaventure emphasized that by meditation we really *are* there, or, better, that Christ and the events of his life become present to us here and now by the power of imagination. These meditations reflect a greater intimacy than heretofore: we can truly enter into communion with Christ by meditating devoutly on his life. And this is important not only because, as Christians had always done, we should enter into the gospel stories and draw inspiration from them; rather, by our entering into communion with Christ, and especially by sharing in his passion, he can bring us through the cross to the resurrection and union with his divinity. (This may be why Ludolph includes a lengthy chapter on the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary: she was the human being who most deeply shared in her Son’s passion, and by union with her Son she is carried up into glory. Thus her assumption encourages the reader of the *Vita Christi* to see how union with Christ in his humanity leads to his divinity.)

In order to foster the sense of intimacy with the Lord, meditations of this kind from Bonaventure on were lively, imaginative, and detailed, and they took liberties with the gospel text—adding figures that were not present and even describing scenes not found in the Scriptures. The purpose was not to entertain the reader; these meditations were not written scripts of passion plays (although in fact

there was a symbiotic relationship between such texts and those dramas). They drew the reader into a relationship with Christ in order to assist in the journey from this visible world to heaven, rewarding the reader with intimacy with Jesus now and glory with him later.

This sacramental understanding of the visible world explains the wealth of detail found in Ludolph's *Vita Christi*. Not only the appearance, words, and actions of Christ speak of his divinity; the ceremonies of the church, the elements of this world, its seasons, plants and animals, places, names—everything in the visible world speaks of Christ. Ludolph's work offers a course in the training of our senses and imagination to enable everything to remind us of Christ, so that in time our meditation on him embraces all things.

There is one final, very important characteristic about coming into communion with Christ through meditation: it can be done by anyone, by ordinary Christians as well as monastics. This may be why several major lives of Christ appeared in the fourteenth century. Three were written by Augustinians: a *Vita Christi* by Michael de Massa, Jordan of Quedlinburg's *Meditationes de Passione Christi*, and the *De Gestis Domini Salvatoris* by Simon Fidati da Cascia. The Franciscan strain was represented by the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, written by John de Caulibus but attributed to Bonaventure. And Ludolph wrote his *Vita Christi*. It is interesting to note that, with the exception of Ludolph, all of these authors were mendicant friars—and Ludolph had been a Dominican for many years before joining the Carthusians, so he too was shaped by that milieu. This meant that they were composed by men whose vocation was preaching, and the intended audience was not just cloistered monastics but also people living in the world. Ludolph had joined an eremitical community reputed to be the most austere of religious orders and the one most remote from everyday life, but in his *Vita Christi* he presents meditations on Christ's life that are intended not only for hermits, monks, and nuns but also for friars, secular clergy, rulers, and ordinary laypeople.

Along with this appeal to diverse audiences, what made Ludolph's book an immediate best seller was its comprehensiveness. I have briefly indicated several major monuments of Christian spirituality in the centuries preceding Ludolph's life: the biblical texts themselves, patristic homilies, liturgical practices, the works by Benedictine and Cistercian authors, and the writings of mendicant friars. All

of these were incorporated by Ludolph into his magisterial life of Christ, which begins with the eternal generation of the Son of God and ends with the Last Judgment. The *Vita Christi* is a very long book, to be sure, but it is a kind of spiritual *Summa*, bringing together between two covers a wealth of prayerful reflection on the life of Christ.

### **The Structure of the *Vita Iesu Christi***

Ludolph's meditations on the life of Christ are arranged in two parts, containing ninety-two and eighty-eight chapters, respectively, with a prologue and brief conclusion. Part 2 begins with Peter's confession of faith (the event that many modern biblical scholars hold to be the turning point in Mark's gospel). It is likely that Ludolph chose to divide his work here because it was on this occasion that Jesus first spoke explicitly about his approaching passion, the central theme in the second half of the *Vita Christi*. The author blends the events found in the four gospels into a single narrative, generally following the chronology of the Synoptic Gospels. He occasionally adverts to differences between the gospel accounts, sometimes providing a symbolic meaning to explain the discrepancies. Ludolph generally avoids using material from the apocryphal gospels; when he does, or when he relates a legend, he often includes the caveat "It is said."

Before beginning the life of Christ proper, Ludolph offers a brief but important reflection on the first few verses in John's gospel, followed by a description of the fall of Lucifer and of Adam and Eve. The life of Jesus is a moving human drama, but for Ludolph the protagonist of the story is the Son of God incarnate, and the purpose of his coming was to restore a ruined creation and open the way to eternal life.

In a doctoral dissertation devoted to the *Vita Iesu Christi*, Charles Abbott Conway, Jr., has suggested that Ludolph offers a dynamic description of salvation history in five phases.<sup>13</sup> The drama opens in

<sup>13</sup> Charles Abbot Conway, Jr., *The "Vita Christi" of Ludolph of Saxony and Late Medieval Devotion Centred on the Incarnation: A Descriptive Analysis* (Salzburg: Analecta Cartusiana 34, 1976).

heaven with the eternal generation of the Son of God. This starting place is important, not only because it underscores the divine identity of Jesus Christ, but also because it establishes the connection between God the Son and creation even before his incarnation. The relationship between the Father and the Son is a mystery beyond human understanding, which is why, according to Ludolph, the fourth evangelist writes, *In the beginning was the Word*, rather than “In the beginning was the Son.” The word *Son* concerns the relationship of the second Person of the Trinity to the Father, but *Word* concerns his relationship not only to the Father but also to creation. The universe begins as an idea in the Father’s mind, but he expresses that idea through his Word. This fact affirms that creation in itself is good and, when rightly viewed, brings us into communion with its Maker.

The crucial words are “when rightly viewed.” The second act of the drama, related briefly in chapter 2 of the *Vita Christi*, concerns the fall of the angels and of the first human beings. Because creatures have sought to usurp the place of their Creator, the world becomes a wilderness instead of a garden. Rivalries, pride, greed all serve to tear asunder the fabric of creation; Ludolph suggests that the elements themselves have been affected by this revolt. There is a need to restore harmony, and the Son of God becomes Man to bring this about.

The third act opens with the incarnation of the Son. It is precisely in the material world that redemption will be won, making the events in Jesus’ life so important. Ludolph describes the world as variable, storm-tossed, and chaotic; it lacks meaning in itself and of itself can only lead to further ruin. But now that God the Son has come into this wilderness, a voluntary exile from heavenly glory, the world can become the way back to God. The light of God had not been extinguished in the world after the Fall, but it had become very faint and ambiguous. Christ came to endure freely the poverty, humiliation, and suffering of a fallen world and to bring light into that world. This divine light shines in the words and deeds of Jesus; occasionally Ludolph reminds his reader that what he said, did, or endured was the work of God the Son. But the light of the incarnation transcends history: it shines backward from the life of Jesus so that words and events in the Old Testament can rightly be seen as foreshadowing it, and it reaches forward into the present, so that the believer today

encounters the incarnate Christ in the liturgy, in meditation, and in daily life and is reminded of him even by the material creation. This is why Ludolph continually associates gospel stories with events and figures in the Old Testament, makes allusions to liturgical practices, and applies the words and actions of Jesus to contemporary situations.

The fourth act includes the entire life of Jesus, but above all his passion and death. The Son of God voluntarily embraced poverty, fasting, obedience, and humiliation to heal a broken world. The final indignity, the signature key to meaninglessness, was his death. By freely accepting it in obedience to the Father's will, Jesus overcame death, and by his resurrection and ascension he brought the human nature he had assumed back to its true home, heaven. His exile became a pilgrimage.

The final act involves audience participation. Readers are invited to unite themselves to Christ in his obedience, humility, and charity and so to pass with him through the shame of the cross to divine life. Or they can choose to cast their lot with a world devoid of God's light, which can only lead to meaninglessness and despair. Ludolph, after all, lived in what Barbara Tuchman has called the "calamitous" fourteenth century: the era of the Hundred Years' War, the Black Death, and the Avignon Papacy.<sup>14</sup> She suggests that it serves as "a distant mirror" for people today, but the time of tremendous social upheaval in which Ludolph lived created but a distant echo in his writing. War, plague, and famine had a deleterious effect on religious life, intensified the love of luxury among the wealthy, and created a climate that fueled apocalyptic movements, but these were simply more intense expressions of the perennial human failings of pride, avarice, dissension, and lust.

Ludolph's vivid descriptions in the *Vita Christi* are meant to prompt vivid imitation: when meditating on the events of Christ's life, and especially on his passion, the reader is urged not simply to admire what Christ did, but to imitate him. In the words of Eric Saak, "Ludolph's work is neither one of personal, mystical vision, nor strictly one directed toward monastic piety; rather it is intended to

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

teach the believer how to live devoutly.”<sup>15</sup> There is thus a homiletic quality to Ludolph’s presentation of this divine/human drama.<sup>16</sup> His style is foreign to readers today, but Conway’s description of it is illuminating:

The nearest formal analogy is perhaps that of a musical work in which a theme is stated, and some of its permutations and combinations are explored, then the whole movement goes into a development of primary and secondary themes alike, allowing all the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and tonal implications of the themes to be drawn out, then moving to a recapitulation of the material originally stated, with perhaps a coda appended at the end.<sup>17</sup>

Each individual chapter of the work follows the traditional progression of *lectio–meditatio–oratio*, although not always in a systematic way. Ludolph begins with an examination of the literal meaning of the passage under consideration; this examination may include historical, legal, or geographical background material. There follows a meditation on the moral and/or mystical implications of the text, which involves the etymology of names, symbolic meanings of the characters, places, and objects connected with the event, associations with the liturgy, and moral applications to readers of various kinds. The chapter concludes with a prayer, evidently written by Ludolph himself, which briefly summarizes the virtues and graces for which the reader should ask in light of the subject of the chapter. These prayers are succinct and lovely and have been published independently of the *Vita Christi*.<sup>18</sup> Ludolph does not address the fourth stage,

<sup>15</sup> Eric Saak, *High Way to Heaven: The Augustinian Platform between Reform and Reformation, 1292–1524* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 597.

<sup>16</sup> Bodenstedt notes that the *Vita Christi* was prescribed for public reading in the charterhouse of Basle (Bodenstedt, *The Vita Christi*, 53). His work was also cited frequently in collections of texts assembled to assist preachers.

<sup>17</sup> Conway, *The “Vita Christi,”* 25–26.

<sup>18</sup> See Bodenstedt, *The Vita Christi*, 126. She herself produced an English translation of these prayers: *Praying the Life of Christ. First English Translation of the Prayers Concluding the 181 Chapters of the Vita Christi of Ludolphus the Carthusian: The Quintessence of His Devout Meditations on the Life of Christ* (Salzburg: *Analecta Cartusiana* 15, 1973).

*contemplatio*; this is a gift of God, for which devout meditation on the life of Christ is a good preparation. At the very end of the book he urges the reader not to abandon the humanity of Christ even when attaining contemplation and holds up Saint Bernard as a model to emulate in this regard.

Ludolph follows a more definite pattern in his exposition of the passion: he presents a scene (*articulus*), draws lessons (*documenta*), invites application (*conformatio*), and concludes with a prayer (*oratio*). This pattern is found in Jordan of Quidlenburg's *Meditationes de Passione Christi*, although Jordan has the prayer first; much of Ludolph's material and many of the short prayers in these chapters are from Jordan.

Conway likens each chapter of the *Vita Christi* to a painting in a chapel depicting a particular scene from the life of Christ:

Surrounding each panel are the comments and precepts of the learned doctors of the Church, who appear to look upon the event with the reader (the analogous form of presentation in a chapel might be roundels portraying the Prophets and Fathers observing the scene and writing upon it). All this is drawn together by the author of the work, whose material gives the reader keys to understanding the meaning and symbolism of events contained in the Gospel.<sup>19</sup>

## Ludolph's Sources

A closer examination of each of these literary panels reveals the brushwork of many artists, both writers whom Ludolph cites and others whose work he incorporates without attribution.<sup>20</sup> He was not an original theologian, but he was very adept at weaving a wealth of material into one narrative.

<sup>19</sup> Conway, *The "Vita Christi,"* 147.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Baier has written a thorough analysis of the sources used by Ludolph in his chapters on the passion: *Untersuchungen zu den Passionsbetrachtungen in der Vita Christi des Ludolf vons Sachsen: Ein quellenkritischer Beitrag zu Leben und Werk Ludolfs und zur Geschichte der Passionstheologie* (Salzburg: *Analecta Cartusiana* 44, 1977).

Ludolph's primary source is the Bible: the *Vita* contains 840 citations from the Old Testament and 2,200 from the New Testament. In his meditation on the events of Christ's life, he gives pride of place to Matthew's gospel (122 pericopes), followed by Luke (85), Mark (51), and finally John (44). Ludolph offers a thorough spiritual commentary on the biblical events, drawn from a multitude of patristic and medieval authors.

### *Sources Cited by Ludolph*

The Paris edition of the *Vita Christi* published in 1865 tabulates sixty-two ecclesiastical and sixteen secular authors cited by Ludolph; this list is given in the appendix to this introduction. While Ludolph provided the names of authors, he omitted the titles of their works. Jean Dadré published an edition (Venice, 1581) in which he identified a great number of the titles. This translation of the *Vita Christi* is the first to identify correctly nearly all of Ludolph's citations.

By far the authors cited most frequently are John Chrysostom and Augustine, each nearly a thousand times. Then follow Jerome, Bede, Gregory, Bernard, Anselm, and Theophylact. Very often works by other authors were attributed to these men in the Middle Ages; for example, Anselm's *Meditations* were in fact written by several different people. Wherever the true authorship is known I provide this in the margin, but I retain the name given by Ludolph in the text. It has not been possible to locate all of Ludolph's citations; in some cases, the sentences may have come from glosses, and either the original work has been lost or the earlier attribution was erroneous. It is evident that Ludolph relied heavily on the *Catena Aurea* of Saint Thomas: it was his source for many quotations, including well over one hundred from the biblical commentaries of Theophylact, the Greek archbishop of Ohrid (d. 1107).<sup>21</sup> In some instances, a quotation

<sup>21</sup> Latin translations of the Greek fathers began to circulate in the West in the mid-twelfth century. Thomas Aquinas was commissioned by Pope Urban IV to compile a collection of patristic texts on the four gospels, including the Greek fathers whenever possible. Thomas had the commentaries of Theophylact translated, but this translation was lost; the only surviving texts were in the *Catena Aurea*.

has been located in the *Catena Aurea* but could not be traced back to its original source.

The citations from John Chrysostom come from several different sources. There are many excerpts from his biblical commentaries, but the vagaries of the Latin translations of these books in the Middle Ages create a challenge for anyone trying to find the original source. Around the year 420 Anianus of Celada translated Chrysostom's *Commentary on Matthew* into Latin, but only the first twenty-five of ninety homilies survive.<sup>22</sup> In 1151 Burgundius of Pisa produced a new Latin translation for Pope Eugenius III, which was difficult to find even in older times (this was the book that Aquinas said he would prefer having to all the beauty of Paris). Ludolph also relies heavily on a work of an Arian author in the fifth century attributed to Chrysostom, the *Opus Imperfectum*, which consists of fifty-five homilies on the first twenty-five chapters of Matthew. On occasion Chrysostom's name is attached to citations from the works of Chromatius of Aquileia or Peter Chrysologus, presumably because of the similarity of the three names in abbreviated form. Finally, it should be noted that many sermons were wrongly attributed to Chrysostom in the Middle Ages.

### *Sources not Cited by Ludolph*

Just as remarkable as the wealth of credited citations in the *Vita Christi* is the array of other texts for which Ludolph does not give a source. Medieval notions of intellectual property were very different from our own; Ludolph was not plagiarizing. Jean Mabillon called Saint Bernard "the last of the Fathers," and that seems to have been Ludolph's notion too.<sup>23</sup> Ludolph cites Bernard and his predecessors because they were thought to possess a higher degree of authority than later writers. Of course, Ludolph often cites later works unwittingly because they had come to be attributed to one or another

<sup>22</sup> It was later thought that only the first eight were genuine. These appear in Migne; the remaining chapters of Anianus's translation can be found in an edition of Chrysostom's works published in Basel in 1523.

<sup>23</sup> Mabillon's opinion is found in the Preface to his edition of Bernard's works (PL 182:26).

of the fathers. The matter is more complex in that authors Ludolph cites have often themselves used other authors without attribution, especially in the genre of lives of Christ. Because Ludolph's un-attributed sources are less familiar to the general reader than his patristic authors, some brief background on them may be helpful.

### *Glosses and postillae*

Glosses began in Ireland in the eighth century, when phrases from the writings of the fathers were written near texts from the psalms to assist meditation. Gradually the practice spread to other books of the Bible: passages from the fathers and ecclesiastical authorities were written in the margins or between the lines to clarify or explain matters and to provide spiritual interpretations from the fathers. The *Glossa ordinaria*, which became the fundamental text for the study of Scripture in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is credited to the circle of Anselm of Laon (d. 1117).<sup>24</sup> Its materials were drawn from patristic authors and Carolingian interpreters, especially Rabanus Maurus. Much was taken from existing glosses and *florilegia*, which were often used instead of the patristic texts. Ludolph occasionally mentions the gloss, but he also cites it without attribution. Some of his texts can be found in the *Manipulus florum*, a collection of quotations from the fathers and other authors arranged by subject, composed by Thomas of Ireland at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

The great contribution of the schoolmen to this biblical enterprise was the creation of *postillae*.<sup>25</sup> These contained material from the

<sup>24</sup> Migne offers two glosses in his collection, the first of which he wrongly attributes to Walafrid Strabo, ninth-century abbot and student of Rabanus Maurus. But then the gloss he attributes to Anselm was not Anselm's work, either. One principal difference is that the first gloss was marginal, the second interlinear; these two texts combined represent the *Glossa ordinaria*. For the complex history of glosses, see Beryl Smalley, *Gospels in the Schools, c. 1100–1250* (London: Bloomsbury, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> The etymology of the word is uncertain, but may have been an abbreviation for *post illa verba* ("after those words"). The *postilla* had the biblical text and patristic interpretations from fathers and glosses, but also exegetical commentaries from the 12th–13th centuries.

fathers and glosses but also offered theological and moral commentaries on the text drawn from the principal exegetes of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Two noteworthy *postillae* were composed in the thirteenth century by the Dominican Hugh of Saint-Cher and the Franciscan Alexander of Hales. Ludolph's contemporary, the Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra, produced a *postilla* of the entire Bible that emphasized the literal sense of Scripture and incorporated material from his study of Hebrew. The *Glossa ordinaria* and the *Postilla* of Nicholas were often published together. Ludolph relies heavily on the works of Gorran and Lyra, who in turn often cite texts of the *Glossa ordinaria* not found in Migne.

### *Gospel Commentaries*

Along with glosses, the twelfth century also witnessed the emergence of biblical commentaries; these proved very useful to Ludolph. The first was written by a Premonstratensian canon, Zachary of Besançon, around 1145. Entitled *In unum ex quatuor* ("Into one from four"), it uses as its biblical text a sixth-century Latin translation by Victor of Capua of an earlier Gospel Harmony, that is, a text that blended the four gospel narratives into one account. Victor was not certain whether the text he translated was the *Diatesseron* of Tatian, a disciple of Justin Martyr. Whatever its provenance, he brought the text into line with the Latin of the Vulgate and had a scribe produce a beautiful manuscript. Saint Boniface gave it to the Abbey of Fulda, where it served as a basis for several vernacular Gospel Harmonies. Ludolph includes over five hundred excerpts from *In unum ex quatuor* in his *Vita Christi*.

*In unum ex quatuor* was also one of the many sources used by Peter Comestor (d. 1178) for his *Historia Scholastica*, an account of history from the creation up to the end of the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>26</sup> Comestor was a student of Peter Lombard, and toward the end of his life he became attached to the Abbey of St. Victor. Hugh of St. Victor was a strong advocate of the literal meaning of a biblical text; this fact prompted Comestor to undertake a historical approach. Some of his

<sup>26</sup> Comestor ("devourer") was a nickname given him because of his voracious appetite for knowledge.

sources for the literal meaning were liturgy, art, relics, and geography. The *Historia Scholastica* appears over a hundred times in Ludolph's work.

A contemporary of Peter Comestor, Peter the Chanter or Peter Cantor, thought that Comestor's *Historia* contained too many details and put too much emphasis on recent traditions, so he produced his own version of the *Super unum ex quatuor*, which Ludolph uses a few times and cites. But Cantor also produced a guide for moral behavior aimed primarily at religious, called the *Verbum abbreviatum*; this was a source for some of Ludolph's patristic citations.

### *The Scholastic Doctors*

Ludolph mentions Thomas Aquinas on a few occasions but otherwise makes no reference to him, Albert the Great, or Bonaventure, although he does draw on their writings. He takes many texts from their biblical commentaries, and the *Lignum vitae* of Bonaventure is cited over forty times. As was mentioned above, Ludolph relies heavily on the *Catena Aurea* of Aquinas. He also employs many of the teachings found in the *Summa*. A less-renowned Dominican theologian, Hugh of Ripelin (d. 1270), was the author of the *Compendium theologiae veritatis*, a theological handbook popular for centuries; its authorship was often credited to others. Ludolph has many excerpts from this book. Although Jacobus de Voragine (d. 1298), a Dominican contemporary of Aquinas and Bonaventure, was not a theologian, mention should be made of him. Ludolph used some material from his sermons, but more from his renowned collection of the lives of the saints, the *Golden Legend*.

### *Ludolph's Contemporaries*

Most of the material Ludolph uses from his contemporaries is taken from various meditations on the life and passion of Jesus, but there are two other noteworthy sources. The first is the *Horologium sapientiae* of Henry Suso, from which Ludolph borrows several passages. The other is a work called the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, which associates individual events in the lives of Christ and the

Virgin Mary with three prefigurations in the Old Testament. The text is written in rhyming couplets. Ludolph frequently uses this text and maintains its rhyme scheme in his prose work. In fact, some scholars have suggested that Ludolph himself was its author.

### *Lives of Christ*

The fourteenth century was the heyday of meditations on the life and passion of Christ, and several of them found their way into Ludolph's *Vita Christi*. Scholars disagree about when particular books were written and who was borrowing from whom, so the following chronology is tentative. However, given the way excerpts from all these various texts are woven through Ludolph's account, it seems likely that he was drawing on these other authors rather than vice versa.

The precursor in this genre was a book written in the mid-twelfth century by Aelred of Rievaulx for his sister, *De institutione inclusarum*.<sup>27</sup> Aelred's sister was an anchoress, and he wrote her a rule for the eremitical life. In the course of the book he invites her to enter into various scenes in the life of Christ. The following century saw the publication of Bonaventure's *Lignum vitae*, which urged the reader to picture a tree with twelve fruits; these are events in Christ's life, and as the reader meditates on each fruit he climbs the tree of Christ's cross. Three other thirteenth-century texts should be noted: the *Liber de Passionis* of the Cistercian Oglerius de Tridino, abbot of Locedio (d. 1214), a work later ascribed to Bernard; *De meditationis Christi Passionis per septem diei horas*, attributed to Bede; and the *Dialogus Beatae Mariae et Anselmi de Passione Domini*, in which Mary describes the events of her Son's passion to Anselm. The latter two works were probably written by Franciscans.

At the end of the thirteenth century or early in the fourteenth, an extremely influential life of Christ was written by a Franciscan, probably John de Caulibus: the *Meditationes vitae Christi*. It was composed for a Poor Clare, and the text invited the reader to place herself in

<sup>27</sup> This came to be known as "Meditation 15" by Anselm, and Ludolph credits Anselm when citing it.

various scenes in Christ's life. Its authorship came to be attributed to Bonaventure, and its translation into various languages made it one of the most popular spiritual books in the late Middle Ages. Ludolph relied heavily on this work, both in his own writing and in the passages he took from the *Vita Christi* of Michael de Massa.

Michael de Massa (d. 1337) wrote a life of Christ in which he drew on the *De meditationis Christi* of Ps-Bede, the *Liber de Passionis* of Ps-Bernard, the *Meditationes vitae Christi* of Ps-Bonaventure, and other authors as well.<sup>28</sup> (Ludolph's Prologue is taken largely from this work, so it was Michael, not Ludolph, who so deftly combined the works of several authors there.) Often the citations from these other sources in Ludolph come via Michael's book, but not always; it seems that Ludolph used both his book and the other works independently.

Also at some time in the fourteenth century two other books were written from which Ludolph freely and frequently drew. Both were by Augustinians: the *Explanatio Passionis Dominicae* of Henry of Friemar (d. 1340), and the *Meditationes de Passione Christi* of Jordan of Quedlinburg (d. 1380).<sup>29</sup> As will be seen in the text, especially in the chapters dealing with the passion, Ludolph incorporated much material from Michael de Massa, Henry of Friemar, and Jordan of Quedlinburg.

### Other Sources

A few other works used by Ludolph should be mentioned. One is the *Stimulus amoris*, or *Stimulus dilectionis*, of the twelfth-century Cistercian Eckbert of Schönau, which came to be known as "Meditation 9" of Anselm; Ludolph cites this nearly thirty times.

<sup>28</sup> Copies of this work are rare, but it is available online from the Bavarian State Library.

<sup>29</sup> Again, these works are scarce. The book by Henry of Friemar is available online from Villanova University, under the title *Passio Domini litteraliter et moraliter: ab Henrico de Firmatia explanata*. Jordan's writings are being prepared by Eric Saak for publication by Brill in the series Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions.

About forty *exempla* are scattered throughout the *Vita Christi*. These stories were drawn from legends, ancient pagan literature, and popular lore and were used to illustrate moral teachings. They circulated within monastic communities and were employed by the mendicant orders in their preaching endeavors. These *exempla* were gathered into collections; Ludolph drew on the collections available to him, and his book in turn became a resource for later such anthologies.

Ludolph occasionally includes geographical information about the Holy Land to help his readers understand the literal meaning of the text and also to facilitate their visualization of events. At times he has recourse to older chronicles, such as the *De locis sanctis* of Adamnan (d. 704), which was based on an account this monk received of a visit to the Holy Land by Bishop Arculf around 680. An abridgement of this work under the same name was composed by Bede. But Ludolph also relies on more recent information, primarily taken from Burchard of Sion's *Descriptio terrae sanctae* written in 1285.

As the appendix indicates, Ludolph quoted a number of ancient non-Christian authors, but none so frequently as Seneca, whom he cites well over sixty times. Seneca's reputation reached its pinnacle in the Middle Ages, when he was considered almost a Christian. Anthologies of his writings also existed, one produced in the sixth century by Martin of Braga, the *Formula honestae vitae*. Another work, *de Moribus*, was ascribed wrongly to Martin, and its author is now known as Ps-Seneca. Ludolph also attributes to Seneca the sayings of Publilius Syrus, a slave in the first century BC who organized a collection of sayings popular in the Middle Ages.

## This Translation

There is no critical edition of the *Vita Christi*. In the opinion of James Hogg, who has devoted his life to publishing works by and about Carthusians, one is not likely to be prepared because of the vast number of extant manuscripts and extracts.<sup>30</sup> The text used for

<sup>30</sup> *Ludolphus the Carthusian Vita Christi Introductory Volume* (Salzburg: *Analecta Cartusiana* 241, 2007), 177.

this translation is the four-volume edition published in 1870, but I consulted older printed versions as well, including one printed at Strasbourg in 1474, the second oldest printed edition, which may have been made from the autograph text.<sup>31</sup> I have translated every sentence of Ludolph's work, although on a few occasions what he wrote as an aside has been relegated to a footnote. Occasionally a word or phrase from the Latin has been included marginally to help the reader understand Ludolph's meaning; sometimes, too, this has been done when there is a play on words or rhyme. Ludolph's style is somewhat repetitive (intentionally so, given the book's intended purpose for meditation), and his sentences can be lengthy and convoluted. My intent has been to convey as accurately as possible in ordinary English what Ludolph wrote. The experience of the reader of this text should be similar to that enjoyed by its original intended audience—people from all walks of life, possessing varying degrees of theological background. While I hope that this translation will be of service to scholars, I have produced it with the general reader in mind. For this reason, I provide explanatory footnotes when these help a modern reader understand the allusions of a fourteenth-century author.

Biblical citations are based on the Challoner revision of the Douay-Rheims translation of the Latin Vulgate, the text customarily used by Ludolph.<sup>32</sup> Often his interpretations are dependent on the Vulgate, which differs somewhat from the original Greek and Hebrew, as well as from modern English translations made from these languages. Occasionally a text differs from the Vulgate, and this is noted. Some of Ludolph's sources used Latin translations of the *Diatessaron*, and Ludolph himself may have done so. Gilles Quispel has proposed that a number of Ludolph's biblical texts came from such a source, but there is scholarly disagreement on the matter; in this edition, the

<sup>31</sup> L. M. Rigollot, *Ludolphus de Saxonia: "Vita Iesu Christi"* (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1870). The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, possesses a copy of the 1474 edition, which was printed at the charterhouse where Ludolph spent his last years.

<sup>32</sup> The numbering of the psalms is that of the Vulgate, which follows the Greek Septuagint.

verses identified by Quispel are given in bold print with a note that the words may come from a Latin *Diatessaron*.<sup>33</sup>

There is one area where contemporary sensibilities have been taken into account in this translation: the many references to *the Jews*. Both Ludolph and his sources repeatedly refer to Christ's enemies in this way, especially in the chapters on the passion. The fourteenth century did witness increased hostility to the Jewish people, but other reasons may have been at work as well. Erik Saak suggests that one motive for this practice in the stories of the passion is that they were written in part to provide a spur to ethical living. While "the Jews" are frequently presented in a bad light, the authors of such books (including Ludolph) want to connect their behavior with that of their contemporaries who were considered to be bad Christians: heretics, Simoniacs, and hypocrites. The texts were a mirror held up, rhetorically equating the reader with the text's antagonists, the Jews.<sup>34</sup> We should be on guard against reading back into the distant past more recent patterns of anti-Semitism. However, while there are some passages in Ludolph's book where "the Jews" as a collective must be retained in order to be faithful to his text (as, for example, when he contrasts the Jews with Gentile believers), whenever he uses the word to mean Jesus' enemies among the Jewish people and their leaders, the English translation renders it accordingly.

There is a school of thought in some translation circles that the same word in the original language must always be translated by the same word in the receptor language. That principle has not been followed here, because a word can have several different meanings in Latin, often suggested by context, and different words can justifiably be translated by the same word in English. The aim has been to provide a readable version of a great spiritual work, not the equally laudable aim of creating a critical, scholarly translation of an ancient text. Mention should be made of one word where it was felt necessary to have two English words serve: *salus*, which can mean

<sup>33</sup> Gilles Quispel, *Tatian and the Gospel of Thomas: Studies in the History of the Western Diatessaron* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1975).

<sup>34</sup> See Saak, *High Way*, 554–58.

“health,” “prosperity,” “safety,” or “salvation.” Ludolph uses this word and its variants when describing the healing miracles of Jesus, and it is clear from the context that he understands the word to refer both to the physical state of the individual and to salvation in a theological sense. In this translation, the word is translated by *health/salvation*.

## Conclusion

The *Vita Christi* of Ludolph is one of the most comprehensive and influential versions of the late medieval genre of a meditated life of Christ. An English translation of this seminal work will be useful to students of medieval history and spirituality. Given the tremendous advances in biblical exegesis, theology, history, and anthropology since the fourteenth century, what does it offer the ordinary Christian seeking spiritual nourishment? José García de Castro Valdés, a Spanish Jesuit, has recently suggested three qualities of this spiritual classic that give it a perennial value: he calls it prophetic, sapiential, and mystagogical. The *Vita Christi* is *prophetic*: in the face of the multiple programs in contemporary culture that guarantee happiness and even salvation, the *Vita* proposes the poor, humble humanity of Christ as the center of our human existence. It is *sapiential*: even with the cultural and linguistic limitations inherent in a text from six centuries ago, its message transcends the historical, exegetical ambience of the past to speak directly to the heart, inviting the reader to experience an encounter with the living Christ. Finally, it is *mystagogical*: the *Life of Jesus Christ* is above all a *life*; it challenges us to plunge deeply into the mystery of Christ’s life as our own. This mystery is nothing less than the revelation of the Father in Christ and the power of that revelation to transform us by the love of the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> José García de Castro Valdés, “La *Vita Christi* de Ludolfo de Sajonia (+1377) e Ignacio de Loyola (+1556): A propósito de un gran libro,” *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 86, no. 338 (Madrid: Comillas, 2011): 545.

## Appendix

### Authors Cited by Ludolph

This list is given in the Rigollot edition of the *Vita Christi* published in 1865 (Paris: Victor Palmé). Bodenstedt points out that it omits Plato, Ptolemy, Quintilian, and the authors of the *Evangelium Nazaraeorum*, the *Itinerarium Clementis*, the *Passio Anastasiae*, and the *Vita St. Columbani* (Bodenstedt, *Vita Christi*, 24 n. 1). It also does not include the many authors Ludolph quotes without attribution.

#### *Ecclesiastical Authors*

Alain of Lille	Gregory the Great
Alcuin	Haymo
Ambrose	Hegesippus
Anselm	Hilary
Athanasius	Hildebert of Lavardin
Augustine	Hugh of St. Victor
Basil	Ignatius of Antioch
Bede	Innocent III
Bernard	Isaac Abbas
Boethius	Isidore
Bridget of Sweden	Jerome
Cassian	John Abbas
Cassiodorus	John Damascene
Chrysostom	Leo the Great
Cyprian	Maximus of Turin
Cyril of Alexandria	Nicholas III
Dionysius the Areopagite	Origen
Ephrem	Papias
Epiphanius	Paulinus of Nola
Eusebius of Caesarea	Peter of Blois
Fulgentius	Peter Cantor
Gennadius	Peter Chrysologus
Greek catenae	Peter Comestor
Gregory Nazianzen	Peter Damian
Gregory of Nyssa	Peter Lombard

Prosper  
Rabanus  
Remigius  
Richard of St. Victor  
Rupert of Deutz  
Sedulius

Severianus  
Sulpicius of Jerusalem  
Theophilus  
Theophylact  
Thomas Aquinas

*Secular Authors*

Anaxagoras  
Aristotle  
Cato  
Cicero  
Hippocrates  
Horace  
Josephus  
Juvenal

Lucan  
Ovid  
Priscian  
Sallust  
Seneca  
Valerius Maximus  
Virgil



# *The Life of Jesus Christ*

## PART ONE



# Prologue<sup>1</sup>

*\*For other foundation no man can lay, the apostle says, but that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus.\* Augustine tells us that God is the plenitude of abundance and we are an abyss of need, and God's goodness is such that nothing can go well when we turn away from him.\* Because this is so, you must not forsake this foundation if you want to escape the ruin caused by your failings and replenish your spirit; here you will find every kind of remedy for your needs.\**

**\*R 1**

\*1 Cor 3:11

\*Solil 1.3 approx;  
PL 32:870;  
De natura boni 7;  
PL 42:554

\*Massa; Guigo 2.1

*\*First, anyone who wishes to lay down the burden of sins and attain peace of heart should heed God's gracious invitation addressed to sinners, "Come to me all you that labor with the toil of vices and are burdened with the baggage of your sins, and I will refresh you by healing and reviving you; and you shall find rest to your souls\* here and hereafter." Listen, patient, to your loving and devoted physician; come to him with*

**\*R 2**

\*Matt 11:28-29

<sup>1</sup> Ludolph's Prologue consists largely of excerpts from the *Vita Christi* of Michael de Massa, who in turn drew on the works of other writers, especially the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* of John de Caulibus (MVC) and the *De exterioris et interioris hominis* by David of Augsburg. The first several pages are from the *De contemplatione* by the Carthusian Guigo de Ponte (English translation: Dennis Martin, *Carthusian Spirituality* [New York: Paulist Press, 1997]). This combination of perspectives shapes Ludolph's characteristic approach to meditating on the life of Christ: from Guigo, meditation as a path to contemplation; from the MVC, the role of the senses and imagination; from David, the moral implications of Christ's behavior.

heartfelt contrition, sincere confession, and the firm intention to avoid evil and do good.\*

\**Massa; Guigo 2.1*

Next, the sinner who already faithfully believes in Christ and has been reconciled to him through penance should strive to stay close to this physician by devoutly meditating on his most holy life as much as possible. But take care to do this with deliberation and not hurry through the reading of Christ's life; rather, take a small selection in turn each day. With such devout reflections you can celebrate a daily Sabbath for Christ—your thoughts, feelings, prayers, praises, and all of your daily work will lead to this, and you will find delight in it. Here you will find a respite from the din of distractions and worldly preoccupations, and you will enjoy sweet repose. Wherever you may be, return often here; this is a sure and holy refuge to protect you from the manifold varieties of human weakness that constantly attack God's servants.\*

\**Massa; Guigo 2.1*

Frequently consider the major events in Christ's life: his incarnation, birth, circumcision, epiphany, presentation in the temple, passion, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Holy Spirit, and second coming as Judge. Do this with an eye to definite spiritual recollection, self-discipline, and consolation. Meditate on the life of Christ with a thirst to put into practice what you read there—it does little good to read unless you seek to imitate. Bernard asks, "What does it profit you to read repeatedly the Savior's good name in books, unless you are trying to be good in your conduct?"\* And Chrysostom writes, "Whoever reads about God wants to find God. Let us hasten to live in a way worthy of God. Our good behavior will be like a lamp shining before the eyes of our heart, showing us the way of truth."\*

\*SC 14.8;  
PL 183:843B;  
SB 1:81

\*Chrysostom,  
Ps 45:5; PG 59:453;  
*Massa; Guigo 2.1*

\***R 3**

\*There are many reasons that this way of living should be a sinner's greatest aspiration. First, for the forgiveness of sins: when we judge ourselves, accuse ourselves in confession, and freely undertake penance,

we are already delivered in no small measure from the squalor of sin; we walk attentively with God and are meditating in the aforesaid manner. *For our God is a consuming fire,\** purifying those who cling to him of their sins. Second, for enlightenment: the one who comes to our aid is *a light shining in the darkness.\** Those who are illumined by this light learn to set proper priorities, giving themselves first to Christ and then to godly concerns: their own, their neighbor's, and those of the world. Third, for the gift of tears: these are so necessary for a sinner in this miserable valley. Christ, who is *the fountain of gardens and the well of living waters,\** customarily gives these tears to one who stays close to him.\*

\*Heb 12:29

\*John 1:5

\*Song 4:15

\*Massa; Guigo 2.2

Fourth, for renewal after the sinful lapses of daily life: the Lord always lifts up those who cling to him, as he says, *Make a brazen serpent, and set it up for a sign: whosoever being struck shall look on it, shall live.\** Fifth, because of the sweet and longed-for taste this practice holds for those who follow it, as the psalmist says: *O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet.\** Sixth, for the knowledge of the Father's majesty, which can be had only through Christ, as he himself teaches, *Neither does any one know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal him.\** Seventh, for the sure deliverance from this world's dangers that it offers: faithful sinners who daily welcome Christ into their hearts and make a bower for him from these sweet meditations will in turn be sought out and welcomed by Christ after death. What they longed for and grew accustomed to here below they will enjoy forever: life with Christ.\*

\*Num 21:8

\*Ps 33:9

\*Matt 11:27

\*Massa; Guigo 2.2

\*This is a blessed, well-irrigated way of life; it purifies and renews sinners who cling to it, making them fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. To live like this is sweet and lovely: *her conversation has no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness, but joy and gladness.\** This food is so agree-

\*R 4

\*Wis 8:16

able and delicious that once a loving heart has tasted it, all other practices will seem bland. It nourishes and refreshes, for, as Ambrose observes, those who receive Christ into their inner dwelling feed on the greatest delights and abundant pleasures.\* It is the consolation of the solitary, for whom it is the best of companions, giving joy, comfort, and solace; for the sinner it is *a tower of strength against the face of the enemy*.\* This way of life offers an easy and thorough way to contemplate the Creator—a duty from which no one may excuse oneself—because there is no faster way to reach the heights of God’s majesty than by meditating on the life of our Redeemer. Everyone can follow this practice, the young beginner as well as those advanced in the spiritual life, and all find here a pleasant home in which to nest like a dove, and a hiding place for the offspring of their chaste love.\*

\*Exp Luke 5.16;  
PL 15:1640B;  
CL 14:140

\*Ps 60:4

\**Massa; Guigo 2.3*

This meditation makes the saints loving, solicitous, and disposed kindly to those who invoke them because of the joy we share with them. For example, could the Blessed Virgin, the mother of mercy, tenderness, and grace, possibly despise you or turn her eyes from you, sinner though you are, when she sees you take her son—whom she loves above all—into your arms and hold him close to your breast, and this not just once a day, but frequently? Could she possibly desert you when she sees you holding her son each and every day, attending to every detail of his life, and offering him every service of devotion and affection? Certainly not. So it is with the other saints: they look gladly on those with whom God is pleased to dwell; this way of life turns their clients into their companions, because it is their way of life, too. Clearly this is the life of Christ’s mother, who served him and cared for him for so many years. This is the life of the apostles, his intimate companions, who persevered faithfully with him. This is the life of the heavenly citizens who enjoy Christ, marvel at his wondrous works, and reverently attend him for all eternity.\*

\**Massa; Guigo 2.4*

Here we find what is truly the best part: to sit at the feet of Christ and listen to his words. Rightly, it is not taken away from one who by grace possesses it, for this is the reward promised to the good and faithful servant: a life begun here on earth but fulfilled in eternity. No tongue can sufficiently praise this way of life, which is truly good, holy, and more eminent than any other: it marks the beginning of that profound contemplation we long for in the angelic, eternal life of our true homeland. What can compare with abiding continually with Christ, *on whom the angels desire to look?*\* If you wish to reign with Christ forever, begin to reign with him now; do not abandon him, for to serve him is to reign.\*

\*1 Pet 1:12

\*Massa; Guigo 2.3

**\*R 5**

\*Draw near to him who descends from the bosom of the Father into the Virgin's womb. Come forward with pure faith as another witness with the angel to his holy conception. Rejoice with the Virgin Mother, who is made fruitful for your sake. Be present at his birth and circumcision as a good provider with Joseph. Go with the magi to Bethlehem and adore the infant king. Help his parents carry Jesus when they present him in the temple. In company with the apostles, follow the loving shepherd about as he performs remarkable miracles. Be present as he dies, sharing in the sorrows of his Blessed Mother and John and consoling them; with devout curiosity touch and caress each wound of the Savior, who died for you. Search for the risen one with Mary Magdalen until you deserve to find him. Marvel at his glorious ascension into heaven as if you were standing among the apostles on Mount Olivet. Sit with the apostles in conclave, removed from all external distractions, so that you may deserve to be clothed from on high with the power of the Holy Spirit. If you have followed him for a little while on earth with a godly, humble, and loving heart, he in turn will raise you up to sit with him at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, just as he promised the faithful sinner who clings to him: *If any man minister*

to me, let him follow me: and where I am, there also shall my minister be.\*

\*John 12:26;  
Massa; Guigo 2.3

Faithful sinners who lovingly embrace this way of life should never doubt that Christ adopts them as daughters and sons. As it says in the book of Proverbs, *I love them that love me*.\* Bernard writes, "God cannot please the person who is not pleasing to him; for if God is pleasing to someone, that one cannot displease God."\* Let faithful sinners prudently beware of relying on their own merits, no matter what their condition; rather, let them approach the Lord to beg for alms with empty hands, conscious that they are merely paupers, possessing nothing. But do not do this out of false humility, concealing merits; rather, know with utter certainty that *in your sight no man living shall be justified*.\*

\*Prov 8:17

\*SC 24.8;  
PL 183:899A;  
SB 1:162

\*Ps 142:2

The fact is, we cannot render an account for even a single thought should God choose to summon us to Judgment. Those who throw themselves devoutly and with reverent fear upon the good God who calls sinners will not be considered presumptuous. It is just like beggars in this world: they are thought to be more wretched, not more admirable, in proportion to their need; they are not held to be presumptuous or proud—on the contrary, generous benefactors view them with greater pity.\*

\*Massa; Guigo  
2.4–5

\*R 6

\*Saint Bernard meditated continually, collecting a bundle of myrrh, that is, an accumulation of bitter recollections from the life and sufferings of Christ, which he pressed between his breasts, that is, in his affectionate heart. He advises us,

If you are wise, you will imitate the prudent bride and never let this precious bundle of myrrh be removed from your bosom for even an hour. Preserve without fail the memory of those bitter trials he endured for you, and meditate upon them frequently. Then you too can say, *A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, he shall abide between my breasts*.\* As for me, friends, I have been conscious of my

\*Song 1:12

lack of merits from the early days of my conversion, so I have undertaken to collect a bundle from my Lord's anxieties and sufferings and hold it close to my breast. First there were the privations in his infancy; then his labors in preaching, his weariness in journeying, his vigils in praying, his temptations in fasting, his tears in compassion, his disputes in teaching; finally peril from false friends, insults, spitting, blows, mockery, and scorn; the nails and other torments that fill the pages of the gospel like trees in a forest—and all for the salvation of our race.

Among the many twigs of this fragrant bouquet we should not overlook the myrrh he tasted upon the cross and that which was used to prepare him for burial. In the first he took upon himself the bitterness of our sins, and in the second he proclaimed the future incorruption of our bodies: *"I shall publish the memory of the abundance of your sweetness\* as long as I live; your justifications and mercies I will never forget: for by them you have given me life."*\*

\*Ps 144:7

\*Ps 118:93

I have said that wisdom is to be found in meditating on these things. They are for me the source of perfect righteousness, fullness of knowledge, riches of salvation, and abundance of merit. Sometimes I take from them a bitter but healing tonic; at other times, a sweet and consoling ointment. These events support me in times of trial and humble me in times of prosperity. They offer sure guidance to one who travels on the king's way among the joys and sorrows of this life, warding off impending evils on every side. They draw to me the favor of the world's Judge, whom, despite his awesome powers, they describe as meek and humble; though he is beyond the reach of princes and fearful to kings, they portray him as kind and easily pleased. As you know, such thoughts are often in my mouth, and God knows that they are always in my heart—and it is clear that they are certainly no strangers to my pen. They express for me the most sublime philosophy: *to know Jesus*

\*1 Cor 2:2

*Christ, and him crucified.\** Dear friends, you must gather this prized bundle for yourselves.

Recall that Simeon took him in his arms; that Mary bore him in her womb, cradled him on her lap, and like a bride placed him between her breasts. I imagine that Joseph dandled him on his knees and smiled often at him. All these people kept Christ before them, not behind them. They are your models: do as they did. If you carry him in such a way that your eyes can rest on him, it is certain that the sight of the Lord's sufferings will make your own much lighter.\*

\*SC 43.2–5;  
PL 183:994B;  
SB 2:42–44;  
*Massa*

Because most people give little thought to these matters, they tire quickly; if they reflected on them, they would not grow weary of doing good.

## Benefits of Meditating on the Life of Christ

\*R 7

\*The blessed virgin Cecilia was accustomed to read the life of Christ.<sup>2</sup> For among the many words in praise of her virtues and renown, it is said that she always carried a copy of the gospels close to her heart. I understand this to mean that from among the events of the life of Christ preserved in the gospels, she had chosen the ones that most moved her, and she meditated on these day and night with a pure and undivided heart, giving them particular and fervent attention. When she finished reading she would start again, pondering his deeds with sweet and gentle enjoyment and gathering them into her heart for conscientious consideration.\*

\**Massa*;  
*MVC Prol*;  
*CM 153:7*

<sup>2</sup> The following pages incorporate almost the entire Prologue of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* by the Franciscan John de Caulibus, a work long attributed to Saint Bonaventure; Ludolph removed specifically Franciscan references. English translation: Isa Ragusa and Rosalie Green, *Meditations on the Life of Christ* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

I encourage you to do the same. Of all the many kinds of spiritual exercise, I believe this is the one that is the most necessary, the most beneficial, and the one that can lead you to the greatest heights. The life of our Lord Jesus Christ was perfect and blameless—you will find no better manual to help you deal with empty and passing delights, tribulation, adversity, vices, or temptations of enemies. Through frequent and assiduous meditation on his life, the soul learns to know him, to love him, and to have confidence in him; in this way we can resolutely resist foolish and passing things, scorning them and treating them with contempt. It is clear that Saint Cecilia's heart was so filled with the life of Christ that there was no room for trivial concerns. As she processed in on her wedding day, surrounded by the many distracting ceremonies of such an occasion, her heart was steadfast. As the organ sounded, she sang to God alone, *Let my heart be undefiled, that I may not be confounded.*\*

\*Ps 118:80; *Massa*;  
*MVC Prol*;  
*CM 153:7*

Meditation on Christ's life also fortifies us to face tribulation and adversity, so that we feel and fear them less. This is shown by the martyrs, as Bernard teaches:

Therefore they hear the words, *My dove in the clefts of the rock,*\* because all their devotion is centered on the wounds of Christ, and they dwell there continually by constant meditation. From these wounds flows strength for martyrdom; from them comes immense trust in the Most High. Our gentle commander wants his loyal soldiers to lift up their faces and eyes to his wounds; these emblems will strengthen their resolve and teach them how to bear up more courageously. While gazing upon the Lord's wounds, they will not feel their own. The martyrs leap for joy and triumph even as their bodies are being mangled and the sword slashes their sides; they watch the holy blood stream from them not merely bravely, but joyfully.

\*Song 2:14

Where is the martyr's soul at that moment? In a safe place, surely; in the rock, surely; in Christ's

heart, surely; without doubt, his wounds are open to receive them. Had they been focusing only on their own heart, they would have felt the piercing steel and been unable to bear the pain; they would have given in and denied the faith. But now that they dwell in the rock, is it any wonder that they stand firm like a rock? Nor should we marvel that, exiled from the body, they do not feel bodily pains. Lack of feeling does not do this, love does; feelings are leashed, not lost; pain is not banished, but scorned. The martyr's strength comes from the rock.\*

\*SC 51.7-8;  
PL 183:1074A;  
SB 2:152-53;  
*Massa*

**\*R 8**

\*Confessors of the faith and others also learn from Christ's life not only to put up with their labors, trials, and infirmities but to do so cheerfully. By virtue of their loving meditation on the life and sufferings of Christ, their souls do not seem to be in their own bodies but in Christ. A person is prepared for the temptations and vices of the enemy so that it is not possible to err about what to do or avoid: in Christ's life is found the perfection of all virtues. Nowhere can you find the instruction and examples of poverty, humility, charity, gentleness, obedience, patience, and the other virtues to match the virtues in the life of Christ.\*

\**Massa*

Indeed, whatever virtues the church possesses she has received from Christ himself by means of the lessons of his deeds. Bernard asks,

What do you know about virtues, if you are ignorant of Christ, who is the virtue of God? Where, I ask, is true prudence, except in Christ's teaching? Where is true justice, except in Christ's mercy? Where is true temperance, except in Christ's life? Where is true fortitude, except in Christ's passion? Only those are prudent who have learned his doctrine, only those are just who have had their sins pardoned by his mercy, only those are temperate

who strive to imitate his life, only those are courageous who firmly hold onto his lessons of wisdom and patience in trying times. You will labor in vain to acquire virtues if you hope to find them apart from the Lord of virtues, whose doctrine is the seedbed of prudence, whose mercy is the work of justice, whose life is the mirror of temperance, and whose death is the emblem of fortitude.\*

\*SC 22.11;  
PL 184:883D;  
SB 1:137

Gregory the Great writes, "Why does the bride call her beloved not myrrh, but a *bundle* of myrrh, unless it be that the holy soul, while devoutly pondering the life of Christ from every angle, is gathering together virtues of all sorts from him? By imitating these she can counter her faults and make for herself a bundle that prevents the everlasting putrefaction of the flesh."\*

And Augustine observes,

\*Robert of  
Tombelaine,  
Exp in Cant 1.33;  
PL 79:493A

Although God heals souls in all sorts of ways through many gracious circumstances ordained by his marvelous wisdom, he has chosen none better than the Wisdom of God himself, that is, the only-begotten Son, consubstantial and coeternal with the Father, who deigned to take on our human nature completely: *And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*.\*

\*John 1:14

People were avidly seeking riches and paying court to selfish desires, and he chose to be poor; they coveted dignities and honors, and he refused to be made a king; they thought earthly progeny a great blessing, and he had no wife and family; they arrogantly shrank from insults, and he bore every kind of outrage. They judged injustices to be intolerable, but what is a greater injustice than the condemnation of the just and innocent one? They viewed bodily punishment with horror; he was scourged and tortured in many ways. They were afraid to die; he was sentenced to death. They held crucifixion to be the most shameful way to perish;

he was crucified. He made everything that we are afraid to be deprived of worthless by depriving himself of it, and he overcame everything we are afraid to face by embracing it. Sin is simply wanting what he rejected or avoiding what he accepted.\*

\*De vera religione  
16:30–31;  
PL 34:134;  
CL 32:205–6;  
*Massa*

**\*R 9**

\*So Christ's whole earthly life, which he chose to assume for us, offers instruction for our behavior. Again, Augustine: "We judge that people these days are not worthy of imitation. If you agree, apply your mind to the God who became Man to teach men and women how to live. Recall the words of John, *he that says he abides in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked*,"\* and you will not lack someone to follow, because Christ's every action was done for our instruction. We encounter the same lesson again in the Lord's passion: *For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also.*"\* Bede says, "Those who claim they abide in Christ should walk as he walked: they should not amass earthly goods or run after perishable wealth; they should flee honors and welcome contempt in this world for the sake of heavenly glory; they should help everyone gladly; they should injure no one and bear injuries from others patiently, even asking the Lord to pardon them; they should always seek the Creator's glory and never their own, and encourage their companions to pursue noble goals. To do things like this is what it means to follow in Christ's footsteps."\*

\*1 John 2:6

\*John 13:15;  
Sermo 351.4.11;  
PL 39:1547

\*Ps-Bede, Hom  
2.22; PL 94:252A

In the knowledge of Christ we possess salvation and all wisdom, as Ambrose writes: "We have all things in Christ, and Christ is everything to us. If you seek someone to heal your wounds, he is a physician; if you are burning with fever, he is a fountain; if you are weighed down by iniquity, he is justice; if you need help, he is strength; if you fear death, he is life; if you shun the darkness, he is light; if you desire heaven, he is the way; if you hunger, he is food."\* An old saying expresses this truth very well:

\*De virginitate  
16.99; PL 16:291C

If you do not know Christ, other knowledge is vain;  
If you know Christ well, this alone is all gain.<sup>3</sup>

Would that the worldly-wise might understand, and so exchange their empty knowledge for this!

Whoever follows Christ cannot go astray or be deceived: when we meditate frequently on his life, our heart is refreshed, enkindled, and divinely illuminated to imitate and obtain his virtues. Indeed, many who are simple and illiterate have come to know great and profound mysteries of God because they have found here an anointing that gradually purifies and elevates the spirit, teaching all things.\*

\*In whatever concerns virtue and right conduct, always hold up before you that bright mirror and model of all holiness, the life and behavior of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.<sup>4</sup> He was sent from heaven for our sake, to blaze the trail of virtue, to give us by his example the law of life and discipline, and to instruct us in his person. We had been created in his image, but we defiled that image by sin; however, we can restore that image by imitating his virtues. The more you strive to conform yourself to him by following his example, the closer you will be to him in heaven and the more of his glory you will share.\*

\*Massa; MVC  
Prol; CM 153:9  
\*R 10

\*Massa;  
David 1.20

<sup>3</sup> *Hoc est nescire, sine Christo plurima scire; Si Christum bene scis, satis est; si cetera, nescis.* The origin of this couplet is unknown, but it was popular from the Middle Ages on, sometimes being used as an epitaph. The idea can be traced back to Augustine's *Confessions*: "Surely someone is unhappy who knows all these things and does not know you, and the one who knows you is happy even without knowing all these other things" (Conf 5.4.7).

<sup>4</sup> Michael de Massa interpolates several passages here from book 1, chap. 20 of the *De exterioris et interioris hominis* by David of Augsburg, another work often attributed to Bonaventure. English translation: Dominic Devas, trans., *Spiritual Life and Progress by David of Augsburg* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1937).

## How to Meditate on the Life of Christ

As Christ's faithful follower, examine in turn each phase in Christ's life, study all his virtues, and seek to imitate them to the best of your ability. In your exterior and interior efforts, call to mind Christ's hardships and labors; if you are heavily burdened, run to him, the gentle father of the poor, and throw yourself upon him like a child in its mother's lap. Tell him everything, entrust everything to him, cast all your cares upon him—he will calm the storm and relieve you. Do not simply yearn for the Lord Jesus when you keep vigil, but as you lie on your bed lay your head on its resting place and imagine yourself reclining with John on Jesus' breast, and as you recline, nurse at that breast, and you will peacefully slumber and rest in him.\*

\**Massa*

In everything you say and do keep your eyes fixed on Jesus as your model: walking and standing, sitting and getting up, eating and drinking, speaking and keeping silence, alone or with others. In this way, you will grow to love him more, familiarity with him will increase your faith and grace, and you will become more perfect in virtue. Let this be your wisdom and your purpose: always to be thinking somehow about Jesus, so that you are striving to imitate him more closely or love him more deeply. You will use your time well by meditating on these subjects and devoting yourself to good and holy reflections about the Lord Jesus. By continually thinking about him,\* the mirror and model of all perfection, you will change your behavior to resemble his as you go about your business. The more frequently you engage in these meditations, the more familiar they will become to you: they will come into your mind more spontaneously and refresh your spirit more delightfully.\*

\**Massa*;  
*David 1.20*

\**Massa*

\***R 11**

\*You have seen to what an eminent position meditation on Christ's life leads. Now I would like to say

something about the meditations themselves; I will not treat everything written in the gospels but will pick out the more important events. Nor should you think that everything Jesus said and did, and upon which we can meditate, was written down. In order to make a greater impression on you I will describe events as they occurred, or might have occurred, employing imaginative representations that strike the mind in different ways. For we can consider, understand, and express the meaning of Sacred Scripture in as many ways as we find helpful, provided they are not contrary to the truth of life, justice, or doctrine; in other words, so long as they are not contrary to faith and morals.\*

*\*Massa; MVC  
Prol; CM 153:10*

However, if people assert something about God that seems unreliable to you because it is not in accord with natural reason, the moral law, faith, or Sacred Scripture, they sin by presumption. So you will find me saying the Lord Jesus, or other persons, said or did something; if this cannot be demonstrated from Scripture, you should consider what I say to be no more than a devout reflection. That is, take it as if I had said, "Imagine the good Lord Jesus as he says this, or does that," and so with the other characters. If you want to gain the greatest benefit from this exercise, put aside all other concerns and tasks, and with your whole heart strive with diligence, delight, and determination to be present when Jesus speaks and acts.\*

*\*Massa; MVC  
Prol; CM 153:10*

As you read the narrative, imagine you are seeing each event with your own eyes and hearing it with your own ears, because the sweetest thoughts are born of desire—and these are much more pleasing to the taste. Although these accounts describe events that occurred in the past, you must meditate upon them as if they were taking place now: there is no question but that you will savor them with greater pleasure. Read what once happened as if it were happening here and now. Put past deeds before your eyes as if they

were present; you will experience them more deeply and more happily.

**\*R 12**

\*This is why sometimes I describe the locations where events took place: when we read in the gospel that this or that action happened in a certain place, it is very helpful to know something about where it occurred. Christian churches all over the world never cease to unite themselves day and night with the Holy Land, where the good Jesus lived and which he illuminated by his preaching and consecrated by his precious blood. We find it pleasing to think about these places, but it would be even more delightful to visit them in person, there to ponder in our hearts how the Lord labored for our salvation in each different locale.\*

*\*Burchard  
3 approx*

Who can describe how the many devout pilgrims in the Holy Land travel from site to site, and with burning zeal kiss the ground and embrace the places where they hear that Jesus sat or performed some deed? Beating their breasts, weeping, groaning, and sighing by turns, they express outwardly in their bodies the devotion they doubtless feel in their hearts, and their emotion moves many to tears, even among the Saracens. What shall I say about the patriarch Jacob, or about Joseph and his brothers, who, although they could not dwell there in their lifetime, chose to be buried there after they died? What more? Well might we weep over the indifference of the Christian people in our time, who in spite of so many examples are slow to deliver the land Jesus Christ hallowed with his blood from the hands of the enemy.\*

*\*Burchard  
3-4 approx*

**\*R 13**

\*Take it as a general rule that wherever you do not find material for reflection in following a narrative, it suffices to picture in your mind's eye something the Lord Jesus said or did, and simply talk with him so that you might become more familiar with him. For it seems that greater sweetness and more devotion is to be had in this way; in fact, almost all the efficacy of

these reflections consists in always and everywhere attentively contemplating the deeds and behavior of Jesus. Picture him among his disciples and in the company of sinners, when he converses and preaches, when he walks and when he sits, when he sleeps and when he keeps vigil, when he eats and when he serves others, when he heals the sick and when he performs other miracles.\*

\**Massa; MVC 18;*  
*CM 153:93*

Ponder in your heart his conduct and his actions: how humbly he carried himself among the people and how gently he dealt with his disciples; how merciful he was to the poor, making himself like them in everything so that they seemed to be his special kin; how he despised or spurned no one, even the lepers; how he did not curry favor with the wealthy; how free he was of worldly cares, giving no thought to his bodily needs; how patient he was in the face of insults, and how meekly he responded to them; how he did not defend himself with biting and bitter retorts but instead countered malicious words with a humble response.\*

\**Massa;*  
*David 1.20*

Observe how suitably he acted in all things and how concerned he was for the salvation of souls, out of love for those for whom he was willing to die, how he made himself an example of all goodness, how compassionate he was with the afflicted, how he patiently bore with the imperfections of the sick and did not scorn sinners, how mercifully he welcomed the penitent, how obedient he was to his parents, and how promptly he served the needs of all. As he himself said, *I am in the midst of you, as he that serves*.\* See how he shunned all boasting and ostentation and avoided giving any cause for scandal, how sparingly he ate and drank, how modest he was in appearance, how dedicated to prayer, how attentive at vigils, how willing to endure labor and want, and how calm he remained in all circumstances. Similarly, as you hear or read about what Jesus said and did, meditate on the

\**Luke 22:27*

way in which he did everything, or might have done it in your estimation, because he who was the best and most perfect of us always acted in the best and most perfect way.\*

\**Massa;*

*David 1.20*

## What Jesus Looked Like

Jesus had a pleasing appearance and a gentle way of speaking, and he was kind in all he did. Above all contemplate his face, if you can picture it; this is probably the most difficult thing to do but is also perhaps the most pleasing. Let his countenance instruct you, and have recourse to it in the narratives that follow. If individual meditations are unclear or subjects for consideration are lacking, hasten back to picturing him, and it will suffice for you as regards what is written here. \*To help you see Christ's face and appearance, or indeed his complete figure, I would like to include something that you may find useful while meditating on the narrative of his deeds. It is said that the following document appears in annals of the Romans:

\*R 14

Jesus Christ is proclaimed to be a prophet of truth by the people. He is rather tall, with a venerable countenance that inspires either love or fear. His hair is the color of a ripe hazelnut; it hangs down straight to his ears, but below the ears it is wavy and curly, with a bluish sheen, and fans out on his shoulders. It is parted in two at the top of his head, as is customary for Nazarenes. His brow is smooth and very serene, his face without spot or wrinkle, with a slightly ruddy complexion. His nose and mouth are flawless. His beard is full and youthful, of the same color of his hair, not long, but forked at the chin. His aspect is grave and mature, his bluish-gray eyes changeable and bright. He is formidable when reprimanding, sweet and amiable

when teaching, and cheerful without being undignified. He sometimes weeps but never laughs. His stature is well developed and straight, and his hands and arms are beautiful to behold. His conversation is serious, reasonable, sparing, and modest.<sup>5</sup>

According to the description just given, he truly deserves to be called by the psalmist *beautiful above the sons of men*.\*

\*Ps 44:3; *Massa*

## The Excellence of the Gospels

\*According to Augustine, among the entire collection of divine records contained in Sacred Scripture, pride of place should be given to the gospels.\* For this reason, see to it that you always hold them in your hands and carry them in your heart—they will best illuminate for you the life and deeds of our Lord Jesus Christ, and all that pertains to your salvation. Chrysostom teaches that the gospels provide a summary of the perfections of our rational nature,\* and Jerome claims that in them we find the complete fulfillment of the Law and a digest of precepts and examples for life.\*

\*R 15

\*De cons 1.1;  
PL 34:1042;  
CS 43:1

\*Hom Matt 1.12;  
PG 57/58:20

\*Primasius, Com  
Ep S Pauli, Pref;  
PL 68:413D

<sup>5</sup> This description was probably written in Italy in the thirteenth or fourteenth century but purports to be a contemporary description of Jesus' appearance. The Byzantine historian Nicephorus Callistus (d. 1335) has a similar description, so it is possible that the Latin version was a translation from the Greek. Although Ludolph simply refers to it as a document from the annals of the Romans, it later came to be described as a letter from Publius Lentulus, governor of Judea before Pontius Pilate. No such person existed, nor was there a "Governor of Judea." In 1440 Lorenzo Valla demonstrated that the letter was spurious.

Chrysostom writes,

It would be wonderful if we had no need for the Scriptures because by the grace of the Spirit we were living rightly simply because the Spirit has written in our hearts the same doctrine recorded with ink on paper. But because we have lost the grace to act in this way, and also to help us anticipate future blessings, we should attend to what has been written down.\*

\*Hom Matt 1.2;  
PG 57/58:15

The Scriptures were not given to us simply for us to preserve them in books but so that we could engrave them on our hearts. For if the devil will not dare to approach a house in which the gospels are kept, much less will he, or any demons, or any sinful nature, ever touch or enter a soul that bears about with it the ideas contained in the gospels. Sanctify your soul, sanctify your body, by always having the words of the gospels on your lips and in your heart. Just as foul language soils us and opens the door to demons, so it is evident that spiritual reading sanctifies us and draws down divine grace upon us.\*

\*Hom John 32.3;  
PG 59:187

Beloved, let us devote ourselves to the Scriptures— if nothing else, let us assiduously study the gospels and have them always at hand. Once you open these books, provided you keep on to the end, you will hold worldly preoccupations in contempt and reject them. If you are wealthy, you will account riches as nothing; if you are poor, your poverty will not ruin you, you will not be grasping or avaricious. In fact, you will be greedy for more poverty and despise riches. If you act in this way, you will banish all wickedness. Many other benefits are to be gained, too many to be enumerated here; those who follow my counsel will learn them by experience.

Elsewhere Chrysostom says,

What equals the gospels in excellence? God himself descends to speak to us on earth and mortals are

raised up to heaven; human beings converse with angels and the other supernal powers. By virtue of the Gospel the ancient struggle is concluded: demons flee, death is destroyed, Paradise is opened, the curse is broken, sin is banished, error is repelled, truth returns, the word of mercy is sown everywhere and everywhere springs up, heavenly powers speak with us as friends, angels make frequent visitations to earth. In all of this, our assurance regarding the certainty of all future blessings is strengthened. For this reason, the gospels alone should truly be called *Good News*, because all other words are empty, promising good things only in this present life. That message first proclaimed by the fishermen can rightly be described as good tidings, since it was freely and generously given to us. We have received these tremendous promises not by the sweat of our brow, or hard work, or great torment, but simply because of God's great love for us.\*

\*Hom Matt 1.3;  
PG 57/58:15

And Augustine explains, "The word *Evangelium* in Latin means *good message* or *good proclamation*. The word can be used for any good news but is properly applied to the announcement of the Savior. Therefore, those who narrated the birth, words, and deeds of our Lord Jesus Christ are called *evangelists*."\*

\*Contra Faust 2.2;  
PL 42:210;  
CS 25:255

\*Before beginning to read the gospel stories themselves, you should note that each of the evangelists, guided by the Holy Spirit, sometimes anticipated events that came later, or recorded events omitted in earlier accounts, or repeated events related elsewhere to improve their narrative. Their intention was simply to record the Gospel story in the most beneficial way; as Augustine suggests, it is likely that each of the evangelists was careful to record the story in exactly the way God had inspired him.\*

\*R 16

Lest the devotion of the beginner be unduly troubled, in this presentation I have laid out the sequence of events in a way that fidelity to the course

\*De cons 1.2;  
PL 34:1044;  
CS 43:2

of events seemed to require. This does not mean that what follows is necessarily the actual, certain order in which these events took place, because such a definitive presentation is not possible. Be that as it may, in the gospels themselves you will learn the life story of the Word incarnate, what he commands and what he promises, in which you have the way, the truth, and the life. Study carefully Christ's example: from his life, you will see that you *can* live rightly; from his commandments, you will know *how* to live rightly; from his promises, you will *desire* to live rightly. With these three weapons you can repel our three enemies—impotence, ignorance, negligence. The one who chooses to remain ignorant will be ignored, the negligent person will be neglected, the one who feigns lack of ability will be cast out.\*

\*Zachary,  
Praef 3 approx;  
PL 186:39C–40A

\*R 17

\*So rouse yourself, O soul devoted to Christ! Be alert, Christian! Examine diligently, ponder attentively, tease out scrupulously every detail in the life of Jesus Christ, and follow in your Lord's footsteps. For your sake he came down to earth from his heavenly throne; for your own sake, flee earthly things and strive for those of heaven. If you find that the world is sweet, know that Christ is sweeter; if you find that the world is harsh, know that he endured all its pains for you. Arise and walk! Do not drag your feet on the path, lest you forfeit your place in your homeland.\*

\*LV Prol approx



*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, grant that I, a poor and weak sinner, may keep the eyes of my heart fixed on your life and deeds, and imitate you to the best of my ability. By this means enable me to attain perfect maturity and become a holy temple of the Lord. Shed upon my heart the light of your*

*grace: may it continually precede me and follow me so that, with you as my leader in all my ways, I may do all those things that are pleasing to you and avoid those that displease you. O Most High, I beseech you to direct all my thoughts, words, and deeds according to your law and your counsels; by doing your will in all things, may I deserve to be saved by you here and for all eternity. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 1

# The Eternal, Divine Generation of Christ

(John 1:1-5)

\*R 1

\*Thirsting to savor each precious drop of the good wine of the Gospel that the Lord Jesus has stored up till this time of grace, let us begin with his divine generation, which the fourth gospel treats. John introduced this theme and explained it fully so that the divinity of the Word would be manifest, especially in answer to certain heretics who claimed that Christ was only human and consequently denied that he was eternal; they taught that he came into being only when he was born and did not exist before Mary. John, therefore, begins with the eternal existence of the Word, who existed before his mother in his divine nature. This evangelist teaches five things about the divine Persons, which we will review in order.\*

\**Lyra John 1:1*

## The Eternal Generation of the Word

\*R 2

\**in principio*  
‡John 1:1

\*First he proclaims the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, saying, *In the beginning\* was the Word.‡* That is, the Word was in God himself, who is understood to be the ground of everything else. The first principle is necessarily the Word properly so called, as being in him of whom he is the Word. It is as if he were saying, "The Son was in the Father, co-eternal

with the Father. He did not begin to be in Mary, but *in the beginning*,\* that is, in the Father, who is the origin without origin, and the Son is the origin *from* the origin.”

\**in principio*

John calls the Son of God the *Word*; our Lord Jesus Christ is called the Son of God, and also the Word of God, and the Power and the Wisdom of God. These all say the same thing, because the realities are one and the same: Son, Word, Power, Wisdom.\*

\*Bruno John 1:1;  
PL 165:451B

But John says *Word*, not *Son*, because that name is more suitable in this context. Recall that a meaningful articulation is called a *word*; this is true broadly speaking, but *word* more fundamentally signifies the interior concept of the mind. A face is said to be healthy because it indicates health: well-being is the reality expressed by the face.<sup>1</sup> Just so, the word is what is signified by the sound of the voice. The underlying reality is the interior concept in the mind; the sounds are vocal expressions of impressions that are in the soul, and these concepts also are properly speaking called *words* even before they are pronounced.\* The term *word* signifies the vocal sound that comes from the mouth but also the mental idea that is born from the mind, and when this concept emerges in the spoken word, it still remains present in the mind. The Son can be understood in this way: he proceeds from the Father by an eternal birth, but he remains with him and in him by the unity of their divine essence—just as a thought or a concept remains in the mind from which it is born. This is why John prefers *Word* to *Son* here. The Word is in God’s self properly and perfectly. A spoken word proceeds from the one thinking, and a concept from the one conceiving it; and, because the Word and the Son are one and the same, it follows that as there is a generation of the Son from the Father, so there is procession of the Word from the Speaker.

\**Lyra John 1:1*

<sup>1</sup> Lyra in fact says that urine, not the face, indicates health.

However, the evangelist chooses to describe the Son here as the *Word* rather than *Son* because *Son* can be used only in relationship to a Father, whereas *Word* can be used not only in relationship to the Speaker but also in relationship to what is spoken and what is brought about in others who hear what is said. Therefore, the Son of God is described here not only in terms of his relationship with the Father, from whom he proceeds, but also in terms of the creatures he made, the flesh he assumed, and the truths he taught. All of these aspects are most correctly and fittingly embraced by the term *Word*, nor could one find any more appropriate term under heaven.\*

\*Bonaventura  
John 1:1

### The Distinction of Persons

\*R 3

\*Second, John indicates the personal distinction between the Father and the Son, saying, *and the Word was with God*.\* In this phrase, the noun *God* is a personal term: the Word was with God the Father; the Son is always in the Father, and the Father is always in the Son. The preposition *with* refers to a relational distinction between two Persons, not their nature. Nothing is ever said to be “with itself,” nor can anyone be said to be “in himself,” so there exists a personal distinction between the Word and the Origin\* with whom the Word abides. However, the Word does not come from the Father by an action that carries him out of the Father but remains within him. Therefore, the Word abides within the one whose Word he is but is personally distinct from him, as has just been said. *The Word was with God* as one is with another.\*

\*John 1:1

\*Principium

\*Lyra John 1:1

### The Father and Son Are Consubstantial

\*R 4

\*Third, John declares that the Father and the Son are consubstantial, that is, they possess a unity of es-

sence, saying, *and the Word was God*.<sup>\*</sup> Thus the noun *God* is predicated of the Word: the Word is God. Subjects and predicates mean the same, though they be transposed.<sup>\*</sup> In this phrase *God* refers to the divine essence: the Word is God, possessing the divine nature or substance. John does not say that he was with God but was not himself God. Nothing can be in God that is not God—he is totally and substantially the same. When John says that *the Word was with God*, this does not mean he was of an extraneous nature, as our word is to us. Rather, he was of the divine nature, which is indivisible and not manifold, for in no way could God be other than one and absolutely simple.<sup>\*</sup> Therefore, the Word and the Origin from which he comes share the same inner nature, although, as has been said, they can be distinguished personally. All three Persons are implied in this clause: the Father by the noun *God*, the Son by the noun *Word*, and the Holy Spirit by the preposition *with*.

\*John 1:1

\*Aristotle,  
Peri Herm 10

\*Lyra John 1:1

## The Father and the Son Are Co-eternal

\*Fourth, he speaks of the co-eternity of the Father and the Son, saying, *The same was in the beginning with God*.<sup>\*</sup> This Word about whom he speaks is with God the Father from the beginning of eternity, that is, before all ages, eternally.<sup>\*</sup> It was as if he were saying, “This Word of God never existed apart from God the Father: just as there was never a Father without the Son, so there could not be God without his Word, or without his Power, or without his Wisdom.”<sup>\*</sup> We speak of the Father because he has a Son; parenthood necessarily requires progeny. And because the Father who speaks and conceives the Word is from eternity, then the Word he brings to birth by speaking must truly be called the Word *in the beginning*. Not, understand, in the beginning of time, about which it was said, *In the beginning God created heaven, and earth*,<sup>\*</sup> but

\*R 5

\*John 1:2

\*Lyra John 1:1

\*Bruno John 1:1;  
PL 165:451B

\*Gen 1:1