

Thomas à Kempis

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Thomas à Kempis (*Thomas*





Monument on Mount Saint Agnes
in Zwolle. "Here Thomas à
Kempis lived in the service of his
fellow man and wrote 'Imitation
of Christ'.

Hemerken, Thomas Hämerken, Thomas

van Kempen) (1380 - July 25, 1471) was a Renaissance Roman Catholic monk and author of *Imitation of Christ*, one of the best known Christian books on devotion.

He was born at Kempen, Germany (40 miles northwest of Cologne) in 1380 and died near Zwolle (52 miles east-north-east of Amsterdam) in 1471. His paternal name was Hemerken or Hämmerlein, "little hammer."

In 1395 he was sent to the school at Deventer conducted by the Brethren of the Common Life. He became skillful as a copyist and was thus enabled to support himself. Later he was admitted to the Augustinian convent of Mount Saint Agnes near Zwolle, where his brother John had been before him and had risen to the dignity of prior. Thomas

received priest's orders in 1413 and was made subprior in 1429.

The house was disturbed for a time in consequence of the pope's rejection of the bishop-elect of Utrecht, Rudolph of Diepholt; otherwise, Thomas' life was a quiet one, his time being spent between devotional exercises, composition, and copying. He copied the Bible no less than four times, one of the copies being preserved at Darmstadt in five volumes. In its teachings he was widely read, and his works abound in Biblical quotations, especially from the New Testament.

His life is no doubt fitly characterized by the words under an old picture first referred to by Franciscus Tolensis: "In all things I sought quiet and found it not save in retirement and in books." A monument was dedicated to his memory

in the presence of the archbishop of Utrecht in St. Michael's Church, Zwolle, on November 11, 1897.

Thomas à Kempis belonged to the school of mystics who were scattered along the Rhine from Switzerland to Strasburg and Cologne and in the Netherlands. He was a follower of Geert Groote and Florentius Radewijns, the founders of the Brethren of the Common Life.

His writings are all of a devotional character and include tracts and meditations, letters, sermons, a life of Saint Lydewigis, a Christian woman who remained steadfast under a great stress of afflictions, and biographies of Groote, Radewijns, and nine of their companions. Works similar in content to the *Imitation of Christ* and pervaded by

the same spirit are his prolonged meditation on the life and blessings of the Savior and another on the Incarnation. Both of these works overflow with adoration for Christ.

The following quotes are attributed to him:

"If thou wilt receive profit, read with humility, simplicity and faith, and seek not at any time the fame of being learned."

"At the Day of Judgement we shall not be asked what we have read but what we have done."

The Imitation of Christ, Book I,
ch. 3

"If, however, you seek Jesus in all

things, you will surely find Him. "

The Imitation of Christ, Book II,
ch. 7

Books written by Thomas à Kempis

- *The Imitation of Christ* (ISBN 1-59986-979-9)
- *Vera Sapientia Or True Wisdom* (ISBN 0-9706526-7-4)

External links

- Read Imitation of Christ online
- Thomas à Kempis at The Catholic Encyclopedia
- Quotes from Thomas à Kempis
- Works by Thomas à Kempis at Project Gutenberg

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