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The Cloud of Unknowing

By Anonymous (14th century)

Read by: Douglas Harvey Language: English
 Length: 5 hours and 23 minutes Style: Solo
 Genre(s): Non-Fiction, Essays, Religion & Spirituality

Product Formats and Options

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The Cloud of Unknowing is an anonymous work of Christian mysticism written in Middle English in the latter half of the 14th century. The text is a spiritual guide on contemplative prayer in the late Middle Ages. The underlying message of this work suggests that the way to know God is to abandon consideration of God’s particular activities and attributes and be courageous enough to surrender one’s mind and ego to the realm of “unknowing”, at which point one may begin to glimpse the nature of God. The author is unknown. The English Augustinian mystic Walter Hilton has at times been suggested, but this is generally doubted. It is possible the author was a Carthusian priest, though this is not certain.

The Cloud of Unknowing is written specifically to a student, and the author strongly commands the student in the Prologue, “do not willingly and deliberately read it, copy it, speak of it, or allow it to be read, copied, or spoken of, by anyone or to anyone, except by or to a person who, in your opinion, has undertaken truly and without reservation to be a perfect follower of Christ.”

The book counsels the young student to seek God, not through knowledge and intellect, but through intense contemplation, motivated by love, and stripped of all thought.

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* is unknown. The English Augustinian mystic Walter Hilton has at times been suggested, but this is generally doubted. It is possible the author was a Carthusian priest, though this is not certain. The Carthusian Order is a Catholic religious order of monks and nuns founded by Saint Bruno in the 11th century and known for its strict adherence to a contemplative and solitary lifestyle. Carthusians are renowned for their emphasis on silence, solitude, prayer, and manual work. Carthusian monks live in individual cells, typically grouped around a central courtyard, within a monastery known as a charterhouse. They spend most of their time in solitude and silence, engaging in personal prayer, meditation, and study. The order’s motto, “Stat crux dum volvitur orbis,” translates to “The Cross is steady while the world is turning,” emphasizing the focus on the spiritual life amidst the changes and challenges of the world. Overall, the Carthusian way of life is distinct for its rigor and dedication to deepening the individual’s relationship with God through contemplation and ascetic practices.