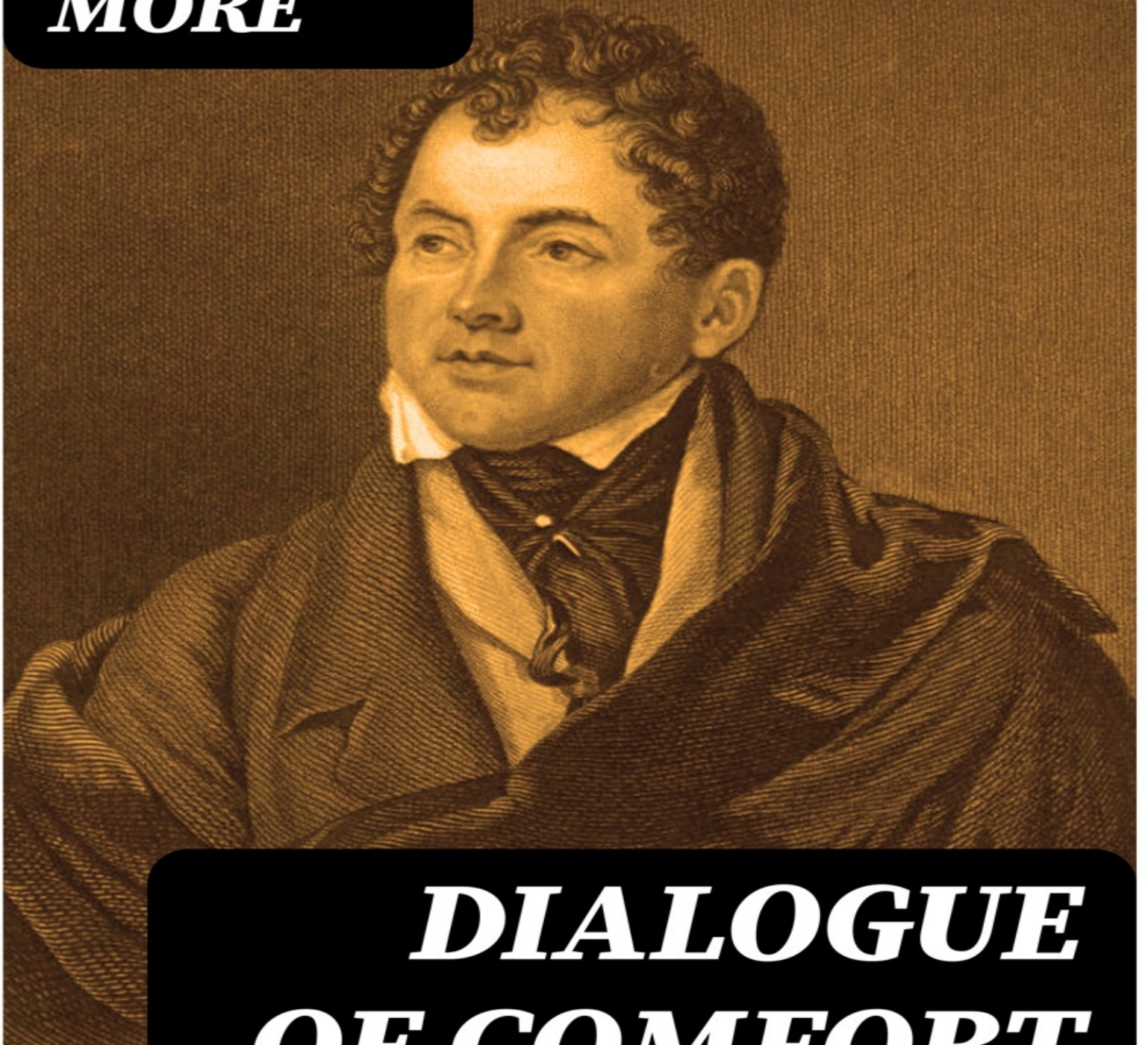


***THOMAS
MORE***



***DIALOGUE
OF COMFORT
AGAINST
TRIBULATION***

Printed by E. S.

Thomas More

Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation

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BOOK ONE

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VINCENT: Who would have thought, O my good uncle, a few years past, that those in this country who would visit their friends lying in disease and sickness would come, as I do now, to seek and fetch comfort of them? Or who would have thought that in giving comfort to them they would use the way that I may well use to you? For albeit that the priests and friars be wont to call upon sick men to remember death, yet we worldly friends, for fear of discomforting them, have ever had a way here in Hungary of lifting up their hearts and putting them in good hope of life.

But now, my good uncle, the world is here waxed such, and so great perils appear here to fall at hand, that methinketh the greatest comfort a man can have is when he can see that he shall soon be gone. And we who are likely long to live here in wretchedness have need of some comforting counsel against tribulation to be given us by such as you, good uncle. For you have so long lived virtuously, and are so learned in the law of God that very few are better in this country. And you have had yourself good experience and assay of such things as we do now fear, as one who hath been taken prisoner in Turkey two times in your days, and is now likely to depart hence ere long.

But that may be your great comfort, good uncle, since you depart to God. But us of your kindred shall you leave here, a company of sorry comfortless orphans. For to all of

us your good help, comfort, and counsel hath long been a great stay—not as an uncle to some, and to others as one further of kin, but as though to us all you had been a natural father.

ANTHONY: Mine own good cousin, I cannot much deny but what there is indeed, not only here in Hungary but also in almost all places in Christendom, such a customary manner of unchristian comforting. And in any sick man it doth more harm than good, by drawing him in time of sickness, with looking and longing for life, from the meditation of death, judgment, heaven, and hell, with which he should beset much of his time—even all his whole life in his best health. Yet is that manner of comfort to my mind more than mad when it is used to a man of mine age. For as we well know that a young man may die soon, so are we very sure that an old man cannot live long. And yet there is (as Tully saith) no man so old but that, for all that, he hopeth yet that he may live one year more, and of a frail folly delighteth to think thereon and comfort himself therewith. So other men's words of such comfort, adding more sticks to that fire, shall (in a manner) quite burn up the pleasant moisture that should most refresh him—the wholesome dew, I mean, of God's grace, by which he should wish with God's will to be hence, and long to be with him in Heaven.

Now, as for your taking my departing from you so heavily (as that of one from whom you recognize, of your goodness, to have had here before help and comfort), would God I had done to you and to others half so much as I myself reckon it would have been my duty to do! But whensoever God may take me hence, to reckon yourselves then comfortless, as

though your chief comfort stood in me—therein would you make, methinketh, a reckoning very much as though you would cast away a strong staff and lean upon a rotten reed. For God is, and must be, your comfort, and not I. And he is a sure comforter, who (as he said unto his disciples) never leaveth his servants comfortless orphans, not even when he departed from his disciples by death. But he both sent them a comforter, as he had promised, the Holy Spirit of his Father and himself, and he also made them sure that to the world's end he would ever dwell with them himself. And therefore, if you be part of his flock and believe his promise, how can you be comfortless in any tribulation, when Christ and his Holy Spirit, and with them their inseparable Father, if you put full trust and confidence in them, are never either one finger-breadth of space nor one minute of time from you?

VINCENT: O, my good uncle, even these selfsame words, with which you prove that because of God's own gracious presence we cannot be left comfortless, make me now feel and perceive how much comfort we shall miss when you are gone. For albeit, good uncle, that while you tell me this I cannot but grant it for true, yet if I had not now heard it from you, I would not have remembered it, nor would it have fallen to my mind. And moreover, as our tribulations shall increase in weight and number, so shall we need not only one such good word or twain, but a great heap of them, to stable and strengthen the walls of our hearts against the great surges of this tempestuous sea.

ANTHONY: Good cousin, trust well in God and he shall provide you outward teachers suitable for every time, or

else shall himself sufficiently teach you inwardly.

VINCENT: Very well, good uncle, but yet if we would leave the seeking of outward learning, when we can have it, and look to be inwardly taught by God alone, then should be thereby tempt God and displease him. And since I now see the likelihood that when you are gone we shall be sore destitute of any other like you, therefore methinketh that God bindeth me of duty to pray you now, good uncle, in this short time that we have you, that I may learn of you such plenty of good counsel and comfort, against these great storms of tribulation with which both I and all mine are sore beaten already, and now upon the coming of this cruel Turk fear to fall in far more, that I may, with the same laid up in remembrance, govern and stay the ship of our kindred and keep it afloat from peril of spiritual drowning.

You are not ignorant, good uncle, what heaps of heaviness have of late fallen among us already, with which some of our poor family are fallen into such dumps that scanty can any such comfort as my poor wit can give them at all assuage their sorrow. And now, since these tidings have come hither, so hot with the great Turk's enterprise into these parts here, we can scanty talk nor think of anything else than his might and our danger. There falleth so continually before the eyes of our heart a fearful imagination of this terrible thing: his mighty strength and power, his high malice and hatred, and his incomparable cruelty, with robbing, spoiling, burning, and laying waste all the way that his army cometh; then, killing or carrying away the people thence, far from home, and there severing the couples and the kindred asunder, every one far from the

other, some kept in thralldom and some kept in prison and some for a triumph tormented and killed in his presence; then, sending his people hither and his false faith too, so that such as are here and still remain shall either both lose all and be lost too, or be forced to forsake the faith of our Saviour Christ and fall to the false sect of Mahomet. And yet—that which we fear more than all the rest—no small part of our own folk who dwell even here about us are, we fear, falling to him or already confederated with him. If this be so, it may haply keep this quarter from the Turk's invasion. But then shall they that turn to his law leave all their neighbours nothing, but shall have our goods given them and our bodies too, unless we turn as they do and forsake our Saviour too. And then—for there is no born Turk so cruel to Christian folk as is the false Christian that falleth from the faith—we shall stand in peril, if we persevere in the truth, to be more hardly handled and die a more cruel death by our own countrymen at home than if we were taken hence and carried into Turkey. These fearful heaps of peril lie so heavy at our hearts, since we know not into which we shall fortune to fall and therefore fear all the worst, that (as our Saviour prophesied of the people of Jerusalem) many among us wish already, before the peril come, that the mountains would overwhelm them or the valleys open and swallow them up and cover them.

Therefore, good uncle, against these horrible fears of these terrible tribulations—some of which, as you know, our house hath already, and the rest of which we stand in dread of—give us, while God lendeth you to us, such plenty of your

comforting counsel as I may write and keep with us, to stay us when God shall call you hence.

ANTHONY: Ah, my good cousin, this is a heavy hearing. And just as we who dwell here in this part now sorely fear that thing which a few years ago we feared not at all, so I suspect that ere long they shall fear it as much who now think themselves very sure because they dwell further off.

Greece feared not the Turk when I was born, and within a while afterward that whole empire was his. The great Sultan of Syria thought himself more than his match, and long since you were born hath he that empire too. Then hath he taken Belgrade, the fortress of this realm. And since that hath he destroyed our noble young goodly king, and now two of them strive for us—our Lord send the grace that the third dog carry not away the bone from them both! What of the noble strong city of Rhodes, the winning of which he counted as a victory against the whole body of Christendom, since all Christendom was not able to defend that strong town against him? Howbeit, if the princes of Christendom everywhere would, where there was need, have set to their hands in time, the Turk would never have taken any one of all those places. But partly because of dissensions fallen among ourselves, and partly because no man careth what harm other folk feel, but each part suffereth the other to shift for itself, the Turk has in a few years wonderfully increased and Christendom on the other hand very sorely decayed. And all this is worked by our wickedness, with which God is not content.

But now, whereas you desire of me some plenty of comforting things, which you may put in remembrance, to

comfort your company with—verily, in the rehearsing and heaping of your manifold fears, I myself began to feel that there would be much need, against so many troubles, of many comforting counsels. For surely, a little before you came, as I devised with myself upon the Turk's coming, it happened that my mind fell suddenly from that to devising upon my own departing. Now, albeit that I fully put my trust in God and hope to be a saved soul by his mercy, yet no man is here so sure that without revelation he may stand clean out of dread. So I bethought me also upon the pain of hell, and afterward, then, I bethought me upon the Turk again. And at first methought his terror nothing, when I compared with it the joyful hope of heaven. Then I compared it on the other hand with the fearful dread of hell, casting therein in my mind those terrible fiendish tormentors, with the deep consideration of that furious endless fire. And methought that if the Turk with his whole host, and all his trumpets and timbrels too, were to come to my chamber door and kill me in my bed, in respect of the other reckoning I would regard him not a rush. And yet, when I now heard your lamentable words, laying forth as though it were present before my face that heap of heavy sorrowful tribulations that (besides those that are already befallen) are in short space likely to follow, I waxed myself suddenly somewhat dismayed. And therefore I well approve your request in this behalf, since you wish to have a store of comfort beforehand, ready by you to resort to, and to lay up in your heart as a remedy against the poison of all desperate dread that might arise from occasion of sore tribulation. And I shall be glad, as my poor wit shall serve

me, to call to mind with you such things as I before have read, heard, or thought upon, that may conveniently serve us to this purpose.

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First shall you, good cousin, understand this: The natural wise men of this world, the old moral philosophers, laboured much in this matter. And many natural reasons have they written by which they might encourage men to set little by such goods—or such hurts, either—the going and coming of which are the matter and cause of tribulation. Such are the goods of fortune, riches, favour, friends, fame, worldly honour, and such other things: or of the body, as beauty, strength, agility, liveliness, and health. These things, as you know, coming to us, are matter of worldly wealth. And, taken from us by fortune or by force or the fear of losing them, they are matter of adversity and tribulation. For tribulation seemeth generally to signify nothing else but some kind of grief, either pain of the body or heaviness of the mind. Now that the body should not feel what it feeleth, all the wit in the world cannot bring that about. But that the mind should not be grieved either with the pain that the body feeleth or with occasions of heaviness offered and given unto the soul itself, this thing the philosophers laboured very much about. And many goodly sayings have they toward strength and comfort against tribulation, exciting men to the full contempt of all worldly loss and the despising of sickness and all bodily grief, painful death and all.

Howbeit, indeed, for anything that ever I read in them, I never could yet find that those natural reasons were ever able to give sufficient comfort of themselves. For they never

stretch so far but that they leave untouched, for lack of necessary knowledge, that special point which not only is the chief comfort of all but without which also all other comforts are nothing. And that point is to refer the final end of their comfort unto God, and to repute and take for the special cause of comfort that by the patient sufferance of their tribulation they shall attain his favour and for their pain receive reward at his hand in heaven. And for lack of knowledge of this end, they did, as they needs must, leave untouched also the very special means without which we can never attain to this comfort, which is the gracious aid and help of God to move, stir, and guide us forward in the referring of all our ghostly comfort—yea, and our worldly comfort too—all unto that heavenly end. And therefore, as I say, for the lack of these things, all their comforting counsels are very far insufficient.

Howbeit, though they be far unable to cure our disease of themselves and therefore are not sufficient to be taken for our physicians, some good drugs have they yet in their shops. They may therefore be suffered to dwell among our apothecaries, if their medicines be made not of their own brains but after the bills made by the great physician God, prescribing the medicines himself and correcting the faults of their erroneous recipes. For unless we take this way with them, they shall not fail to do as many bold blind apothecaries do who, either for lucre or out of a foolish pride, give sick folk medicines of their own devising. For therewith do they kill up in corners many such simple folk as they find so foolish as to put their lives in the hands of such ignorant and unlearned Blind Bayards.

We shall therefore neither fully receive these philosophers' reasons in this matter, nor yet utterly refuse them. But, using them in such order as may beseem them, we shall fetch the principal and effectual medicines against these diseases of tribulation from that high, great, and excellent physician without whom we could never be healed of our very deadly disease of damnation. For our necessity in that regard, the Spirit of God spiritually speaketh of himself to us, and biddeth us give him the honour of all our health. And therein he thus saith unto us: "Honour thou the physician, for him hath the high God ordained for thy necessity." Therefore let us pray that high physician, our blessed Saviour Christ, whose holy manhood God ordained for our necessity, to cure our deadly wounds with the medicine made of the most wholesome blood of his own blessed body. And let us pray that, as he cured our mortal malady by this incomparable medicine, it may please him to send us and put in our minds at this time such medicines as may so comfort and strengthen us in his grace against the sickness and sorrows of tribulation, that our deadly enemy the devil may never have the power, by his poisoned dart of murmur, grudge, and impatience, to turn our short sickness of worldly tribulation into the endless everlasting death of infernal damnation.



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Since all our principal comfort must come from God, we must first presuppose, in him to whom we shall give any effectual comfort with any ghostly counsel, one ground to begin with, on which all that we shall build may be supported and stand; that is, the ground and foundation of faith. Without this, had ready before, all the spiritual comfort that anyone may speak of can never avail a fly.

For just as it would be utterly vain to lay natural reasons of comfort to him who hath no wit, so would it undoubtedly be frustrate to lay spiritual causes of comfort to him who hath no faith. For unless a man first believe that holy scripture is the word of God, and that the word of God is true, how can he take any comfort in that which the scripture telleth him? A man must needs take little fruit of scripture, if he either believe not that it be the word of God, or else think that, though it were, it might yet for all that be untrue! As this faith is more strong or more faint, so shall the comforting words of holy scripture stand the man in more stead or less.

This virtue of faith can no man give himself, nor yet any man to another. But though men may with preaching be ministers unto God therein; and though a man can, with his own free will, obeying freely the inward inspiration of God, be a weak worker with almighty God therein; yet is the faith indeed the gracious gift of God himself. For, as St. James saith, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is given from above, descending from the Father of lights." Therefore,

feeling our faith by many tokens very faint, let us pray to him who giveth it to us, that it may please him to help and increase it. And let us first say with him in the gospel, "I believe, good Lord, but help thou the lack of my belief." And afterwards, let us pray with the apostles, "Lord, increase our faith." And finally, let us consider, by Christ's saying unto them, that, if we would not suffer the strength and fervour of our faith to wax lukewarm—or rather key-cold—and lose its vigour by scattering our minds abroad about so many trifling things that we very seldom think of the matters of our faith, we should withdraw our thought from the respect and regard of all worldly fantasies, and so gather our faith together into a little narrow room. And like the little grain of mustard seed, which is by nature hot, we should set it in the garden of our soul, all weeds being pulled out for the better feeding of our faith. Then shall it grow, and so spread up in height that the birds—that is, the holy angels of heaven—shall breed in our soul, and bring forth virtues in the branches of our faith. And then, with the faithful trust that through the true belief of God's word we shall put in his promise, we shall be well able to command a great mountain of tribulation to void from the place where it stood in our heart, whereas with a very feeble faith and faint, we shall be scanty able to remove a little hillock.

And therefore, as for the first conclusion, since we must of necessity before any spiritual comfort presuppose the foundation of faith, and since no man can give us faith but only God, let us never cease to call upon God for it.

VINCENT: Forsooth, good uncle, methinks that this foundation of faith which, as you say, must be laid first, is so

necessarily requisite, that without it all spiritual comfort would be given utterly in vain. And therefore now shall we pray God for a full and fast faith. And I pray you, good uncle, proceed you farther in the process of your matter of spiritual comfort against tribulation.

ANTHONY: That shall I, cousin, with good will.



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I will in my poor mind assign, for the first comfort, the desire and longing to be comforted by God. And not without some reason call I this the first cause of comfort. For, as the cure of that person is in a manner desperate, who hath no will to be cured, so is the comfort of that person desperate, who desireth not his own comfort.

And here shall I note you two kinds of folk who are in tribulation and heaviness: one sort that will not seek for comfort, and another sort that will.

And again, of those that will not, there are also two sorts. For the first there are the sort who are so drowned in sorrow that they fall into a careless deadly dullness, regarding nothing, thinking almost of nothing, no more than if they lay in a lethargy. With them it may so befall that wit and remembrance will wear away and fall even fair from them. And this comfortless kind of heaviness in tribulation is the highest kind of the deadly sin of sloth.

Another sort there are, who will seek for no comfort, nor yet receive none, but in their tribulation (be it loss or sickness) are so testy, so fuming, and so far out of all patience that it profiteth no man to speak to them. And these are as furious with impatience as though they were in half a frenzy. And, from a custom of such behaviour, they may fall into one full and whole. And this kind of heaviness in tribulation is even a dangerous high branch of the mortal sin of ire.

Then is there, as I told you, another kind of folk, who fain would be comforted. And yet are they of two sorts too. One sort are those who in their sorrow seek for worldly comfort. And of them shall we now speak the less, for the divers occasions that we shall afterwards have to touch upon them in more places than one. But here will I say this, which I learned of St. Bernard: He who in tribulation turneth himself unto worldly vanities, to get help and comfort from them, fareth like a man who in peril of drowning catcheth whatsoever cometh next to hand, and that holdeth he fast, be it never so simple a stick. But then that helpeth him not, for he draweth that stick down under the water with him, and there they lie both drowned together. So surely, if we accustom ourselves to put our trust of comfort in the delight of these childish worldly things, God shall for that foul fault suffer our tribulation to grow so great that all the pleasures of this world shall never bear us up, but all our childish pleasure shall drown with us in the depth of tribulation.

The other sort is, I say, of those who long and desire to be comforted by God. And as I told you before, they undoubtedly have a great cause of comfort even in that point alone, that they consider themselves to desire and long to be comforted by almighty God. This mind of theirs may well be cause of great comfort to them, for two great considerations.

One is that they see themselves seek for their comfort where they cannot fail to find it. For God both can give them comfort, and will. He can, for he is all-mighty; he will, for he is all-good, and hath himself promised, "Ask and you shall have." He who hath faith—as he must needs have who shall

take comfort—cannot doubt but what God will surely keep his promise. And therefore hath he a great cause to be of good comfort, as I say, in that he considereth that he longeth to be comforted by him who, his faith maketh him sure, will not fail to comfort him.

But here consider this: I speak here of him who in tribulation longeth to be comforted by God, and who referreth the manner of his comforting to God. Such a man holdeth himself content, whether God comfort him by taking away or diminishing the tribulation itself, or by giving him patience and spiritual consolation therein. For if he long only to have God take his trouble from him, we cannot so well warrant that mind for a cause of so great comfort. For a man may desire that who never mindeth to be the better, and also may he miss the effect of his desire, because his request is haply not good for him. And of this kind of longing and requiring, we shall have occasion hereafter to speak further. But he who, referring the manner of his comforting to God, desireth of God to be comforted, asketh a thing so lawful and so pleasing to God that he cannot fail to fare well. And therefore hath he, as I say, great cause to take comfort in the very desire itself.

Another cause hath he to take of that desire a very great occasion of comfort. For since his desire is good, and declareth to him that he hath a good faith in God, it is a good token unto him that he is not an abject, cast out of God's gracious favour, since he perceiveth that God hath put such a virtuous, well-ordered appetite in his mind. For as every evil mind cometh of the world and ourselves and the devil, so is every such good mind inspired into man's heart,

either immediately or by the mean of our good angel or other gracious occasion, by the goodness of God himself. And what a comfort then may this be to us, when we by that desire perceive a sure undoubted token that towards our final salvation our Saviour is himself so graciously busy about us!

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VINCENT: Forsooth, good uncle, this good mind of longing for God's comfort is a good cause of great comfort indeed—our Lord in tribulation send it to us! But by this I see well, that woe may they be who in tribulation lack that mind and who desire not to be comforted by God, but either are of sloth or impatience discomfortless, or else of folly seek for their chief ease and comfort anywhere else.

ANTHONY: That is, good cousin, very true, as long as they stand in that state. But then you must consider that tribulation is a means to drive them from that state, and that is one of the causes for which God sendeth it unto man. For albeit that pain was ordained by God for the punishment of sins (so that they who never do now but sin cannot but be ever punished in hell) yet in this world, in which his high mercy giveth men space to be better, the punishment that he sendeth by tribulation serveth ordinarily for a means of amendment.

St. Paul himself was sorely against Christ, till Christ gave him a great fall and threw him to the ground, and struck him stark blind. And with that tribulation he turned to him at the first word, and God was his physician and healed him soon after both in body and in soul by his minister Ananias and made him his blessed apostle. Some are in the beginning of tribulation very stubborn and stiff against God, and yet at length tribulation bringeth them home. The proud king Pharaoh did abide and endure two or three of the first plagues, and would not once stoop at them. But then God

laid on a sorer lash that made him cry to him for help. And then sent he for Moses and Aaron and confessed himself for a sinner and God for good and righteous. And he prayed them to pray for him and to withdraw that plague, and he would let them go. But when his tribulation was withdrawn, then was he wicked again. So was his tribulation occasion of his profit, and his help in turn was cause of his harm. For his tribulation made him call to God, and his help made hard his heart again. Many a man who in an easy tribulation falleth to seek his ease in the pastime of worldly fantasies, in a greater pain findeth all those comforts so feeble that he is fain to fall to the seeking of God's help.

And therefore is, I say, the very tribulation itself many times a means to bring the man to the taking of the aforementioned comfort therein—that is, to the desire of comfort given by God. For this desire of God's comfort is, as I have proved you, great cause of comfort itself.

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Howbeit, though the tribulation itself be a means oftentimes to get a man this first comfort in it, yet sometimes itself alone bringeth not a man to it. And therefore, since unless this comfort be had first, there can in tribulation no other good comfort come forth, we must consider the means by which this first comfort may come.

Meseemeth that if the man of sloth or impatience or hope of worldly comfort have no mind to desire and seek for comfort of God, those who are his friends, who come to visit and comfort him, must before everything put that point in his mind, and not spend the time (as they commonly do) in trifling and in turning him to the fantasies of the world. They must also move him to pray God to put this desire in his mind. For when he once getteth it, he then hath the first comfort—and, without doubt, if it be well considered, a comfort marvellously great. His friends who thus counsel him must also, to the attaining thereof, help to pray for him themselves, and cause him to desire good folk to help him to pray for it. And then, if these ways be taken to get it, I doubt not but the goodness of God shall give it.

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VINCENT: Verily methinketh, good uncle, that this counsel is very good. For unless a person have first a desire to be comforted by God, I cannot see what it can avail to give him any further counsel of any spiritual comfort.

Howbeit, what if the man have this desire of God's comfort: that is, that it may please God to comfort him in his tribulation by taking that tribulation from him—is not this a good desire of God's comfort, and a desire sufficient for him who is in tribulation?

ANTHONY: No, cousin, that it is not. I touched before upon this point and passed it over, because I thought it would fall in our way again, and so know I well that it will, oftener than once. And now am I glad that you yourself move it to me here.

A man may many times, well and without sin, desire of God that the tribulation be taken from him. But neither may we desire that in every case, nor yet very well in any case (except very few) save under a certain condition, either expressed or implied. For tribulations are, as you know well, of many sundry kinds. Some are by loss of goods or possessions, some by the sickness of ourselves, and some by the loss of friends or by some other pain put unto our bodies. Some are by the dread of losing these things that we fain would save, under which fear fall all the same things that we have spoken of before. For we may fear loss of goods or possessions, or the loss of our friends, or their grief and trouble or our own by sickness, imprisonment, or other

bodily pain. We may be troubled most of all with the fear of that thing which he feareth least of all who hath most need to do so—that is, the fear of losing through deadly sin the life of his blessed soul. And this last kind of tribulation, as the sorest tribulation of all, though we may touch some pieces of it here and there before, yet the chief part and the principal pain will I reserve to treat apart effectually at the end.

But now, as I said, since the kinds of tribulation are so diverse, a man may pray God to take some of these tribulations from him, and may take some comfort in the trust that God will do so. And therefore against hunger, sickness, and bodily hurt, and against the loss of either body or soul, men may lawfully many times pray to the goodness of God, either for themselves or for their friends. And toward this purpose are expressly prayed many devout orisons in the common services of our mother Holy Church. And toward our help in some of these things serve some of the petitions in the Pater Noster, in which we pray daily for our daily food, and to be preserved from the fall into temptation, and to be delivered from evil.

But yet may we not always pray for the taking away from us of every kind of temptation. For if a man should in every sickness pray for his health again, when should he show himself content to die and to depart unto God? And that mind must a man have, you know, or else it will not be well with him. It is a tribulation to good men to feel in themselves the conflict of the flesh against the soul and the rebellion of sensuality against the rule and governance of reason—the relics that remain in mankind of old original sin,

of which St. Paul so sore complaineth in his epistle to the Romans. And yet may we not pray, while we stand in this life, to have this kind of tribulation utterly taken from us. For it is left us by God's ordinance to strive against it and fight with it, and by reason and grace to master it and use it for the matter of our merit.

For the salvation of our soul may we boldly pray. For grace may we boldly pray, for faith, for hope, and for charity, and for every such virtue as shall serve us toward heaven. But as for all the other things before mentioned (in which is contained the matter of every kind of tribulation), we may never well make prayers so precisely but that we must express or imply a condition therein—that is, that if God see the contrary better for us, we refer it wholly to his will. And if that be so, we pray that God, instead of taking away our grief, may send us of his goodness either spiritual comfort to take it gladly or at least strength to bear it patiently.

For if we determine with ourselves that we will take no comfort in anything but the taking of our tribulation from us, then either we prescribe to God that he shall do us no better turn, even though he would, than we will ourselves appoint him; or else we declare that we ourselves can tell better than he what is better for us. And therefore, I say, let us in tribulation desire his help and comfort, and let us remit the manner of that comfort unto his own high pleasure. When we do this, let us nothing doubt but that, as his high wisdom better seeth what is best for us than we can see it ourselves, so shall his sovereign high goodness give us that thing that shall indeed be best.

For otherwise, if we presume to stand to our own choice—unless God offer us the choice himself, as he did to David in the choice of his own punishment, after his high pride conceived in the numbering of the people—we may foolishly choose the worst. And by prescribing unto God ourselves so precisely what we will that he shall do for us, unless of his gracious favour he reject our folly, he shall for indignation grant us our own request, and afterward shall we well find that it shall turn us to harm.

How many men attain health of body for whom it would be better, for their soul's health, that their bodies were sick still? How many get out of prison who happen outside on such harm as the prison would have kept them from? How many who have been loth to lose their worldly goods have, in keeping of their goods, soon afterward lost their life? So blind is our mortality and so unaware what will befall—so unsure also what manner of mind we ourselves will have tomorrow—that God could not lightly do a man more vengeance than to grant him in this world his own foolish wishes.

What wit have we poor fools to know what will serve us? For the blessed apostle himself in his sore tribulation, praying thrice unto God to take it away from him, was answered again by God (in a manner) that he was but a fool in asking that request, but that the help of God's grace in that tribulation to strengthen him was far better for him than to take that tribulation from him. And therefore, perceiving well by experience the truth of the lesson, he giveth us good warning not to be too bold of our minds, when we require aught of God, at his own pleasure. For his