

Twelve exhortations to modern Christians

Themes from *Medieval Wisdom for Modern Christians: Finding Authentic Faith in a Forgotten Age*, by Chris R Armstrong (Brazos, 2016) – with further readings

Tradition as source of truth (chapter 3)

- If we are to be faithful Christ-followers in the modern world, which is at enmity with God, we need to recover the medieval reliance on Christian tradition; thereby we can indwell the meanings of the Scriptural canon and be formed by them in our affections and habitual actions

Further readings: *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* and *Tradition, Scripture, and Interpretation: A Sourcebook of the Ancient Church*, both by D. H. Williams

The medieval passion for theological knowledge (chapter 4)

- We need to value reason as God's highest earthly gift to humanity and a light to illuminate our paths in God, and use that gift again in the passionate search for theological understanding

Further reading: *Many Mansions: An Introduction to the Development and Diversity of Medieval Theology*, David N. Bell

The ethical fabric of medieval faith (chapter 5)

- We need to examine our moral lives more precisely with help from medieval traditions like the Seven Capital Vices and Seven Virtues: the concreteness of moral action grounds our ideas of God and keeps them from floating off into abstractions
- We need to train up our moral affections through the telling and hearing of stories, addressing the conundrum of how to train believers in moral good while also teaching a radical message of grace

Further readings: *Glittering Vices*, Rebecca Konyndyck DeYoung; *De Malo*, Thomas Aquinas

Why medievals invented the hospital (chapter 6)

- We need to absorb two theological lessons from the medieval birth and growth of the hospital: (1) that God affirms bodily health as a positive good and desires it for all the people he has made, and (2) that *mercy* is the highest of human virtues

Further readings: *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity*, Gary Ferngren; *Medicine, Society, and Faith in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, Darrel Amundsen; and *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls: A History of Hospitals*, Guenter B. Risse

God's second book: the natural world (chapter 7)

- We need to join medievals in overcoming both our dismissal of the material world as spiritually irrelevant and our idolatry of material enjoyments as ends in themselves; we will do this when we once again come, as the medievals did, to see the world as sacramental – that is, full of God's presence, reflecting his glory and communicating his grace; this will enliven and energize our engagement with the arts, the sciences, and all aspects of human culture and life on earth

Further readings: *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*, Hans Boersma; *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, Emile Male; *The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution*, James Hannam

Medieval faith as a religion of the heart (chapter 8)

- We need to recover the Christian mystical tradition's seriousness about the spiritual importance of the bodily senses and the emotions
- We need to cultivate compassion for others by dwelling on the Passion of Christ for us

Further readings: *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, Robert L. Wilken; *The Grief of God*, Ellen G. Ross; *God's Lovers in an Age of Anxiety*, Joan Nuth

How the incarnation lifts up our humanness (chapter 9)

- We need to follow the medievals in reclaiming the Incarnation – attending to Mary through whom Christ the Second Person of God was born on earth and to the life he then lived here
- We need to see how the Incarnation exalts not only the humanity of Christ, but also the humanity of *humanity*; as C. S. Lewis says, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal."

Further readings: *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 3: The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, Jaroslav Pelikan; *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius

Our response to our medieval heritage, including the ascetic and monastic paths (chapter 10)

- We need to drink from medieval wells if we are to live our faith in truly human and truly world-engaging ways, not fearfully—in hiding and in denial of the very great capacities of humanity
- When we recognize the spiritual importance of our *material and communal* lives, we need also then to examine the ascetic and monastic traditions of our faith for important disciplines

Further readings: *The Story of Monasticism*, Greg Peters; *Monk Habits for Everyday People: Benedictine Spirituality for Protestants*, Dennis Okholm

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