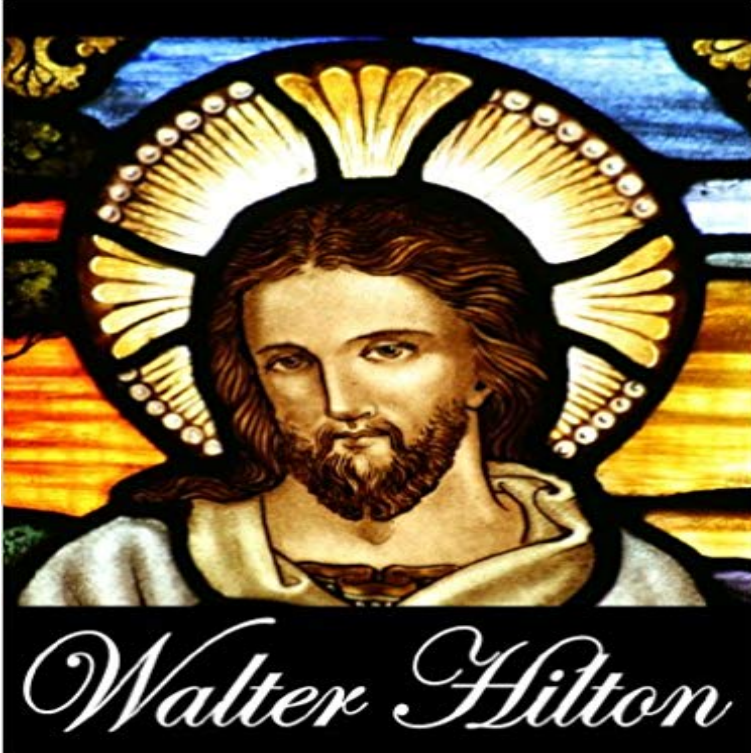


The Scale (or Ladder) of Perfection, A New Edition & Treatise Written to a Devout Man (With Active Table of Contents)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Hilton was first recorded in January 1371 as a bachelor of law attached to the diocesan court of Ely, and again in 1375. In some manuscripts, he is described as a *commensor* or *inceptor decretorum* -- that is, he may have completed the studies and examinations that would have entitled him to become a Master of canon law, but without undertaking the regency that would have given him the latter title. Prior to 1386, he retired from the world as a hermit, when he developed a deep devotion to the Carthusian Order. In 1386, he wrote the Latin epistle of spiritual counsel, *De Utilitate et Prerogativis Religionis*, for his friend Adam Horsley, a former officer of the Exchequer, who was about to enter the Carthusian Order. According to manuscript tradition, Hilton died as an Augustinian Canon Regular in the priory of St Peter at Thurgarton, in Nottinghamshire. However, this manuscript was written much later than the history it reports, and it contains a number of historic mistakes (see footnote 1). His spiritual writings were influential during the fifteenth century in England. The most famous of these is the *Scale of Perfection*, in two books, which survives in some sixty-two manuscripts, including fourteen of a Latin translation by Hilton's contemporary in Cambridge and Ely, the Carmelite friar Thomas Fishlake). In Fishlake's translation, the *Scale* became the first work written in English to circulate on the European continent. It was printed by Wynkyn de Worde in Westminster in 1494, at the request of Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of King Henry VII, and five more times before the English Reformation of the 1530s. The first book of *Scale* is addressed to a woman recently enclosed as an anchoress, providing her with appropriate spiritual exercises; the bulk of its ninety-three chapters deal with the extirpation of the foul image of sin in the soul, the perversion of the image of the

Trinity in the three spiritual powers of Mind, Reason and Will (reflecting the Father, Son and Holy Spirit respectively, according to a tradition drawn from St Augustine) -- through a series of meditations on the seven deadly sins. The second book, which opens by addressing itself to Hiltons former reader, who, he says, has further questions, seems from its style and content rather to be addressed to a larger, perhaps more sophisticated audience; its major themes are the reformation of the soul in faith alone and in both faith and feeling. This latter is described in an extended metaphor as a spiritual journey to Jerusalem, or peace in meditation, a gift which is also its own giver, Christ. The first book of the Scale was apparently written some time before the second, and circulated independently. Three of Hiltons letters of spiritual guidance, the Latin *De Utilitate* and *De Imagine Peccati*, and the English *On Mixed Life* which is written to a devout layman of wealth and household responsibility, advising him not to give up his active life to become a contemplative, but to mix the two) distinctly echo parts of Scale I, and were probably written around the same time: that is, in the early 1380s. The *Mixed Life* occasionally appears with the Scale in fifteenth-century manuscripts, and was printed by de Worde in 1494, as a third book of the Scale (possibly at the desire of Lady Margaret) -- although the *Mixed Life* occurs in only half of the surviving copies of that printing. All later prints of the Scale also included the *Mixed Life*. Hilton also wrote three other Latin letters of spiritual guidance, the *Epistola de Leccione*, *Intencione*, *Oracione*, *Meditacione et Allis*, the *Epistola ad Quemdam Seculo Renunciare Volentem* and *Firmissime crede*, and a scholastic *quodlibet* on the appropriateness of reverence shown to images in churches, a practice criticised by Lollards. In English, he also wrote a short tract, *Of Angels Song*, which is a criticism of one aspect of Richard Rolles spirituality, commentaries on the Psalm texts *Qui Habitat* and

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