WALTER HILTON : TRADITIONALIST?

S. S. HUSSEY

IN THEIR entry under 'Hilton' in the Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Dom David Knowles and Miss Joy Russell-Smith write:

Si Hilton est traditionnel, voire conservateur dans le doctrine, il se montre parfaitement original dans les méthodes.

I believe this to be fundamentally true, but the second part of the statement needs further explanation and illustration (and perhaps some qualification) in a way which an encyclopaedia entry does not, of course, permit. And, once we turn adjective into noun, traditionalist may acquire the slightly patronising tone provided by the suffix in, say, alarmist, opportunist, theorist, pacifist (not always: dentist, tobacconist, chemist, and other occupational definitions). I sometimes have the feeling that Hilton is so acceptable because he comes after Rolle and the author of the Cloud, because he is the closest we can imagine a mystic getting to the man whose feet are firmly on the ground, so very English, no suspicious calor, dulcor or canor, no impossible strivings after the pseudo-Dionysian solitude, certainly none of the embarrassment (not to say neurosis) of Margery Kempe. Who could imagine Hilton - even a young Hilton, who, remember, was most probably once a solitary himself - running away from home in a makeshift garment run up from his sister's frocks and his father's raincoat? No; this is a writer we can get to grips with, appreciate his 'moderation' and 'balance' and pass on: rather like a Chaucerian Franklin solving the tensions of the so-called 'marriage group' of tales by providing an admirable compromise where each side gets its due and nobody loses face. Such a view of Hilton would be a very superficial one, a travesty of a writer who 'se montre parfaitement original dans les méthodes'.

Yet there would be some truth in it. Hilton's aim is that of all the mystics, Dionysian or not, an aim clearly expressed in
Albert the Great’s De Adhaerendo Deo of the thirteenth century (which was amplified by the fifteenth-century Benedictine monk Johannes von Kastle):

For this is the end of all spiritual exercises: to draw near to God within your own self and to rest in him by means of faith utterly purified and without impressions of external things, by a will wholly faithful, without other ties.

and the method is the same too:

We must proceed by the usual order, from the labour of action to the stillness of contemplation, from the moral virtues to the theoretical and speculative virtues. 1

The path from one to the other, however, almost always involved meditation (‘The means that you should make most use of, as I have said before, are prayer and meditation’ - Scale of Perfection, 1, ch.23).

Meditation, as has been pointed out, does not imply, as it often did following the great sixteenth-century Spanish mystics, the deliberate and systematic use of the reason to lead the will to acts of charity. For the late middle ages, meditation was much more of a ‘natural’ contemplation, contemplating scriptural truth as one might contemplate a picture: a blend of gaze, reflection and admiration. Bernard’s word for it is ‘consideration’. Of course they loved what they contemplated, and the intellectual conviction was already present, built in. If the meditation were devout enough, they hoped that God might — occasionally, and by the operation of his grace, and for brief periods only — remove the veil from the divine truth. Writings on meditation therefore incorporate the biblical text, expound it, and grow out of it. The mind becomes occupied with thoughts about God, and the thoughts give rise to affective prayer. Meditation was especially on the passion sequence, beginning at Gethsemane. It is an extreme development of the concentration on the emotional aspects of religion by St Bernard who argued that natural human feeling does not have to be suppressed but can be channelled to the love of God who chose the crucifixion as the form the redemption should take in order to demonstrate his love for mankind. This view of the crucifixion appears in iconography from the thirteenth century on: Christ is the man of sorrows, his body hangs from the cross while Mary and John stand sorrowing by. The ‘human interest’ in the gospel story was spread by the preaching of the friars. It was later exploited by the better of the medieval dramatists, as, say,
at York, where Joseph on the flight into Egypt offers to carry the baby for a time to give Mary's arm a rest, or where Joseph and Mary go forward uncertainly together to recover Christ who is talking to the doctors in the temple. There was much apocryphal material—on the purity of Mary's life before the annunciation, for example—and much more was undoubtedly imagined. In the contemplative scheme of things it was natural that consideration of Christ's manhood should precede considerations of his godhead and it was one of the main ways of preparing the mind for God.

Meditation thus naturally fitted into the schema of the contemplative life. In the thirteenth century, St Edmund of Abingdon distinguishes three ways of contemplating God:

(i) through creation, i.e. created beings
(ii) in the scriptures, i.e. meditation
(iii) in the divine nature itself.

The four rungs of Guido's Scala Claustalium are

(i) Lesson (i.e. Holy Writ and the Fathers) for beginners
(ii) Meditation, on the lesson, for proficient
(iii) Prayer, arising from meditation, for the devout
(iv) Contemplation, for the 'Holy and Blessed of God'.

That he thought meditation proper for proficient shows that he regarded it as a stage, albeit a lowly stage, of contemplation proper. Hilton is completely traditional here, in chapter 35 of Book 1 of the Scale, for instance:

Your mind is suddenly detached from all worldly and material things, and you seem to see Jesus in your soul as He appeared on earth; you see Him taken by the Jews and bound as a thief, beaten and despised, scourged and condemned to death; with what humility He carried the cross on His shoulders, and with what cruelty He was nailed to it. You see, too, the crown of thorns upon His head and the sharp spear that pierced Him to the heart, and at this sight you feel your heart moved to such great compassion and pity for your Lord Jesus, that you mourn and weep and cry out with all the power of your body and soul, marvelling at the goodness and love, the patience and humility of your Lord, that He would for so sinful a wretch as you are suffer such great pain.

But my point here is that Hilton does not interpolate imagined, non-biblical meditations in the manner of, say, the Franciscan Meditaciones Vitae Christi in which Jesus, in passion week, predicts his death to the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, and the author adds (p.308) 'Here one may interpolate a very beautiful meditation of which the Scripture does not speak', or in which
the risen Christ appears on Easter Sunday first of all to the Virgin.

(You should know, however, that nothing is mentioned in the
Gospel about the appearance to the Lady. I have included it and
placed it first because the Church seems to hold it, and as
it is more fully given in the legend of the Resurrection', p.365).

The gentle Nicholas Love, prior of Mount Grace Charterhouse, who
adapted the Meditationes 'for common people and simple souls'
in the fifteenth century, similarly allows his imagination to play
over the scriptural narrative:

And how our Lord meekly helped them both [Mary and Joseph
at Nazareth] according to their needs, as well as in scouring
the floors, making the beds and such like charring, ministering
gladly and humbly. Thus he fulfilled in deed that which he
saith of himself in the gospel: 'Man's Son came not to be served,
but to serve'.

Hilton does not elaborate or interpolate. Nor does he participate
in the way that Julian of Norwich wished to do:

With hym y desyrede to suffere, leyevande in dedyle bodye as
god wolde gyffe me grace. And in this sodainlye I sawe the
rede blode trekylle downe fro vndyr the garlande, alle hate,
freschlye, plentifullly and lyvelye, ryght as me thought that
it was in that tyme that the garlond of thornys was thyrsted
on his blesede hoede.

and as Margery Kempe seemed to imagine that she actually did,
sharing in the preparations for Christ's birth and being present
during his early life as the Virgin's handmaiden. Hilton remains
a teacher, not a witness. He does not say, like Rolle, Julian or
Margery, 'This happened to me', but rather in the final chapter
of Book I of the Scale:

Well, I have told you something of the contemplative life in
itself, as I conceive it, and then of the ways which by God's
grace lead to it. Not that I can experience it and practise it
in the way that I talk about it. But by my words, such as
they are, I would first of all stir my own negligence to do
better than I have done in the past, and then my purpose is
to urge you, or anyone else who has undertaken the contem-
plative life, to strive more earnestly and more humbly in it
by such simple words as God has given me grace to use.

But in talking about meditation as a lower stage in the contem-
plative life, I have begged the question of the way the mystic
progresses from active to contemplative and have avoided altoget-
tive mention of the mixed life. The division into active and contempla-
tive lives is of course traditional following Augustine and Gregory,
although it is worth remembering, as Abbot Butler did, that in
these writers we do not find the schematic programmes of later
mystics. In fourteenth-century English writings, the locus classicus is perhaps the final chapter of Rolle's Form of Living. This envisages a simple twofold scheme: active life (mykel owtoward) and contemplative life ('mykel inwarde ... lastandar and sykerar, restfuller, deltablier, luflyer and mare medeful'). Rolle's contemplative life has two parts. The lower includes meditation and devotion to God in psalms, hymns and prayers; the higher part is 'bealdyng and gernyng of þe thynges of heven, and joy in be Haly Gaste, þat men hase oft'. It involves forsaking the world and, after overcoming many temptations, the contemplative feels the fire of love in his heart and achieves a partial sight of God on this earth. I think that it is his failure to chart progress within the contemplative life that gives rise to a suspicion that, while undoubtedly sincere and not simply eloquent, Rolle perhaps did not give enough weight to the difficulties and false starts in the progress from the lower stage of contemplative life to the higher. Or, alternatively, that he himself achieved a higher level of contemplation fairly soon (as of course is possible by means of operant grace), but that his stress on the physical manifestations of this could well expose less sincere or less rigorous disciples to the false, devilish signs of progress which both The Cloud author and Hilton seem to regard as a very real danger.

The author of The Cloud is much better at identifying progress from active to contemplative life. In his eighth chapter he describes a fourfold scheme in which the higher part of active life overlaps with the lower part of contemplative life. His real interest, however, is in 'þe hire partye of contemplacion (as it may be had here)[which] hongēþ al holy in þis derknes & in þis cloude of vnknowyn, wiþ a louyng steryng & a blinde bealdyng vnto þe nakid beynge of God himself only'. (32/5-8). Already in the prologue to his book he envisages not only the immediate recipient (whom he later calls 'a seruant of the special seruauntes of his' bound to a 'more special state and forme of louyng' - surely no fictional addressee) but even those into whose hands the book may come, as set on reaching 'þe souereinnest poine of contempleative louyng'. The warning is repeated in the penultimate chapter of The Cloud and in Privy Counselling ('Bot now forþe of oure mater þat specialy in þis writyng pertyneþ vnto þee, & to aile oþer liche vnto þee in þat disposition only.' 160/24-26).
The whole tone of his writing seems more uncompromising than Hilton's. Julian of Norwich, on the contrary, regards herself as simply the instrument of God's grace, 'this creature':

And therefore I pray you alle for gods sake, and councyle yow for yowre awne prolyght, bat ye leue the beholdeynge of a wrecch that it was scheweide to, and myghtely, wysely and mekely behold in god, that of hys curteysse loue and endlesse goodnesse wold shew it generally in comfort of vs alle. (320/34-39)

Her editors detect a movement, in some of the changes made in the longer text, away from Julian herself and towards God. Even so, her immediate concern is her own spiritual health:

And ther was I lernyd that I shulde se my awne synne and nott other mennys, but if it may be for comfort or helpe of my ewyn crystyn. (703/9-10)

When she once desired to learn about the spiritual state of a friend, she seems to have been warned off, and yet, if we are to believe Margery Kempe, Julian had a reputation as a spiritual counsellor. She does mention a lower part of man's life and a higher part which is 'scheweide inwarde' (553/85 and cf. 568/46 and 600/59) but the division does not seem crucial to the understanding of the Revelations.

Book I of The Scale deals with categories in a manner which Book II seldom does. In chapter 4 we learn that there are three degrees of contemplative life. The first consists in the knowledge of God and spiritual matters (the last a rather vague phrase which Hilton is fond of); such a knowledge may be acquired by the exercise of the reason only and may therefore be found in those who are bent on worldly esteem, or even in heretics. Such 'cold naked reason' is close to The Cloud's 'curious' learning (curious is just about the most pejorative word he knows) but Hilton, as prior of Thurgarton, may have been more directly concerned with heresy than was the writer of The Cloud. The second degree of contemplative life has two stages, a lower which may be experienced during the active life and a higher which is reserved to contemplatives. This lower stage seems rather like the overlapping higher / lower contemplative found in The Cloud. The third degree is 'in knowing of God and in perfect love of him': it may be begun in this life but is complete only in heaven. There is not much in Book I, however, about the later stages of the contemplative life; it remains largely 'an end for which to strive' (ch.14). Occasional further attempts at categorization occur in
Book I, for example the three degrees of prayer set out in chapters 27-32, and in both books traditional divisions such as incipientes, proficientes and perfecti lie behind Hilton’s teaching.

Book II, however, largely abandons such detailed planning in favour of the idea of the re-formation of the image of sin obstinately rooted in man and its replacement by the image of Christ. This idea develops in the second half of Book I (fraom chapter 42 onwards), but the approach there is rather negative and only in the penultimate chapter do we glimpse what is to be the approach of Book II:

In this way you may break down and destroy this image of sin which disfigures the fair image of Christ in you. By humility and charity you will be conformed again to the image of Christ in His humanity and this will lead you to be conformed to the image of Christ in His divinity.

This re-formation is to be of two kinds: ‘in faith’ and ‘in faith and in feeling’ (or simply ‘in feeling’). As set out in Book II, chapters 10 and 11, re-formation in faith would seem to correspond to the lower stage of active life, with perhaps a greater degree of spiritual vigilance. True re-formation in feeling presupposes a fairly advanced stage of contemplative life:

But reform in faith and feeling is not so easily come by. It requires much labour and perseverance. For all the elect are reformed in faith, even though they are in the lowest degree of charity. But reform in feeling is for those who reach the state of perfection, and it cannot be attained in a moment. It implies great grace and long spiritual exercises. (ch.17)

The terminology is apparently peculiar to Hilton, although it derives from several Pauline texts, notably Romans 12:2:

But first, in order that you should not think that this expression of reforming a soul in feeling is mere fiction or fantasy, I will base myself on St. Paul’s words: Nolite conformari huic saeculo, sed reformamini in movitate sensus vestri. That is: You are reformed in faith by grace, do not now conform to the way of the world in pride, covetousness, and other sins, but be reformed in newness of feeling. You see here that St Paul speaks of reform in feeling, and what that new feeling is he relates in another place. Ut impleamini in agnitione voluntatis ejus, in omni intellectu et sapientia spirituali (Colossians 1:9). That is, we pray that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will, with understanding, and every sort of spiritual wisdom. This is to be reformed in feeling. (ch.31)

In Book II Hilton seems to me largely to discard categories in favour of analogies. Some are biblical, such as the lost drachma, others patristic (the hound who wearies in the chase) and still others apparently original: the soul well of sin with seven streams
flowing from it. One of these, the ladder, gives its title to the book, although he develops it scarcely at all (at the close of chapter 17) and the colophons of several manuscripts reveal the puzzlement of their scribes: de uita contemplatia; pe reformyng of manny's soule; and even scolde of perfeccion. One such image at least, that of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, has been justly admired by anthologists from the fifteenth century onwards. When Hilton uses the image of darkness, it is noteworthy that the two clouds (of forgetting and unknowing) have become one night on the far side of which stands God.

The question of Hilton's sources is obviously important in trying to assess how traditional a writer he is, but here he gives us little help. Apart from the Bible, he acknowledges by name Augustine, Gregory, Bernard, and once or twice identifies speakers in the Vita Patrum. To this very short list we should add Anselm (whose Cur Deus Homo lies behind the opening chapters of Scale 11), Richard of St Victor, and William Flete's De Remediis contra Temptaciones, not a work about contemplation but already translated from Latin into English before 1359 when Flete left for exile in Italy. Six Latin and one English manuscripts ascribe the work to Hilton, but they are not the most reliable. Beyond this we are in the realm of possibilities, but some of these - William of St Thierry, Hugh of St Victor, and Gilbert of Hoyland's sermons on the Canticles - the researches of the Rev. J.P.H. Clark⁵ have demonstrated that we must take very seriously. Even when he does give names, Hilton, like most medieval writers, does not cite chapter and verse: 'as St Gregory says', 'as St Bernard says', 'as St Augustine said', addressing God (which at least directs us to the Confessions). Hilton's list of terms to describe true contemplation:

Purity and rest of spirit, inward silence and peace of conscience, elevation of thought and integrity of soul, an awareness of the life of grace and seclusion of heart, the wakeful sleep of the spouse and tasting of heavenly savour, ardent love and shining light, the entry of contemplation and reform in feeling can be tracked down to individual writers, but his next sentence shows that he was following his usual habit of extrapolating and synthesising commonplace spiritual terms whenever he found them useful:

All these expressions are found in the writings of the saints, for each of them spoke of it according to the grace which he
had received, and although they differ verbally, they all mean the same truth. (Book II, ch.40)

The whole matter of source-hunting depends on how creative a use of the source one is prepared to allow. Is the source of Hilton’s famous description of God as both the giver and the gift (II, ch.36) to be found in Bernard’s De diligendo Deo? He is both prime mover of our love and final end. He is Himself our human love’s occasion; He also gives the power to love, and brings desire to its consummation. He is Himself the Lovable in His essential Being, and gives Himself to be the Object of our love .... He gave Himself to be our Righteousness, and keeps Himself to be our great Reward.7

It was perhaps the author of The Cloud who began the habit of providing a more detailed separate treatment of difficult concepts:

& if thee peke pat ber be any mater þerin þat þou woldest have more openid þan it is, lote me wetyng whiche it is & þi conceyse þesopon; & at my simple kunnyng it schal be amendid gif I kan. (130/14)

He may have been spiritual director to a group of contemplatives which included the recipient of his two major works (as weel to som oþer of my speçyal freendes in God’. Cloud 88/3). Perhaps Privy Counselling was one such work, and Discretion of Stirrings would appear from its opening sentences to have been another. Conceivably the translations Denis Hid Divinity and Benjamine Minor, if they followed The Cloud (and we do not know this), might have been made as a result of a request for the originals of the ideas he expressed. We have no evidence that Hilton knew The Cloud canon (he never mentions Dionysius) but the titles of the Latin letters (Epistola de imagine peccati; Epistola ad quemdam seculo renunciare volentem; Epistola ad quemdam solitariun de leccione, intencione, oracione, meditacione; Epistola de utilitate et prerogativis religiosis; Tractatus de adoracione imaginum) show that they too fit into this category, as might also Angels’ Song, although that is ascribed to Hilton only in one late manuscript and not in the other five. Book II of the Scale itself might even have resulted from an earlier request (‘Since you wish ... to hear more of an image which I have before partly described to you, I will with pleasure, and at the same time with some misgivings, comply with your request.’). Both the Cloud author and Hilton are concerned with over-literal interpretations of mystical terminology, since bodily language must of necessity sometimes be used to describe spiritual experience. I am regularly surprised by how
comparatively late in each work these warnings come: one would have thought such misunderstandings, if they occurred at all, would be at an early stage. In addition, Hilton is regularly concerned with varying terms for what is essentially the same experience. Not only does he offer to explain phrases from 'other men's books', but on at least two occasions attempts a synthesis. One such list has already been quoted; the second occurs at the end of a chapter in which Hilton has been talking of the infusion of sanctifying grace which for him is the essence of the contemplative experience:

Perhaps you wonder why I say at one time that grace performs all this, at another time Love, or Jesus, or God. I reply that when I say that grace does it I mean Love, Jesus, God; they are all the same. Jesus is Love, Jesus is grace, Jesus is God; for He does everything in us by grace, as God, and for Love. For this reason I can use which word of the four I please in this book. (11, ch.42)

In these two practices - the habit of explaining difficult doctrine at greater length and the elucidation of standard terminology - lies something of Hilton's realisation that traditional teaching, and especially traditional symbolism, might not only provide a convenient way of expressing the inexpressible but might also raise difficulties for well-meaning but none too well-read incipientes or proficientes. Here I find attractive Miss Russell-Smith's suggestion that Book 11 of The Scale might have been meant for the guidance of contemplatives without adequate spiritual direction. Book 1 begins with an address to 'Ghostly sister', and that this is more than a formality I think is implied by several later references to a single anchoress ('you are enclosed in a cell alone'; 'it is as an anchoress that you will be saved'; 'enclosed in a cell'; 'you ... are enclosed as a religious'). Only ch.61, 'your consolation and that of all other enclosed anchoresses' and the final chapter, 'you, or anyone else who has undertaken the contemplative life ... you or any other contemplative' appear to envisage a wider, though similar, audience. Book 11's opening pronoun is an indefinite you, and later in the work Hilton seems to address different classes of people at different stages of spiritual development; chapter 21 even says 'If then you are free and are not bound by any particular rule'. The opening reference back to the image of sin in Book 1, plus the mention in chapter 20 of 'all the others (deadly sins) and their branches, that 1
described in the first Book', both fits Hilton's practice of providing, on request, a more detailed exposition of earlier teaching and also suggests that the two books may well have been composed at different periods. For what such statistics are worth, 19 English manuscripts - including Cambridge University Library Additional 6685 (the base text for Book I) and the Bodley and Simeon anthologies - and two manuscripts of the Latin text contain Book I alone, either in whole or in part. Only 4 manuscripts in English and only one in Latin contain Book II alone, and one manuscript, British Library, Harley 330, has Book I in English but Book II in Latin. Magdalene College, Cambridge F.4.17, with Book II alone in English, has unique readings in chapter I with the apparent purpose of removing references back to the first book.

I have left until last any mention of the mixed life since I think it offers the clearest example of what I have been trying to demonstrate: Hilton's subtle adaptation of traditional teaching towards the needs of his audience rather different from the original and with a discrimination and humanity on his part going beyond those of his contemporaries. The difficulty is in equating two lives (in the sense of interior dispositions) with three states (exterior occupations). The problem is neatly put in the twenty-first chapter of The Cloud with a literalism of interpretation which I have noticed earlier in the writings of the mystics. How could Mary have chosen the optimam partem?

Bot whiche ben pees þe good þinges, of þe whiche Marye chees þe best? þe lyues ben þeyȝ nei, for Holi Chirche maken no mynde bot of two—actyue liif & contemplatyue liif; þe whiche two lyues ben proueuly understoonden in þe sory of þis Gospel by þeis two sisters, Martha and Marye—by Martha actyue, by Marye contemplatyue. Wipouten one ofpeese two lyues may no man be saaf; & where no mo ben bot two, may no man cheze þe best.

His own particular solution lay in the four-part division in which numbers two and three (higher active and lower contemplative) overlap. He does not give this life a title, but it left free number four in the series, the higher contemplative life, begun here on earth but completed in heaven, as the proper one for Mary to choose. The stress changes: not optimam partem but optimam partem.

If we go back some way, Augustine apparently sees no real difficulty, for Mary chose the better part, the contemplative life. Yet elsewhere he envisages three stages: the life of study, the life of business, and a third, the 'composite'. Any of these three
states may be chosen, but each has its responsibilities:

And therefore this holy leisure is longed for by the love of truth; but it is the necessity of love to undertake requisite business. If no one imposes this burden on us, we are necessitated for love's sake to undertake it. And yet not even in this case are we obliged wholly to relinquish the sweets of contemplation: for were these to be withdrawn, the burden might prove more than we could bear.

City of God, 19:19, translation in Aumann

St Gregory, whilst recognising the superiority of the contemplative life over the active, also recognises a potential conflict in practice. He was writing mainly for monks and other clergy, and he therefore envisages a pastoral or episcopal life, based on the example of Christ:

For when he wrought miracles in the city, yet continued all night in prayer on the mountain, he gave his faithful ones an example not to neglect, through love of contemplation, the care of their neighbours; nor again to abandon contemplative pursuits through being too immoderately engaged in the care of their neighbours; but so to keep together their mind, in applying it to the two cases, that the love of their neighbour might not interfere with the love of God, nor again the love of God cast out, because it transcends, the love of their neighbour.

Moralia, 28, translation in Aumann

Augustine and Gregory envisage the possibility of contemplation for all, but by the time of St Thomas the pressures of the external state had become more obvious. The life of the solitary, if properly lived, he holds will surpass life in the community, but true solitude is only for those already perfect (2a2ae,188,art.8). But military orders (such as the Hospitallers and Templars), the canons regular and (especially) the friars - all these ran the risk of allowing the active component in any kind of mixed life to dominate the contemplative. In those quaestiones which touch on this subject, it is finally seen to be a matter of proportion:

As in any mixture, however, one element predominates, so also in the middle type of life, at one time the contemplative element prevails, at another time the active.

Prelates should not dedicate themselves exclusively to the active life, but they should also excel in the contemplative life. Hence, Gregory says, A prelate should be outstanding in action and should surpass others in contemplation. (2a2ae,182,art.1) and especially 3a.40,art.1 ('Whether Christ should have associated with men'):

The contemplative life is, absolutely speaking, more perfect than the active life which is taken up with bodily actions; but the active life according to which a man, by preaching and teaching, gives to others the fruits of his contemplation
is more perfect than the life by which a man contemplates alone, because such a life presupposes an abundance of contemplation. And therefore, Christ chose such a life. (Italics mine)

In the fourteenth century, it seems to me, most writers on contemplation seem to recognise the problem but not to devote much space to it. The ingenious solution of The Cloud has already been mentioned. The Abbey of the Holy Ghost begins:

My dere brother and sister, I se wel that many wolde ben in religioun but they move nowt for povertie or for awe or for drede of her kyn or for bond of maryage. Therfore I make here a book of relygyoun of the herte, that is of the Abbey of the Holy Goost, that all the that now nout been in bodylyche relygyon now been in gostly.

Unfortunately for our purposes, the treatise is an allegory of interior devotional feelings and does not really consider the requirements of external states. At the end of chapter 14 of the Incendium Amoris, Rolle says that those rare men who have experienced the height of contemplation ought not to be chosen for positions of authority; if they accept public office it can only result in a diminution of their brightness. I think that Hilton alone faced squarely the question of the mixed life and that he gradually saw the need to treat it in a separate work.

In the opening categorizing chapters of Scale I, the type of man for whom Mixed Life was later written is firmly assigned to the active life. Chapter 17 speaks of 'men who are leading an active life and who have authority over others, as prelates and those who have the cure of souls'. Chapter 18 mentions those who are compelled to lead an active life in the world but who would rather serve God in tranquillity (like the anchoress who is being addressed) - however, Hilton does not elaborate at this point. Chapter 18 of Book II, in accordance with its probable wider audience, recognises that some men make no effort to progress beyond reform in faith towards reform in feeling, but that others do not advance because they 'are so busy with worldly occupations that must be attended to': such are partly excusable but nevertheless remain in some spiritual danger. Chapter 27, which discusses how a man may be brought to the luminous darkness of contemplation, naturally insists on the necessity to ignore everything else, but 'provided he has no obligations and may do what he likes without scandalizing or offending his neighbour'. Most explicitly, chapter 39 argues that contemplation assists 'the
performance without depression or bitterness of whatever may be his duty according to his state of life, whether he be a religious or a layman'. Chapter 16 of the Stimulus Amoris, by James of Milan and possibly (but by no means certainly) translated and adapted by Hilton, is headed 'How a man in all his doings may be contemplative'. It appears to suggest that the direction of the whole will and bodily activity towards God is equivalent to contemplation, particularly when it involves the care of the desperately sick:

Yea, a blessed man were he that might in active life serve our Lord with Martha, yet nevertheless rest at our Lord's feet sitting with Mary. For thus do angels perfectly that serve us in earth and yet they see aye God's face in heaven. Right so doth such a man that travaileth, and serveth an holy man or a sick or doth any other work to worship of God, and only beholdeth our Lord Jesus Christ in him.

The basis of this is of course the biblical direction to serve Christ by serving the needy. Towards the end of the chapter the writer makes an exception of 'a man that standeth in degree of life contemplative, as do men of religion and such others' and also of those 'that give themselves only to attend to him in contemplation and to nothing else'. If the translation is indeed Hilton's, it would seem that we have a partial and somewhat confused idea of the mixed life, although the term itself is not used. The Reverend John Clark cites a more direct passage from Hilton's Latin letter written to dissuade its recipient from entering the religious life because he would be unsuited to it. There is hope for this man since

Non dubium quin Deus habet electos suos tam insipientes quam proficientes, ac eadem perfecios, extra religionem regularem sicut in religione ... non dubium quin ad tantom plentudinem caritatis ac ceterorum spiritualium carismatum aspirare poterit per gracion Christi, quantum adipiscer posset eiam si religionem introierit.

This too would seem to envisage a kind of mixed life.

If I go on to argue that Mixed Life finally gives full and proper consideration to this problem, it is important to realise just what Mixed Life says. It begins with the traditional teaching that the contemplative life must be preceded by the active life, but then argues that the responsibilities of the man for whom the treatise was written requires him to practise both at different times, that is, the combination of a worldly active state with a contemplative life. Chapter 5 begins with the statement that
mixed life belongs especially 'to prelates and other curates' (the traditional Gregorian interpretation) but it also belongs 'generally to some temporal men' who have received the gift of grace 'and in part savour of ghostly occupation'. The adaptation is carefully qualified and buttressed by a reference to Gregory and to the 'mixed life' led by Christ on earth. Chapter 6, entitled 'How Holy Bishops Used Mixed Life', says that absolutely contemplative life is best, and that those who are fortunately able to live it because they have no temporal responsibilities should leave it temporarily only 'if need ask it at the prayer and instance of others, or else at the bidding of their sovereign'. The mixed life is no free-for-all. And, furthermore, the contemplative element in this mixed life consists of 'the mind of his Passion and of his other works in manhood by devotion and meditation of him'. (ch.8). Most significantly, in chapter 9:

Then, if thou be first Jacob and discreetly wilt use these two lives in time, thou shalt after be Israel (that is very contemplative) either in this life if he will deliver thee and make thee free from charges and businesses the which thou art bounden to, or else after this life full in the bliss of heaven when thou comest thither.

From chapter 13 onwards there is an explanation of the contemplative life, but not in its most advanced stages. The latter may be mentioned ('a ghostly sight of the three principal virtues', the mercy of God towards sinners) but not elaborated as they are in the concluding chapters of Scale II. If we feel servour of 'ghostly things', we are reminded that much time and experience are required before we may really savour them.

I have gone into some detail about Mixed Life since I would not wish Hilton to emerge as some kind of religious egalitarian. Israel is 'as much for to say as a man seeing God', and the recipient of Mixed Life will most probably always remain Jacob. In his perception and articulation of individual difficulties which were sometimes noticed (but not adequately discussed) by his contemporaries, and his adaptation and extension of traditional teaching to help to solve such problems, Hilton is careful to retain the tradition intact. It was this sympathetic yet firm direction which, I feel sure, led to the description of the Scale in the dedication to Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, of the 1494 Wynkyn de Worde printed text (to which was added Mixed
Life as a 'third part') as 'this heuently boke more precyous than
golde'.

NOTES

1. Translated as Of Cleaving to God, by E.Stepp, Oxford, 1947,
   pp.17.36.

2. In the absence of critical texts of The Scale of Perfection,
   I have quoted from the modernized edition of G. Stiwell,
   London, 1953, checked against the E. Underhill text of Book
   I, London, 1923, and my own edited text of Book II.

3. L. Ragusa and R.B. Green, Meditations on the Life of Christ,
   Princeton, 1951.


5. M.E. mystics are quoted from the following editions:
   E.Colledge and J.Walsh, A Book of Showings to the Anchoress
   P.Hodgson, The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy
   Counselling, Early English Text Society O.S, 218, 1944.

   The last of these, 'Action and Contemplation in Walter Hilton',
   97 (1979), 258-74 is especially relevant to this paper.

7. Translated as On the Love of God, by a religious of the Com-

8. Cloud 114/3, Scale II ch.33.

9. In Pre-Reformation English Spirituality, ed. J.Walsh, New

10. Translations from Augustine and Gregory are quoted from the
    Appendix to vol.46, ed. J. Aumann of the Dominican edition
    of the Summa Theologiae, London, 1966, from which St Thomas
    is also quoted.

11. N.F. Blake, Middle English Religious Prose, London, 1972,
    p.89.

