

NOT *of the*  
WORLD

# NOT *of the* WORLD

— 20 LESSONS —  
*on* FOLLOWING CHRIST  
*without* COMPROMISE

SAINT CLAUDE  
LA COLOMBIÈRE

*Compiled and translated by*  
BRANDON P. OTTO

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*Not of the World: 20 Lessons on Following Christ without  
Compromise* © 2026 TAN Books

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## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

“One must be a saint in order to make saints.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, Claude La Colombière—called to the apostolic life by his Jesuit vocation—had to become a saint, and so he did. La Colombière is best known as the spiritual director of St. Marguerite-Marie Alacoque and a promoter of her devotion to the Sacred Heart. But his true goal was simply to be a saint, and for him, “it is impossible to give a higher idea of sanctity than that of a perfect Jesuit.”<sup>2</sup>

La Colombière was born February 2, 1641, in Saint-Symphorien-d'Ozon, outside Lyon, to a truly religious family: out of the five children who survived childhood, four became religious, and the one son who married was

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<sup>1</sup> Claude La Colombière, *Spiritual Journal*, §113, in Claude La Colombière, *Écrits spirituels*, ed. André Ravier, 2nd ed. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer/Bellarmin, 1982), 149. The two *Spiritual Retreats* and the *Spiritual Journal* were originally published in one volume, with no section numbering; Ravier's edition numbers the sections sequentially.

<sup>2</sup> Claude La Colombière, *Spiritual Retreat of 1674* §16, in La Colombière, *Écrits spirituels*, 90.

said to be like “a monk remaining in the world.”<sup>3</sup> La Colombière entered the Jesuits in 1658 and professed his first vows in 1660; after giving a panegyric to celebrate the canonization of St. Francis de Sales in 1666, he was sent to study theology in Paris, where he was ordained to the priesthood in 1669. After teaching rhetoric for three years, he began his third year of probation in 1674—during which he wrote his first *Spiritual Retreat* and his *Spiritual Journal*—culminating in his solemn vows in 1675. After these vows, he was sent to Paray-le-Monial, where he met St. Marguerite-Marie Alacoque. He declared her revelations of the Sacred Heart to be authentic,<sup>4</sup> and he became her spiritual director and promoter.

In 1676, La Colombière was sent to London to be the preacher for the Duchess of York, a Catholic. There, he wrote his *Christian Reflections* and *Sermons* and (cautiously) spread the devotion to the Sacred Heart.<sup>5</sup> However, during the “Papist Terror” of 1678, he was arrested and exiled from England for the crime of being

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<sup>3</sup> André Ravier, “Introduction générale,” in La Colombière, *Écrits spirituels*, 8. Ravier’s introduction is my main source for La Colombière’s life and spirituality.

<sup>4</sup> La Colombière even recorded her account of her greatest vision in his *Spiritual Retreat of 1677*, §135 (*Écrits spirituels*, 165–167).

<sup>5</sup> Neither the ruling Anglicanism of England nor the popular Jansenism among Catholics looked kindly on this devotion (see Ravier, “Introduction générale,” in *Écrits spirituels*, 57).

a Jesuit. His stint in prison exacerbated his already precarious health, and his last years were often spent in medically-required rest in his hometown. During a stay in Paray-le-Monial,<sup>6</sup> he finally succumbed to a severe hemorrhage, dying on February 15, 1682.

La Colombière's writings—all edited and published posthumously—include four volumes of *Sermons* (with a separate series of *Meditations on the Passion*), the *Christian Reflections*, two *Spiritual Retreats* and a *Spiritual Journal*, and a collection of letters. The *Retreats* and *Journal*—the first of his works to be published—were a major enkindler of devotion to the Sacred Heart.

The *Christian Reflections* are collections of passages on various topics, often serving as first drafts of passages in La Colombière's sermons. Though not written for publication, their tone is often admonitory and exhortatory,<sup>7</sup> very different from the intimate, self-directed tone of the *Retreats* and the *Journal*. It is in these latter works that he shows his own spiritual ideal: that of

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<sup>6</sup> Though his superior had been arranging his departure from the town, St. Marguerite-Marie forbade it, telling La Colombière, "He told me that He willed the sacrifice of your life in this land" (qtd. in Ravier, "Introduction générale," 65).

<sup>7</sup> Ravier describes their tone thus: "They represent . . . his spontaneous reaction, in some instinctive way, to the religious and moral state of the society of his times." "Introduction" to the *Christian Reflections* in *Écrits spirituels*, 270.



“destruction” or, more literally, “nullification” of self in order to belong wholly to God. This ideal is perhaps better stated by Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle: man “ought to be disappropriated and nullified, and appropriated to Jesus, subsisting in Jesus, being in Jesus, living in Jesus, working in Jesus, fructifying in Jesus. . . . The life of man is to abase himself and to nullify himself in himself, to refer himself to God, to unite himself to Jesus, to live and to work in Jesus.”<sup>8</sup>

Such “nullification”—emulating the “all-powerful and nullified God”<sup>9</sup>—is the spiritual ideal of La Colombière, who surrendered his own love of solitude in order to follow Jesus in the apostolic, Jesuitical life, and this “sacrifice of my heart”<sup>10</sup> to the Sacred Heart blossomed a fruitful tree: these *Reflections* are a bushel of its fruit.

—Brandon P. Otto

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<sup>8</sup> Pierre de Bérulle, *Diverse Little Works of Piety* V, in *Œuvres complètes de De Bérulle*, ed. Jean-Paul Migne (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1856), 914.

<sup>9</sup> La Colombière, *Spiritual Journal* §110, in *Écrits spirituels*, 147.

<sup>10</sup> La Colombière, *Spiritual Retreat of 1674*, §40, in *Écrits spirituels*, 101. This “sacrifice,” specifically, is a unique vow La Colombière made to follow all the rules of the Jesuits: see *Spiritual Retreat of 1674*, §41, in *Écrits spirituels*, 101–8.

## NOTE ON THE TEXT

Like all of La Colombière's writings, the *Christian Reflections* were published posthumously; the first edition was published in 1684, with slightly revised editions in 1687, 1689, and 1697. I have primarily followed the first edition of 1684, but I have occasionally used readings from the other editions (mainly the "final edition" of 1697) when there are obvious errors, though I have rarely noted it.

Of the various editions published in subsequent centuries, I have made use of two. First is a modernized edition of La Colombière's works, first published in 1757; this edition is "put in better French," as the title page says, though it also often rephrases passages and even rearranges the order of the chapters. Still, the interpretations in this edition have sometimes helped me with translating thornier passages. (A more accurate edition in 1900–1902, by Pierre Charrier, I made no use of.) Second is the 1962 edition of La Colombière's "spiritual writings" by André Ravier; though

the text is almost exclusively that of the 1684 edition, Ravier's edition includes a variety of notes and, most importantly, citations for almost all of La Colombière's quotations and allusions. I have used these citations extensively, though sometimes the sources Ravier gives are either misread or simply *mal à propos* to the quotation or allusion. Still, it has been an invaluable source, especially when trying to track down quotations from excessively voluminous authors like Chrysostom and Augustine.

All quotations in the footnotes are translated by me from the original languages. The most common source is Jean-Paul Migne's pair of enormous patristic compilations, the *Patrologia Latina* and the *Patrologia Græca*; these are cited, respectively, as PL and PG, followed by the volume number, column number, and (in most cases) column section. Thus PL 196:327C is *Patrologia Latina*, volume 196, column 327, section C.

In translating La Colombière's text, I strove to match his style as closely as possible. All of the capitalizations found in the first edition are matched in my translation; I have only added capitalizations for pronouns referring to God or Jesus. I strove to break up La Colombière's sentences as little as possible, though I have been liberal in rearranging punctuation to make

the sentences (mostly) match English usage. However, the run-on sentence, alongside the fragmentary sentence, was common in writing of that era, and my translation reflects that.

## Editions Used

Claude La Colombière. *Reflexions chrétiennes*. Lyon: Anisson, Poseul & Rigaud, 1684.

Claude La Colombière. *Reflexions chretiennes*. Dernière édition. Lyon: Anisson & Posuel, 1697.

Claude La Colombière. *Réflexions chrétiennes sur divers sujets, et Méditations sur la Passion de N.S. Jesus-Christ*. Nouvelle Edition, mise en meilleur françois. Tome Sixieme. Lyon: Jean-Marie Bruyset, 1757.

Bienheureux Claude La Colombière. *Écrits spirituels*. Ed. André Ravier. Deuxième édition revue et augmentée. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer/Bellarmin, 1982.

## NOTICE TO THE READER<sup>11</sup>

After having given the Public the *Sermons*, the *Meditations on the Passion of Jesus Christ* by Père la Colombière, and his *Retreat*, the Reader will, perhaps, know how willingly I present to him a little Collection of some thoughts by the same Author. He had enough care to note down the views that came to him in the spirit, and when they appeared good and solid to him, he would give them all the space that could render them more useful to him. Afterwards, he would put them to work in his *Sermons*, as justness permitted him; for it in no way worried him to employ a good thought, as long as he believed he had found a natural and regular place for it; he was exact to the scruple, when he dealt with disposing and unifying all the parts of a discourse well.

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<sup>11</sup> This notice was included in the original editions of the *Christian Reflections* but dropped in later editions. Unfortunately, the original editor of La Colombière's works did not include his name, and he remains anonymous.

One will doubtless find some of the Reflections from this Volume in his *Sermons*, but except for a few, they do not have exactly the same form. The Author had a great facility for writing well and for devoting different days to the same subject. Those who will take the pains to read this Collection with attention will draw great advantage from it: it contains a great variety of choice and remarkable things, and although some are more focused than others, they all have a befitting form which prevents one from languishing while reading them, and which, from the start, promises some profit.

## ON THE WORLD

The world prefers vain qualities to solid ones; a man who is born in a certain family, although without merit, will be preferred to the man of the world who has more of it; what is worse is that in order to merit the greatest honors, one needs only a heritage, only a good fortune, which will enrich a fool and a miserable person, who will soon see himself preferred over better spirits and over those who have more courage and virtue.

It<sup>12</sup> does no justice to merit; one judges people by their habits, by their interest, by their passion; those who are masters here are neither the best nor the most luminous; they are often the most vicious, whom politics (ordinarily), intrigue, or chance raises up when birth does not form all of their merit, but how much does one want the world to hold merit in regard, to reward it and consider it, since it is not even known here?

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<sup>12</sup> That is, the world.

The honor which ought to be inseparable from virtue, and which I ought not to lose except in losing *virtue*, I lose, according to the world, through the imprudence of a wretch who gives me an affront, and I cannot repair it except by exposing myself to losing my life, as if I were a less honest man because a brutal one was found in the universe. Poverty or the malice of a nitpicker throws me into misfortune; it not only burdens me with confusion before the world but in this sense, it degrades the greatest Lords: this is why one hides it, for fearing of losing honor too, after having lost all the rest.

A great man publishes a crime to the world, and it gives him glory, at which *crime* an individual would blush, as if condition had changed the nature of vices and virtues. Today, one adores a virtuous girl, and tomorrow, if one has her in possession, one abandons oneself to a prostitute. What regulates these kinds of judgments? Is it justice or reason, or rather, passion, which governs the world and all its slaves?

It is necessary, then, that all retire from the world: this is not my thought, much less am I of the humor of those who would want, if it were possible, to cut away all the sweetnesss of life from the world: this is not my sentiment. I wish I were able to guide all the world to



heaven along a path of roses, but if there is nothing of this nature in it, can one dedicate oneself to making the world know the sole path that can lead to heaven and to engaging it to follow it, however thorny it appear?

Can one remain in the world without offending God? If I ask those predestined souls, who fully retire from it after having been engaged in it beforehand, about this, they respond to me that no, it is impossible to live here innocently. If those people say it, they who have so much fear of God, if those, I say, cannot be saved there, those who have so much fear of losing themselves, what will happen to the others who are nowhere near as vigilant nor as conscientious?

But you, do you not say this yourselves? When one shows you the danger there is in holding certain conversations, in taking certain liberties, in speaking ill of a neighbor? Do you not respond that one can't stop this, that one must, then, be silent in companies,<sup>13</sup> that one should not speak of anything, that one would have to be bronze in order to defend himself from evil desires in the midst of a world where everything conspires to bring them to birth, and that—unless one lives as a hermit—it is impossible to protect oneself from this?

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<sup>13</sup> "Company" is the term La Colombière typically uses to describe a social gathering.

This is said every day by people who think to justify their disorders by means of this in some way. It is impossible to frequent this world without offending God or, at the least, without being exposed to the risk of offending Him; you are, thus, obliged to quit it.

All Christians have renounced the world and the vanities of the world; this vow does not oblige one to become a hermit—I know this well—but in the end, it obliges one to something. It is not a vain promise; it is necessary that there be a world within the world itself, which every Christian ought to quit. A world which does not know God, for whom Jesus Christ has not prayed (Jn 17:9), whose chief is the demon. Now, if there is one of these *worlds*, are there not those companies, those assemblies, where vanity reigns, where one studies only how to please, where pleasure forms the entire occupation of those who compose it, where one almost never takes pleasure which is innocent, where, finally, one gains glory from all that nature teaches us to blush about?

How do you want me to esteem a world which I see filled with people who are so little reasonable? One is puffed up by a vain name which he dishonors through his conduct, the other glorifies himself with clothing which he owes to the merchant and the tailor, and

under which he hides not only a withered and ulcered flesh but a filthy and stinking soul. There are those who lose sleep in order to acquire goods for which they have no use, others who are carried away, who scream, who pummel, who rage about things of no importance, or which do not concern them. The cowardice of a debauched man in losing a girl, his perfidy after having dishonored her. A simple girl spurned because she had the weakness to believe an impostor, while the man triumphs by his imposture, as if what is a vice in one sex were a virtue in another. No humanity: one lets reasonable men die of hunger while one lavishes upon dogs and horses what one refuses to creatures whom the Creator formed in His image.

The reason why there are so many complaints against the ingratitude of men is that those to whom one has done good are, indeed, great ingrates, and that we esteem our services very much. How many pains lost in the service of the world! Often, when one has had the best intention and when one has followed it the most, if the thing does not succeed, one gives you no gratitude for your pains. You spend whole years suffering without one even noticing it, and if one notices a fault, one scolds, one is carried away, one shatters you. It is not enough to serve well; one must please, and

what is necessary for pleasing is not in our power: masters have aversions, which make it so that they receive everything that comes from certain persons badly, while a little service from a do-nothing and libertine favorite receives praises and rewards. I pardon this injustice in masters, who do not distinguish natural qualities from true merit, but I do not pardon it in men who love to serve the world, that blind master.

The world does not merit our cares; they are all due to God and to the salvation of our soul; they are all necessary for this matter, and they are useless for all the rest except for God, since we have naught but one end; things have naught but one center, have naught but one movement which brings them there. Furthermore, in working out our salvation, we are happy, though we lack all the rest; when we have all the rest without our salvation, not only do we add nothing to our happiness but we lose it.

Our heart is too small for the world and for the salvation of our soul, our life too short for such distinct affairs, beyond the fact that these cares are incompatible. God Himself, immense though He be, does not extend His cares to such opposite affairs; He has naught but one care alone, which is our salvation; all that He has done, from the beginning of the world,

leads to the despising of the world and to our salvation. The law of nature leads to the written law, that to the law of grace, the law of grace to our salvation: He has done all for this, He sacrifices all for this—goods, honor, health—He, furthermore, gives all this as means for this end. Indeed, as He gives all His advantages, although one does not seek them, to those who despise them as snares which the world sets out for them, He takes them away from those who, for the service of the world, hasten to seek them at the cost of their salvation.

One serves the world only in order to procure a powerful establishment; one wants to obtain fortune and posterity there, and a person does not dream of obtaining a fortune in paradise, where we are masters of doing whatever will please us; there, being great or small depends on our cares. If this is so, what extravagance it is to serve the world in order to obtain a fortune and to treat as a chimera that which we can procure for ourselves in paradise! If the king were to publish an edict by which he declared that, in a year from now, all his subjects would change their condition according to the eagerness that they displayed in *either* caressing or driving his capital enemy to the edge, who is there who, during this year, would not expose himself even to the danger of losing his life in order

to satisfy the prince and to be something better than he was born? Now, this change of state and condition is assured to us, not, I say, in a year, but, perhaps, in a month, according to the regard we have for God or for the world; that artisan, that valet, that slave who, in the lowness of his condition, believed the world unworthy of his eagerness, will see himself as high above his masters as they are, at present, above him. Yes, that lord who has so exactly served the world and practiced all its maxims will see himself trampled under the feet of his servants, that lady, despised and found unworthy of being in the same apartment as her servant. This is why one sees so many monasteries, so many men, wise and happy, according to the world, who mock it for all its caresses, in the infallible assurance that they have of this change, which will fix their happiness for a whole entire eternity.

Those who despise the world are despised by it; the world mocks them without knowing what it does, and they mock the world because they know well what they do; they do not stop rejecting all the sweetnesses and amusements of the world in order to traffic for heaven, like Noah, who did not stop constructing his ark, although they ridiculed him; he saw that in obeying God, he would save himself from death and would

become the master of the world. These wise, according to God, and most despicable, in the judgment of the world, have received secret notices of what is soon to occur, inspirations which convince them of what the world does not want to believe; they no longer doubt this, after what the Lord told them about it in the depths of the heart: this is why they act, they hasten, they are eager to make themselves great in the other life. If you were wise, you would reason like them, and you would say that it is not in vain that so many people—so wise, so considerable through their birth, so great through their charges—quit all that the world offers them, mortify themselves, render themselves despicable to the world; they are men like me: it is, thus, necessary that there be some considerable gain to acquire by despising the world. What will all the rest avail me, then, if listening to the world and its maxims, I risk and lose the principal thing?

The world is naught but a continual dissimulation; it is good, I avow, in some occasions, but in any excessive use, does not this world become a perpetual comedy,<sup>14</sup> above all in our hearts? One puts on a mask upon

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<sup>14</sup> In La Colombière's time, the word *comédie* could be used to refer to any theatrical piece, of any genre, though it could also be used to refer to a play with a happy ending, or a humorous

entering it; one goes about in order to be seen, for one's own interest, to observe the faults of another. Tell me: of all those people, how many are there who hope for your constant fortune, who do not desire a contrary one for you, who accompany you in your misfortune, who are not attached to the one who would take your place; how many are there whom pure friendship attaches to your person?

To judge men healthily, it is necessary to consider them, upon earth, as men in a painting; one esteems a worm in a picture, if it is well-done, no less than a king and a prince, nor, on the stage, a valet less than a lord, but only inasmuch as each one plays his role well, since, in the end, everyone is equal.

Human respect hinders doing good in the world; bad example even brings one to do evil; indeed, can one, in the great world, avoid one of these two shoals either by doing good in order to be esteemed by men or by not doing so for fear of drawing down the ridicules of libertines? If you follow the maxims of Jesus Christ, you will condemn the manners of the world, you will

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play, in contradistinction to a tragedy. La Colombière typically uses the word in the first sense, though the second sense is always implied: the frivolous worldly people he so often lambasts would more likely be patrons of Molière than Corneille or Racine.



trample its idols underfoot; the world, henceforth, will *not* do business with you.<sup>15</sup> Thus the Israelites could not sacrifice in Egypt, nor hold their festivals, because of the tasks by which they were overwhelmed and because the victims they had to sacrifice were the gods of the Egyptians.

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<sup>15</sup> The French is lacking the “not,” but this seems an error, as without it, this sentence does not make sense in context. The 1757 paraphrased edition of the *Christian Reflections* agrees with this interpretation, as it reads, “The world, henceforth, will turn against you” (39).