

**KATHOLIEKE UNIVERSITEIT LEUVEN**  
**FACULTY OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES**



**ABIDING IN MINNE'S DEMANDS**  
**A THEOLOGICAL RETRIEVAL OF JAN VAN RUUSBROEC AND ITS  
INTERDISCIPLINARY ENCOUNTER WITH JEAN-LUC MARION**

A dissertation presented in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for  
the Doctor's Degree in Theology and  
Religious Studies

Promoter:

**Prof. Dr. Lieven Boeve**

Co-Promoter:

**Prof. Dr. Robertus Faesen S.J.**

by

**Patrick Ryan Cooper**

A.M.D.G.

## Acknowledgments

When acknowledging gratitude, one necessarily encounters an impossibility. That is, the unavoidable failure to graciously respond, in an adequate manner, to all that which we have uniquely, yet commonly received. There is nothing false about such humility. Over these past years of research, while daily reflecting and writing upon Ruusbroec's theology of *minne*, I have been humbled by the concrete fact that its better yet to heed love's demands than simply write about them. However, our failures should not deter us and keep us quiet. If anything, let the magnanimous impossibility to satisfy love with a just response reflect the joyful extent to which we are, and will thus remain, indebted to others.

I wish, therefore, to first thank the members of my immediate family in the United States and in Switzerland for their continuing support over these past years in Leuven. And in particular, my mother, Amy Searcy, and her tireless example of a life lived in service of others as well as my mother-in-law, Theresa Wittwer, for her many trips to Leuven over the years in helping out with our young family. I wish to thank my father, Terry Cooper and father-in-law, Daniel Wittwer, Hugh McDonough and Robert Bibbo, as well as Meghan Boyle, Anna and Vince Cooper. As a bridge between the US and Leuven, additionally I wish to thank Joseph Boel S.J. for his council and guidance, as well as for having gently planted the 'Leuven seed' in the first place.

As the outgoing Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies and as my promoter, I first wish to thank Prof. Lieven Boeve, especially for his motivation, loyalty and generous commitment. As well as for the members of the Research Group, Theology in a Postmodern Context, I wish to express my gratitude for its broadened perspective, as well as for its mutual sharing in the challenges and possibilities inherent in our joint endeavor. To my co-promoter, Prof. Rob Faesen S.J., your unwavering patience and strong commitment in transmitting both the texts and traditions of the Brabantine 'Master' is an invaluable gift. To the members of the Institute for the Study of Spirituality, I wish to express my gratitude for our regular gatherings around the texts of Ruusbroec and the stimulating conversation that unfailingly emerges from such close readings. To the members of the Research Group Anthropos, I also wish to express my gratitude and excitement in its vision and in particular, Prof. Yves De Maeseneer for his lived example as a teacher and for his generous advice. Additionally, I want to express my gratitude to the members of the Ruusbroecgenootschap, its tradition of scholarship, as well as for its admirable work in completing the critical edition of Ruusbroec's complete works, thereby making available the Brabantine's works to a larger readership.

To my fellow council-members and the wider community at Sint Kwinten's, I wish to thank you for providing a spiritual home for my family. In particular, Fr. Thomas Gricoski O.S.B. and the late Fr. Cyril Crawford, O.S.B. whose voice can still be recalled and thus heeded. To my dear friends, Ellen Vandenbroeck and Eric De Wilde for your confidence, sharing and loving support. To the Manderfield family and in particular, my dear friend Bradford, for the endurance of your commitments. To the Gonzales family, and to my dear friend Philip, with whom the task of loving integration and concrete synthesis knows no end.

To my dear sons Martin, Francis and Laurence—your inexhaustible life is an endless joy. And to my dearest wife Helena, with whom I flow out and ebb back daily in the demands and desires of God's common love. This work is as much your own as I am yours.

## PREFATORY REMARKS

In this work, one may well read, as in a mirror, the insatiability of thought that persists in saying what cannot be said, while sufficiently aware of its own deficiencies. In seeking to communicate my ongoing scholarly research, the following dissertation evidences traces of such a process of reflection and its continuing trajectory of research. It comprises mainly of various conference presentations and peer-reviewed articles that have been or are intended for future publication. If its repetition becomes at times tedious, then be assured that a change in format and further revision will be in order, if in the event of its future publication.

As a stylistic note to the reader. In the following, I will not italicize my frequent use of Ruusbroec's middle-Dutch term, 'minne' (as a substantive), or 'minnen' (in its verbal form) hoping to forestall any undue distraction from disrupting the overall flow of the text. I do, however, consistently try to provide in brackets the Middle-Dutch equivalent to various key terms, or to accentuate a particular nuance in the Brabantine's corpus. As for textual citations of Ruusbroec, I deliberately not only provide the original vernacular, but furthermore, when citing a passage from the critical edition, the footnote citations for the appropriate section and lines are according to the original Middle-Dutch version. I use the English translation provided by the Ruusbroec critical edition, except for when I occasionally modify the translation, in which case, I provide the alternative translation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### WORKS BY JAN VAN RUUSBROEC

- The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works.* Ed. and trans. J.A. Wiseman, with introduction by Louis Dupré. New York: Paulist Press, 1985.
- Boecskén der verclaringhe.* Ed. Guido De Baere. Translation into English by Ph. Crowley and Helen Rolfson, translation into Latin by L. Surius, Opera omnia, 1; CCCM, 101. Tielt: Lanoo; Turnhout: Brepols, 1989.
- Die geestelike brulocht.* Ed. Jos Alaerts. Translation into English by Helen Rolfson, translation into Latin by L. Surius, Opera omnia, 3; CCCM, 103. Tielt: Lanoo; Turnhout: Brepols, 1988.
- Vanden seven sloten.* Ed. Guido De Baere. Translation into English by Helen Rolfson, translation into Latin by L. Surius, Opera omnia, 2; , 102. Tielt: Lanoo; Turnhout: Brepols, 1989.
- Vanden blinkenden steen; Vanden vier becoringhen; Vanden kerstenen ghelove; brieven.* Ed. Guido De Baere. Translation into English by André Lefevère, translation into Latin by L. Surius, Opera omnia, 10; CCCM, 110. Tielt: Lanoo; Turnhout: Brepols, 1991.
- Vanden XII beghinen.* Prolegomena. Ed. Mikel. M. Kors. Translation into English by Helen Rolfson, Opera omnia, 7; CCCM, 107. Tielt: Lanoo; Turnhout: Brepols, 2000.
- Vanden XII beghinen.* Text and Apparatus. Mikel. M. Kors. Translation into English by Helen Rolfson, translation into Latin by L. Surius, Opera omnia, 7A; CCCM 107A. Tielt: Lanoo; Turnhout: Brepols, 2000.
- Een spiegel der eeuwighe salicheit.* Ed. Guido De Baere. Translation into English by André Lefevère, translation into Latin by L. Surius, Opera omnia, 8; CCCM, 108. Tielt: Lanoo; Turnhout: Brepols, 2001.
- Dat rijcke der ghelieven.* Ed. Jos Alaerts. Translation into English by Helen Rolfson, translation into Latin by L. Surius, Opera omnia, 4; CCCM, 104. Tielt: Lanoo; Turnhout: Brepols, 2002.
- Van seven trappen.* Ed. Rob Faesen. Translation into English by Helen Rolfson, translation into Latin by L. Surius and edited by Rob Faesen. Opera omnia, 9; CCCM 109. Tielt: Lanoo; Turnhout: Brepols, 2003.
- Van den geesteliken tabernakel.* Ed. Thom Mertens. Translation into English by Helen Rolfson, translation into Latin by L. Surius, Opera omnia, 5-6; CCCM, 105-106. Tielt: Lanoo; Turnhout: Brepols, 2006.

## WORKS BY JEAN-LUC MARION

(English)

*God Without Being: Hors-texte.* Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

"Christian Philosophy and charity." *Communio* XIX, Number 3 (1992) 465-473.

"Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Summary for Theologians." Translated by Angus McGeoch. In *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader.* ed. Graham Ward, 279-296. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.

*Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology.* Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998.

*Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics.* Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

*On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-Theo-Logy in Cartesian Thought.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

"In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology'." In *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism.* eds. J.D. Caputo and M.J. Scanlon, 20-53. Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1999.

"'Christian Philosophy': Hermeneutic or Heuristic?" In *The Question of Christian Philosophy Today.* ed., Francis J. Ambrosio, 247-264. New York: Fordham University Press, 1999.

"The Saturated Phenomenon." Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. In *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

"Is the Ontological Argument Ontological? The Argument According to Anselm and its Metaphysical Interpretation According to Kant." In *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology.* eds. Ilse N. Bulhof, Laurens ten Kate, 78-99. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

*The Idol and Distance: Five Studies.* Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. New York: Fordham University Press, 2001.

- "The Formal Reason for the Infinite". In *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*. ed. Graham Ward, 399-412. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001.
- Prolegomena to Charity*. Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002.
- "They Recognized Him and He Became Invisible to Them." Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. *Modern Theology* 18.2 (2002): 145-152.
- Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomenon*. Translated by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002.
- "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theo-Logy." Translated by B. Gendreau, R. Rethy, and M. Sweeney. In *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*. eds., Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- "Introduction: What Do We Mean By 'Mystic'?" In *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*. eds., Michael Kessler, Christian Sheppard, 1-7. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- The Crossing of the Visible*. Translated by James K. A. Smith. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- "The Reason of the Gift". Translated by S. Mackinlay, N. de Warren. In *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, eds. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy, 101-134. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.
- "*Mihi magna quaestio factus sum: The Privilege of Unknowing*." Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. *Journal of Religion*. 85.1 (2005) 1-24.
- The Erotic Phenomenon*. Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- "The Impossible for Man—God". In *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry*. eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, 17-43. Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 2007.
- The Visible and the Revealed*. Translated by Christina M. Gschwandtner. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.
- "The Phenomenality of the Sacrament—Being and Givenness." In *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*. eds. Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, 89-102. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.
- The Reason of the Gift*. Translated and with an introduction by Stephen E. Lewis. Charlottesville, VA.: University of Virginia Press, 2011.



"Resting, Moving, Loving: The Access to the Self according to Saint Augustine." *Journal of Religion*. 91. 1 (2011) 24-42.

*In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*. Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2012.

*Jean Luc Marion: The Essential Writings*. ed., Kevin Hart. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.

## OTHER WORKS

Allitt, Patrick. *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals turn to Rome*. Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Arblaster, John and Rob Faesen, "Mysticism with or without the Church? John of Ruusbroec's Conflict with the Clergy." *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 74.1 (2013) 18-32.

\_\_\_\_\_ eds., *A Companion to John of Ruusbroec*. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.

Augustine. *The Works of Saint Augustine: A translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.: Vol. II, Sermons (20-50)*. Translated by Edmund Hill and edited by John E. Rotelle. Hyde Park, NY.: New City Press, 1990.

Badiou, Alain. *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Translated by Ray Brassier. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003

Beckaert, Edward. "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting: Exploring the Spiritual Affinity between John of Ruusbroec and Rogier van der Weyden." *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 82, 4 (2011), 333-392.

Beeck, Frans Jozef van. *Catholic Identity After Vatican II: Three Types of Faith in the One Church*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985.

\_\_\_\_\_. *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology Volume One, Volume One. Understanding the Christian Faith*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology Volume Two: The Revelation of the Glory. Introduction and Part 1: Fundamental Theology*. Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1993.

\_\_\_\_\_. *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology Volume Two: The Revelation of the Glory: Part II : One God, Creator of All That Is*. Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1994.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology Volume Two: The Revelation of the Glory: Part III: Finitude and Fall*. Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology Volume Two: The Revelation of the Glory: Part IVA: The Genealogy of Depravity: Morality and immorality*. Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Trinitarian Theology as Participation." In *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*. eds., Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, Gerald O'Collins, 295-325. Oxford: University Press, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology Volume Two: The Revelation of the Glory: Part IVB: The Genealogy of depravity: Living Alive to the Living God*. Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Denying Communion to Politicians: A Theologian Explains Why it is Wrong." *Commonweal Magazine*. volume CXXXI, Number 11,( 2004) 19-21.
- Bell, Daniel M. Jr. *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.
- Bell, David N. *The Image and the Likeness: The Augustinian Spirituality of William of St.-Thierry*, Cistercian Studies Series, 78. Kalamazoo, MI.: Cistercian Publications, 1984.
- Benson, Bruce Ellis and Norman Wirzba, eds. *Transforming Philosophy and Religion: Love's Wisdom*. Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 2008.
- Blondel, Maurice. *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*. Translated by Oliva Blanchette. Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Letter on Apologetics & History and Dogma*. Texts presented and translated by Alexander Dru and Illyd Trenthowan. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995.
- Bloom, Allan. *Love and Friendship*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.
- Boeve, Lieven. "Negative Theology and Theological Hermeneutics: The Particularity of Naming God." *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture*, 3 (2)6.6 (2006), 1-13.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Particularity of the Hermeneutics of God. A Response to Richard Kearney's God-who-may-be." In *Faith in the Enlightenment? The Critique of the Enlightenment Revisited*. eds., L. Boeve L., J. Schrijvers J., W. Stoker W., H. Vroom, 327-339. Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval*. New York: Continuum, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe." In *The New Visibility of Religion: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics*. eds., M. Hoelzl and G. Ward, 187-209. London: Continuum, 2008.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Orthodoxy in the Postmodern Context: The Interruption of the Christian Truth Claim." *Concilium* (2014), forthcoming.

Boff, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology*. Translated by Paul Burns. Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 1986.

Bornemark, Joanna. "The Erotic as Limit-Experience: A Sexual Fantasy." In *Phenomenology of Eros*. eds., Jonna Bornemark & Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, SÖDERTÖRN PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES 10, 247-266. Södertörn: Södertörn University, 2012.

Bossche, Stijn van den. "From the Other's Point of View: The Challenge of Jean-Luc Marion's Phenomenology to Theology." In *Religious Experience and Contemporary Theological Epistemology*. eds. L. Boeve, Y. de Maeseneer, S. van den Bossche, 61-82. Leuven: Peeters, 2001.

\_\_\_\_\_. God Does Appear in Immanence after All. Jean-Luc Marion's Phenomenology as a New First Philosophy for Theology. In *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context: Fundamental Theological Perspectives*, BETL 160. eds. Boeve L., Leijssen L, 325-346. Leuven: Peeters, 2001.

\_\_\_\_\_. A Possible Present for Theology: Theological Implications of Jean-Luc Marion's Phenomenology of Givenness. *Bijdragen: Tijdschrift voor Filosofie en Theologie*. 65.1. (2004) 55-78.

\_\_\_\_\_. On the Gift of (the Sacrament of) Marriage. *Questions Liturgiques / Studies in Liturgy*, 89.4 (2008) 238-259.

Bouckaert, Luk. "The Search for a 'Profane Spirituality.'" *Spiritus*, 11.1 (2011) 24-37.

Bremond, Henri. *Apologie pour Fénelon*. Paris: Perrin, 1910.

Bruni, Luigino. *The Wound and the Blessing: Economics, Relationships and Happiness*. Translated by N. Michael Brennen. Hyde Park, NY.: New City Press, 2012.

Caputo, John D., and Michael J. Scanlon, eds. *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*. Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Carlson, Thomas A. *Indiscretion, Finitude and the Naming of God*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Blindness and the Decision to See: On Revelation and Reception in Jean-Luc Marion." In *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*. ed., Kevin Hart, 153-179. Notre Dame, IN.: Notre Dame University Press, 2007.

- Cavanaugh, William T. *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*. Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans, 2008.
- Colborn, Francis. "The Theology of Grace: Present Trends and Future Directions." *Theological Studies*, vol. XXXI (1970) 692-711.
- College, Edmund, and J.C. Marler. "'Poverty of the Will': Ruusbroec, Eckhart and *The Mirror of Simple Souls*." In *Jan van Ruusbroec. The sources, content, and sequels of his mysticism*. eds., Paul Mommaers, N. De. Paepe, 14-47. Leuven: Peeters, 1984.
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation (Orationis Formas)*. Vatican City: United States Catholic Conference, Office for Pub. and Promotion Services, 1989.
- Conway, Michael. "Maurice Blondel and *Ressourcement*." In *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*. eds., Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, with the assistance of °Patricia Kelly, 65-82. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Cook, Barbara Gist. *Essential Love: The Erotic Theology of Jan Van Ruusbroec*. Thesis (Ph. D.)--University of Chicago, The Divinity School, 2000.
- Cooper, Patrick. "A Hunger Unstilled: Retrieving Jan van Ruusbroec's Understanding of Minne in View of Jean-Luc Marion's Erotic Turn." *Medieval Mystical Theology*, 21. 1 (2012) 53-74.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Touching and Being Touched. A Book Review Essay of Toine van de Hoogen's "A Taste of God: On Spirituality and Reframing Foundational Theology". *Bijdragen: Tijdschrift voor Filosofie en Theologie* 73, 3: (2012) 325-336.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Impossible Pleasure: Jan van Ruusbroec and Jean-Luc Marion on Contemplation as Modeless Enjoyment." *Medieval Mystical Theology*, 2014, forthcoming.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Abiding in Minne's Demands: Context and Retrieval." In *Reading Medieval Mystical Texts Today*. eds., Cooper, P., Kikuchi, S. , forthcoming.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Marijn de Jong. "The Natural Desire for God: Karl Rahner's and Frans Jozef van Beeck's Reconfiguration of Theological Metaphysics." *Louvain Studies*, forthcoming.
- Cornet, Ineke and Martin Sebastian Kallungal. "Why Study Liturgical Mysticism? A Historico-Systematic Theological Reflection." *Bijdragen, International Journal in Philosophy and Theology* 71.1 (2010) 3-26.
- Davies, Oliver. *God Within: The Mystical Tradition of Northern Europe*. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition*. London: SCM Press, 2001.

- \_\_\_\_\_, Denys Turner, eds. *Silence and The Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Lost Heaven"; "The Interrupted Body." In *Transformation Theology: Church in the World*. eds., Oliver Davies, Paul D. Janz, Clemens Sedmak, 11-62. London, T&T Clark International, 2007.
- Deblaere, Albert. "The Netherlands [School of Mysticism]." In *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*. ed., Karl Rahner, 4: 143-146. New York: Herder and Herder, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Essentiel, superessentiel, suressentiel." In *Albert Deblaere. Essays on Mystical Literature*. ed., Rob Faesen, BETL 177, 3-31. Leuven: Peeters, 2004.
- De Kesel, Marc . "'A Drop of Water in the Sea': Reflections on Michel de Certeau's Every Day Life Spirituality's." *Studies in Spiritualities*. 21 (2012) 1-25.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Niets dan liefde: Het vileine wonder van de gift*. Amsterdam: Sjobbolet, 2012.
- Denzinger, Heinrich. *Enchiridion Symbolorum*. Friburg: Herder, 1953.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Sauf le nom (post-scriptum)." In *On the Name*. ed., Thomas Dutoit, 35-88. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials." In *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. II. eds., Peggy Kamuf, Elizabeth Rottenberg, 143-196. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- De Sales, Francis. *Traité sur l'amour de Dieu*. Translated by V. Kerns. London: Burns & Oates, 1962.
- Desmond, William. *Being and the Between*. Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- Dupré, Louis. *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes*. Garden City, NY.: Doubleday & Co., 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Common Life: The Origins of Trinitarian Mysticism and its Development by Jan Ruusbroec*. New York: Crossroad, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Jansenism and Quietism." In *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*. eds., Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers, in collaboration with John Meyendorff, 121-141. London: SCM Press, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Unio Mystica: The State and the Experience." In *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: An Ecumenical Dialogue*. eds., Moshe Idel & Bernard McGinn, 3-23. New York: Continuum, 1996.
- Faesen, Rob. "What is a Mystical Experience? History and Interpretation." *Louvain Studies* 23 (1998) 221-245.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Albert Deblaere on the Divorce of Theology and Spirituality." *Albert Deblaere, S.J. (1916-1994) . Essays on Mystical Literature*. BETL, 177. ed., R. Faesen, 407-425. Leuven: Peeters, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Christian Faith, Apophatic Theology and Experience of Transcendence. Some Reflections by Three Medieval Mystical Authors from the Low Countries." In *Religious Experience and Contemporary Theological Epistemology* . BETL 188, eds., Boeve L., De Maeseneer Y., Van den Bossche S., 227-242. Leuven: Peeters, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Jan van Ruusbroec: contemplatief theoloog in een moeilijke tijd*. Kampen: Kok, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Radical Humanism of Christian Mystics: William of Saint-Thierry, Hadewijch and Ruusbroec versus Abaelard and Ockham." In *Seeing The Seeker: Explorations in the Discipline of Spirituality. A Festschrift for Kees Waaijman on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, 263-276. Leuven: Peeters, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Poor in Ourselves and Rich in God: Indwelling and Non-identity of Being (wesen) and Suprabeing (overwesen) in John of Ruusbroec." *Medieval Mystical Theology*, 21 (2012) 147-169.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Albert Deblaere's Study of Mysticism and His Concern for Christian Humanism." In *Reading Medieval Mystical Texts Today*. eds., P. R. Cooper, S. Kikuchi, forthcoming.
- Fagerberg, David W. *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology*. Chicago: Hillebrand Books, 2004.
- Fénelon, François de Salignac de La Mothe-, and Chad Helms. *Fénelon: Selected Writings*. Mahwah, NJ.: Paulist Press, 2006.
- Fransen, Piet. *Divine Grace and Man*, trans. Georges Dupont S.J., (New York: Mentor-Omega Books, 1962)
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sacramental Grace and Divine Indwelling." In *Intelligent Theology*, vol. 1: *The Trinity Lives in us and we celebrate that life*. Translated by Kevin Smyth, 91-126. London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Three Ways of Dogmatic Thought." In *Intelligent Theology*, vol. 1: *The Trinity Lives in us and We Celebrate that Life*, 9-39. London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1967.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace." In *Intelligent Theology* : vol. III, *Universal Theology*, 7-45. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The New Life of Grace*. Translated by Georges Dupont. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969.
- Fritz, Peter Joseph. "Karl Rahner Repeated in Jean-Luc Marion?" *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 318-337.
- García-Rivera, Alejandro. "The Cosmic Frontier: Toward a Natural Anthropology." *Journal of Hispanic Latino Theology*, vol. 3. 1 (1995) 42-49.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Creator of the Visible and the Invisible: Liberation Theology, Postmodernism, and the Spiritual." *Journal of Hispanic Latino Theology*, vol. 3.4 (1996)35-56.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics*. Collegeville, MN.: The Liturgical Press, 1999.
- Garrigou-Lagrange, Réginald. *The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life*. Westminster, Md: Newman Press, 1950.
- Gorday, Peter J. *François Fénelon: The Apostle of Pure Love*. Brewster, MA.: Paraclette Press, 2012.
- Gschwandtner, Christina M. *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics*. Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 2007.
- Hardin, Garret. "The Tragedy of the Commons." *Science* 162 (1968) 1243–1248.
- Hart, David Bentley. *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Offering of Names: Metaphysics, Nihilism, and Analogy." In *Reason and the Reasons of Faith*. eds., P.J. Griffiths, R. Hütter, 255-291. New York—London, T&T Clark, 2005.
- Hemming, Laurence Paul. "Reply to De Maeseneer." In *God out of Place? A Symposium on L.P. Hemming's Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God*. *Ars Disputandi Supplement Series*, vol. 3, ed. Yves De Maeseneer, 89-94. Utrecht: Ars Disputandi, 2005.
- Hollywood, Amy. *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and The Demands of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Hoogen, T. van den. *A Taste of God: On Spirituality and Reframing Foundational Theology*. Berlin: Lit, 2011.

- Horner, Robyn. *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida and the Limits of Phenomenology*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2001.
- Howells, Edward. "Mysticism and the mystical: The Current Debate." *The Way Supplement* (2001) 15-27.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Relationality and difference in the mysticism of Pierre de Berulle." *The Harvard Theological Review*, 102.2 (2009), 225-243.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Appropriating the Divine Presence: Re-reading Augustine's On the Trinity as a Transformative Text." *Spiritus*, 11. 2 (2011) 200-223.
- Hügel, Friedrich. *The Mystical Element of Religion As Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1923.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Pure Love Controversy", 'One Act.'" In *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and her Friends*, vol.2, 146-181. London, James Clarke & Co, 1961.
- Ihssen, Brenda Llewellyn. "'That which has been wrung from tears': Usury, the Greek Fathers, and Catholic Social Teaching." In *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for Twenty-First-Century Christian Social Thought*. eds., Johan Leemans, Brian J. Matz, Johan Verstraeten, 124-160. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience; A Study in Human Nature. Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1929.
- Jeanrond, Werner. *A Theology of Love*. New York—London, T&T Clark, 2010.
- Jones, Tamsin. *A Genealogy of Marion's Philosophy of Religion: Apparent Darkness*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011.
- Julian Norwich. *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*. eds., Jacqueline Jenkins and Nicholas Watson. Turnhout: Brepols, 2006
- Kearney, Richard. *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion*. Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Keenan, James, F. *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences*. New York: Continuum, 2010.
- Kerlin, Michael J. "Maurice Blondel: Philosophy, Prayer and the Mystical." In *Modernists & Mystics*. ed. C.J.T. Talar, 62-81. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009.



Kessler, Michael and Christian Sheppard (eds). *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Kikuchi, Satoshi. "Ruusbroec's Concept of gemeen (Common) Reconsidered." *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, 83.2 (2012), 97-121.

Kraftson-Hogue, Mike. "Predication Turning to Praise: Marion and Augustine on God and Hermeneutics (Giver, Giving, Gift, Giving)." *Literature and Theology: An International Journal of Theory, Criticism and Culture* 14. 4 (2000) 399-411.

Laird, Martin. "Whereof We Speak: Gregory of Nyssa, Jean-Luc Marion and the Current Apophatic Rage." *The Heythrop Journal* 42.1. (2001) 1-12.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Into the Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006.

\_\_\_\_\_. *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness and Contemplation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011.

Lawrence. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. London: Burns & Oates, 1977.

Lerner, Robert E. *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

Lombardus, Petrus. *The Sentences*. Book 1: *The Mystery of the Trinity*. Medieval Sources in Translation 42, translated by Gulio Silano. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2007.

Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976.

Louth, Andrew. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.

Lubac, Henri de. *Catholicism; A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind*. New York: Longmans, Green, 1950.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Splendor of the Church*. New York: Paulist Press, 1963.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Mystery of the Supernatural*. [New York]: Herder and Herder, 1967.

\_\_\_\_\_. *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*. Translated by Richard Arnandez. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*. 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Laurence Paul Hemming, and Susan Frank Parsons. *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages : Historical Survey*. Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Confession of Augustine*. Translated by Richard Beardsworth. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Mackinlay, Shane. "Eyes Wide Shut: A Response to Jean-Luc Marion's Account of the Journey to Emmaus." *Modern Theology* 20.3 (2004) 447-456.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Phenomenality in the Middle: Marion, Romano, and the Hermeneutics of the Event." In *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*. eds., I. G. Leask and E. G. Cassidy, 167-181. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.
- Mansi, Giovanni Domenico. *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio. 1 1*. Graz: Akad. Druck- u. Verl.-Anst, 1960.
- Marcel, Gabriel. *The Decline of Wisdom*. Translated by Manya Harari. London: The Harvill Press, 1954.
- Marmion, Declan, and Rik Van Nieuwenhove. *An Introduction to the Trinity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Maurin, Peter. "To the Bishops of the U.S.A.: A Plea for Houses of Hospitality." In *Easy Essays*. Eugene, OR.: WIPF & STOCK, 2003.
- McGinn, Bernard. *The Foundations of Mysticism, vol. 1, The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. New York: Crossroad, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "God as Eros: Metaphysical Foundations of Christian Mysticism." In *New Perspectives on Historical Theology. Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*. ed., Bradley Nassif, 189-209. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Love, Knowledge and *Unio Mystica* in the Western Tradition." In *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: An Ecumenical Dialogue*. eds., Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn, 59-86. New York: Continuum, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Comments." In *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: An Ecumenical Dialogue*. eds., Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn, 185-194. New York: Continuum, 1996.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Significance of Ruusbroec's Mystical Theology." *Louvain Studies* 31 (2006) 19-41.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Humans as Imago Dei." In *Sources of Transformation: Revitalising Christian Spirituality*. eds., E. Howells and P. Tyler, 19-40. London: Continuum, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism, 1350-1550*. New York: Crossroad Pub. Co, 2012.
- McIntosh, Mark. *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "THE MAKER'S MEANING: DIVINE IDEAS AND SALVATION." *Modern Theology*. 28, no. 3 (2012) 365-384.
- Meyger, Eugene. "Theological Trends: Spiritual Theology Today." *The Way Supplement* (1981) 55-67.
- Mersch, Emile, and John R. Kelly. *The Whole Christ; The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition*. Milwaukee: Bruce Pub. Co, 1938.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Theology of the Mystical Body*. Translated by Cyril Vollert. St. Louis, MO.: Herder Book Co., 1951.
- Milbank, John. *The Suspended Middle: Henri De Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*. Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Gift and the Mirror: On the Philosophy of Love." In *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*. ed., Kevin Hart, 253-318. Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.
- Miller, Vincent. *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Milne, Joseph. "Mystical Aspects of Christian Cosmology". *Medieval Mystical Theology* 20 (2011) 47-65.
- Mommaers, Paul, and N. de Paepe. *Jan Van Ruusbroec: The Sources, Content, and Sequels of His Mysticism*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Jan Van Ruusbroec: Mystical Union with God*. Leuven: Peeters, 2009.
- Nellas, Panayiotis. *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person*. Translated by Norman Russell. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997.
- Nelstrop, Louise, Kevin Magill and Bradley B. Onishi. *Christian Mysticism: an Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches*. Burlington, VT.: Ashgate, 2009.

- Nichols, Aidan. *From Newman to Congar: The Idea of Doctrinal Development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council*. Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1990.
- Nygren, Anders. *Agape and Eros. Part 1: A Study of the Christian Idea of Love, Part 2: The History of the Christian Idea of Love*. Translated by Philip S. Watson. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969.
- Pattison, George. *God & Being: An Enquiry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Pieper, Josef. *Faith, Hope, Love*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997.
- Pontifical Council For Culture, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life : a Christian Reflection on the 'New Age'*. Strathfield, N.S.W.: St Pauls, 2003.
- Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana. London: Burns & Oates, 2004.
- Portier, William L. "Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel." *Communio* XXXVIII, 1 (2011) 103-137.
- Rahner, Karl. *Nature and Grace: And Other Essays*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1963.
- Randles, W.G.L. *The Unmaking of the Medieval Christian Cosmos, 1500-1760*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.
- Reypens, Leonce. *Ruusbroec: Licht- en Liefdebloemen*. Antwerpen: N.V. Leeslust, 1926.
- Robinette, Brian. "A Gift to Theology? Jean-Luc Marion's 'Saturated Phenomenon' in Christological Perspective." *Heythrop Journal* 48 (2007) 86-108.
- Rolfson, Helen. "Ruusbroec and the Franciscan Tradition." *14<sup>th</sup> Century English Mystics Newsletter*. 8.4 (1982) 163-173.
- Romano, Claude. "Love in its Concept: Jean-Luc Marion's *The Erotic Phenomenon*." In *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*. ed., Kevin Hart, 319-335. Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.
- Rosemann, Phillip W. *Peter Lombard*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Rousselot, Pierre. *The Eyes of Faith*. Translated by Joseph Donceel and introduction by John M. McDermott. New York: Fordham University Press, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution*. Translated by Alan Vincelette. Milwaukee, WI.: Marquette University Press, 2001.

- Saarinen, Risto. "Love from Afar: Distance, Intimacy and the Theology of Love." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14. 2 (2012) 131-147.
- Scheeben, Matthias. *Nature and Grace*. Translated by Cyril Vollert. St. Louis, MO.: Herder Book Co., 1954.
- Schmitt, Carl. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Translated by G. Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Schrijvers, Joeri. 'Ontotheological Turnings?' in *Modern Theology* 22 (2006) 221-253.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "In (the) Place of the Self: A Critical Study of Jean-Luc Marion's 'Au lieu de soi. L'approche de Saint Augustin', *Modern Theology* 25 (2009), 661-686.
- Sheldrake, Philip F. *Spirituality and History*. London: SPCK, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology and Social Practice*. New York: Paulist Press, 2010.
- Silesius, Angelus. *Der Cherubinische Wandersmann*. Augsburg: Presse Druck und Verlags GmbH, 1960.
- Sokolowski, Robert. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Christian Faith & Human Understanding: Studies on the Eucharist, Trinity, and the Human Person*. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006.
- Staniloaë, Dumitru. *Eternity and Time*. Translated by Donald Allchin. Oxford: Fairacres Publication, 2001.
- Stracke, D.A. J. van Mierlo, L. Reypens, eds. *Ruusbroec De Wonderbare: Zijn Leven - Zijn Kunst - Zijn Leer*. Leuven: Davidsfonds, 1932.
- Talar, C.J.T., ed. *Modernists & Mystics*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Prayer at Twilight: Henri Bremond's *Apologie pour Fénelon*." In *Modernists & Mystics*. ed., C.J.T. Talar, 39-61. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009.
- Tanquerey, Adolphe. *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*. Translated by Herman Branderis. Tournai: Desclée & Co., 1930.
- Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity." *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 548-570.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue*. Leuven: Peeters Press, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Trinitarian Speculation and the Forms of Divine Disclosure." In *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*. eds., Stephen T. David, Daniel Kendall, Gerald O'Collins, 273-293. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Turner, Denys. *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Atheism, Apophaticism and 'Différance'." In *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*. BETL 172. eds. Jacques Haers and Peter De Mey, 689-708. Leuven: Peeters, 2003.
- Tyrrell, George. "The Relation of Theology to Devotion." In *The Faith of the Millions: A Selection of Past Essays*, First Series, 228-252. London: Longman, Green & Co., 1901.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "What is Mysticism?" In *The Faith of the Millions: A Selection of Past Essays*, First Series, 253-272. London: Longman, Green & Co., 1901.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Juliana of Norwich." In *The Faith of the Millions: A Selection of Past Essays*, Second Series, 1-39. London: Longman, Green & Co., 1901.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Lex Orandi or Prayer and Creed*. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1904.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Medievalism: A Reply to Cardinal Mercier*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Preface." *XVI Revelations of Divine Love Shewed to Mother Juliana of Norwich 1373*. Reprint, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, v-xviii. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, LTD., 1920.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 'A Perverted Devotion (II).' Reprinted in *The Heythrop Journal*, XXIV, Number 4, (1983) 379-390.
- Uyttenhove, Lieve. *Embraced by the Father and the Son in the Unity of the Holy Spirit: A Study of the Trinity and the Mystical Life in the Works of Jan Van Ruusbroec*. Leuven: Peeters, 2012.

Vandenbroucke, F. "Spirituality and Spiritualities." *Concilium* 9.1 (1965) 25-33.

Van Nieuwenhove, Rik. "The Franciscan inspiration of Ruusbroec's mystical theology: Ruusbroec in dialogue with Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas." *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 75 (2001) 102-115.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Jan Van Ruusbroec, Mystical Theologian of the Trinity*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Christian response to suffering, and the significance of the model of the Church as Body of Christ." *Angelicum* 82 (2005) 595-609.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Religious Disposition as a Critical Resource to Resist Instrumentalisation." *The Heythrop Journal* 50.4 (2009) 689-696.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Catholic Theology in the Thirteenth Century and the Origins of Secularism." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 75.4 (2010) 339-354.

\_\_\_\_\_. *An Introduction to Medieval Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Commitments to Medieval Mystical Texts within Contemporary Contexts: Some Reflections on Medieval Mystical Texts as 'Classic' Texts in the Gadamerian Sense." In *Reading Medieval Mystical Texts Today*. eds., Patrick Cooper and Satoshi Kikuchi, forthcoming.

Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. : Vol. V, The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*. Translated by Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, John Saward and Rowan Williams. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991

\_\_\_\_\_. *Love Alone is Credible*. Translated by D.C. Schindler. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004.

Williams, Rowan. *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to Saint John of the Cross*. Cambridge, MA.: Cowley Publications, 1979.

Wiseman, James A. *Minne in Die Geestelike Brulocht of Jan Van Ruysbroeck*. Thesis (S.T.D.)--Catholic University of America, 1979.

Zuijdwegt, Geertjan. "'Utrum Caritas Sit Aliquid Creatum in Anima': Aquinas on the Lombard's Identification of Charity with the Holy Spirit." *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales* 79. 1 (2012) 39-74.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	iii
Prefatory Remarks	v
Bibliography	vi
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
§1. Thematic Introduction	xxx
§2. Contextual Background and Methodological Approach	xxxiv
§3. Conceptualizing Minne's Distinctiveness	xxxvi
A. Research Question	xxxix
§4. Status Quaestionis. Mystical Theology Today—Transformative Praxis Apart from Doctrine?	xl
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
<b>A Hunger Unstilled: Retrieving Jan van Ruusbroec's Understanding of Minne in View of Jean-Luc Marion's Erotic Turn</b>	
§1. Introduction: the erotic locale	1
A. Methodological Remarks	6
B. Possible Openings	8
1. The Place of Impress: Ruusbroec's Theological Anthropology	10
2. Minne as a modeless practice	11
3. The Critical Capacity of Minne	13
C. Concluding Remarks	15
<b>RUUSBROEC, MINNE AND ITS THEO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL BASIS</b>	
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
<b>Possessing the Unfathomable: Approaching Jan van Ruusbroec's Mystical Anthropology as Responsive to the Primacy and Praxis of Minne</b>	
§1 Introduction	17
A. Repositioning Mystical Anthropological Inquiry Away from 'What' or 'Who', to that of 'Where'	20
§ 2. <i>Vanden Vier Becoringhen</i> Analysis	24
a. <i>The 1<sup>st</sup> Temptation</i>	27



b. <i>The 2<sup>nd</sup> Temptation</i>	28
c. <i>The 3<sup>rd</sup> Temptation</i>	28
d. <i>The 4<sup>th</sup> Temptation</i>	29
A. Ruusbroec's Five Voices—A Chorus Abyss.	31
a. <i>The "clearest voice"</i>	32
b. <i>The "gracious voice"</i>	32
c. <i>The voice of "greatest joy"</i>	33
d. <i>The "sweetest voice"</i>	34
e. <i>The "most hidden voice"</i>	34
B. CONCLUSION	35

### CHAPTER 3

#### **'We Shall See God With the Eyes of our Body'. Minne, Mutual Indwelling and Jan van Ruusbroec's Embodied Speculations on the Glorified Body.**

§1. Introduction	37
§2. Retrieving Ruusbroec: Continuity and Discontinuity	40
A. Contemporary Interlude: Oliver Davies and the Need for Cosmological Readings within Medieval Mystical Texts	42
B. Ruusbroec's Minne, Cosmology and its Axis of Continuity	45
1. Cosmology, Speculation and Minne as "above reason, but not without reason"	50
C. Mutual Indwelling and Ruusbroec's Mystical Anthropology	52
D. Embodiment, Identity and Ruusbroec's Speculations over the Glorified body	56
1. "With the eyes of our body"	59
2. "Go into the joy of thy Lord"	62
§3. Concluding Thoughts	65

### CHAPTER 4

#### **Frans Jozef van Beeck, Native Attunement and the 'Admirabile commercium'**

§1. Introduction	68
A. The Basis for a New Theological Synthesis. Trichotomy: Cosmology – Anthropology – Theology	70
B. Autonomy, Heteronomy and the Question of	71

“Religious Experience”	
§2. Native Attunement	72
A. Blondelian Immanence	72
1. Immanence opening onto the Political	74
2. After Blondel: Post conciliar Trajectories	76
a. Locus capax dei: Alejandro García-Rivera's Theological Aesthetics	77
B. Ruusbroec and van Beeck's Native Attunement	79
1. Unity—'in the Image of the Son'	80
2. Particularity—'unto His likeness'	81
C. Doxology, the Admirable Exchange, and Liturgical participation	85
1. Excursus: George Tyrrell and the Modernist Legacy upon Mysticism and Spirituality Today	86
§3. Van Beeck and mystico-liturgical participation	93
§4. Unity and Catholicity in Theology: Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology, Conversant with Mystical and Liturgical Theology	98
A. Van Beeck on the Role and Identity of Fundamental Theology Today	102
B. Conclusion	105

**ABIDING IN MINNE'S DEMANDS. A CONSTRUCTIVE/CRITICAL  
INTERDISCIPLINARY ENCOUNTER BETWEEN JAN VAN RUUSBROEC  
AND JEAN-LUC MARION**

**Chapter 5**

**Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part I—Context and Retrieval**

§1. Contemporary Aesthetic Context: A Love Divided	106
§2. Retrieving Ruusbroec's Minne	110
A. The Question of the "Pure" Gift and its Refusal of Economic Return	113

**Chapter 6**

**Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part II—Pure Gift and *Pur Amour***

**François Fénelon and the Rethinking of Love's Demands Beside the  
Gratuitous Gift**

§1. Introduction and <i>Thematic Context</i>	118
A. <i>Primary Claim</i>	119

B. The Pure Gift	119
§2. Thesis: The Continuing Legacy of Fénelon's <i>pur amour</i>	121
A. The Quietist Controversy and Mystical Theology's Last Blow?	122
B. <i>Cum Alias</i>	123
C. Fénelon's Typology of Love	127
1. <i>Pur Amour</i>	128
2. <i>The Impossible Demand</i>	129
3. <i>Without a Trace</i>	132
4. <i>Acquired and Infused Contemplation</i>	134
D. <i>Discontinuity in Mystical Theology—a Matter of Anthropology</i>	136
E. Conclusion	139

## Chapter 7

### Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part III—Enjoying the [Im]possible with Jan van Ruusbroec and Jean-Luc Marion

§1. Introduction and Summary Review	142
§2. Suspending the Economy	146
A. Loving Knowledge	151
§3. Marion and the [im]possible	154
A. The [im]possible Question of God	154
B. The [im]possible Phenomenon of God	157
C. The im[possibility] of a Dynamic Metaphysics?	162
§ 4. Minne—Modes and Modelessness	164
A. Conclusion—Undergoing Modeless Enjoyment	167

## Chapter 8

### Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part IV—Common Love and the Univocal

§1. Introduction	170
A. Critical Interlude: the Banal <i>Immanentization</i> of Natural Human Desire in Consumer Capitalism	174
B. Common Rule for a Common Life	176
C. Unify, so as to Distinguish	181
§2. Nygren's A-Contextuality	185
§ 3. Piet Fransen, Ruusbroec and Leuven Personalism	189

A. Maintaining the Dynamism of Uncreated/Created grace	193
§ 4. Marion and the Univocity of Love	198
A. The Inverse of Praise	200
B. Desires of Lack and Certainty	203
C. Creation Without Nature	206
D. The Weight of Love	209
§5. Conclusion—Common Minne	213

***GHEMEYNE LEVEN: CONCRETE RETRIEVAL OF RUUSBROEC'S  
MINNE WITHIN CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENTS***

**Chapter 9**

**In the Place of Christ: Retrieving the locus of Ruusbroec's desirous  
Christology within Contemporary Christian Spirituality**

§1. Introduction—Spirituality and Envisioning the Public Realm	216
A. Profane Spirituality	216
B. In the Place of Christ	217
§2. Towards a Desirous Christology	223
A. Conclusion	228

**Chapter 10**

**"For God is a Common Food and a Common Good":  
Jan van Ruusbroec and Learning How to Desire in the  
Christian Humanist Tradition**

§1. Introduction	230
A. What is Common in Catholic Education	230
B. The Common and its Anthropological Basis in Ruusbroec	230
C. Emerging Identities in Given Relationships	232
D. Rethinking the Paradox of the Commons	233
E. Conclusion	236

**Conclusion**

A. Theological Relevance	237
B. Textual Accountability	237

1. Minne's conceptuality	238
2. Ruusbroec's reconfiguring of desire	239
3. Common life as Deification	239
C. Contemporary Contextual Plausibility	239

## INTRODUCTION

### §1. THEMATIC INTRODUCTION

The following work undertakes a fundamental theological retrieval of the Brabantine contemplative, bl. Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381) and his theology of love, or *minne*, amid a constructive/critical interdisciplinary encounter with Jean-Luc Marion.

This interdisciplinary work is principally rooted within the domain of systematic theology and situated amid a renewed focus upon love in theology and philosophy of religion discourses. Specifically, this dissertation engages in a constructive/critical encounter with the French phenomenologist and Catholic philosopher of religion, Jean-Luc Marion, his erotic reduction and univocal conceptuality of love. This critical encounter is brought about by a theological retrieval of the admirable doctor, Jan van Ruusbroec, whose exemplary, mystical theological synthesis of *minne* rightfully stands to be counted amongst one of the very best reflections upon love within the Catholic tradition. Recognition of this alone, despite any and all claims of partiality, should in part sufficiently justify such retrieval. However, this dissertation will not only argue for the theological relevance in retrieving Ruusbroec. Yet, in a subsequent manner, it will make its argumentative appeal by positively assessing the basis for Ruusbroec's contemporary contextual plausibility. The audacity of such an appeal does not escape us, as it is fraught with various historical discontinuities. Instead, the fruitfulness of such retrieval will be judged by the extent to which Ruusbroec's *minne* not only helps clarify for us certain discontinuities that result in constricting our contemporary reappraisal of love. Moreover, by way of its enduring continuity, the fruitfulness of our retrieval will be assessed by the manner in which it can constructively and critically encounter Marion's erotic phenomenon and in so doing, furnish a compelling contribution to ongoing theological and philosophical reflections on love.

As a distinctly Leuven dissertation, this interdisciplinary research has jointly benefited from strong research specialisations in fundamental theology and its contextual-hermeneutical engagement with postmodern philosophy. Likewise, it has well benefited from the expertise of Church historians and in particular, the continuing research into mystical literature of the Low Countries. While firmly identified as a constructive philosophical theological project, this research has well-benefited from the historical critical and theological expertise in Ruusbroec studies unique to Leuven's profile. Enriched, therefore, by such specialisations, this present dissertation hopes to contribute a somewhat innovative, fruitful contribution to ongoing contemporary theological and philosophical reflections upon love within the Catholic tradition. Innovative, not by way of sheer novelty. Rather, in its aims to demonstrate the potential fruitfulness such a thick-hermeneutics and historical retrieval of figures from the mystical theological tradition can contribute to contemporary theological reflection.

This dissertation critically reflects upon several key thematics and interlocutors in orchestrating its sustained encounter between Ruusbroec and Marion. Following, the interrelation of

these core themes will now be introduced, as well as the rationale behind the organisation of the various chapters of this dissertation.

Primarily, a critical challenge and corrective that this dissertation proposes is to be found in its critique of distinctly modern approaches to "mysticism". By appealing in contrast for a more historically-rooted, contemporaneous mystical theology, such a position invariably entails challenging both the a-contextual, universalist tendencies inherent within modern approaches to mysticism. And, in similar measure, explicitly non-theological, psychological approaches to "mystical experience". At the heart of such critiques, however, is the more primary contention that by retrieving a major figure from within the mystical theological canon, Ruusbroec's theology of *minne* fundamentally challenges contemporary approaches to the apophatic legacy within mysticism. And more concretely, the largely equivocal view of apophaticism as one of epistemic indeterminacy. Such a view of the apophatic and its radical negativity as signaling an indeterminate region of "mystery" and unknowability holds little purchase for the Brabantine contemplative and instead, is indicative of more modern discourses between natural and positive religion.<sup>1</sup> Rather, for Ruusbroec, radical apophaticism places its stress clearly upon *minne*'s 'overdeterminacy', excess and the theological itself as always '*semper maior*'. In a sapiential, praxiological vein, Ruusbroec's texts—as a speaking from and within *minne*—display an unmistakable dynamism that combines an apophatic rigor, coupled with an insatiable, erotic insistence in continuing to respond, name and affirm a love that is both inalienable to the human person as well as far exceeding the creaturely by way of its abysmal depths [*afgrondigher minne*].

This dissertation will regularly focus upon such an inexhaustible excess specifically in terms of *minne*'s distinctly erotic sense. In this strongly erotic sense, we are introduced to Ruusbroec's bold and at times arresting degree of mutuality in and amid the reciprocal demands between Creator and creature. A mutuality, for instance, memorably articulated in Ruusbroec's Eucharistic theology and its depiction of Christ's insatiable consumption.<sup>2</sup> And yet, what frees *minne*'s at times fierce voracity from becoming truly monstrous in its absorption and pantheistic confusion is precisely the relationship such erotic mutuality holds to the asymmetrical primacy of the gift within Ruusbroec's theology.<sup>3</sup> We can well see this asymmetry affirmed, paradoxically, amid the full-flowering of *minne*'s mutuality—in the union with God as "without difference and distinction" [*sonder differentie ochte onderscheet*]<sup>4</sup>—precisely in the perdurance of otherness, whereby the creature shall eternally remain, "*een ander van gode*".<sup>4</sup> Continued emphasis upon, as well as distinguishing how the dynamic synthesis of Ruusbroec's *minne* mobilizes its various claims of mediation, immediacy, difference,

---

<sup>1</sup> See *infra*, chapter 4.

<sup>2</sup> See *infra*, chapter 5.

<sup>3</sup> See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, Opera Omnia VIII, ed. G. de Baere, trans. A. Lefevère (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), ll. 723-728: "Now the nature of minnen is always: to give and take, minnen and be loved [*ghemindt werden*]. And both of these are in anyone who loves [*mint*]. Christ's *minne* is voracious and generous: even though he gives us all that He has and all that He is, He also takes back all that we have and all that we are. And He demands of us more than we can accomplish." "u es der minnen natuere altoes gheven ende nemen, minnen ende ghemindt werden. Ende dit es beide in ieghewelken die mint. Cristus minne die es ghierigh ende melde: al gheeft hi ons al dat hi heeft ende al dat hi es, hi nemt oec weder al dat wi hebben ende al dat wi sijn. Ende hi eischt ons meer dan wi gheleisten moghen."

<sup>4</sup> See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Boecksen der verclaringhe*, Opera Omnia I, ed. G. de Baere, trans. Ph. Crowley and H. Rolfson (Tielt: Lannoo, Leiden: Brill, 1981) ll. 40-41: "[...] it [the human person in union with God] will remain eternally creature and other than God." "[...] die sal eweleke creature bliven ende een ander van gode."

distinction and otherness are all extremely crucial in facilitating the rigor of its contemporary retrieval. However, in an explicitly historical vein, arriving at such a renewed conceptuality by way of its thick hermeneutic and close textual analysis is equally beneficial, as it helps clarify the consistency underscoring, for example, Ruusbroec's continued critique of the Free Spirits and the latter's heterodox claims of 'autotheism' or "becoming God". Equally so, arriving at a renewed conceptuality of minne enables a more thorough historical evaluation and response to the famous Parisian chancellor, Jean Gerson (1363-1429) and his famous charge against Ruusbroec's Book Three of *Die Geestelike Brulocht* as guilty of pantheistic "absorption". A charge, which Gerson associates with Ruusbroec's supposedly illicit, idealized theological exemplarism. If indeed, what Ruusbroec claims that his at times radical claims of union with God, "...in minnen, not in essence [*wesen*], nor in nature"<sup>5</sup> are consistent with his thought, and not simply a dogmatic cover, then a renewed conceptuality of minne is of crucial importance. A conceptuality, not so as to elide the "kernel of minnen that is hidden from us in darkness, in fathomless unknowing."<sup>6</sup> Rather, a conceptuality that mirrors the inexhaustible creaturely undertaking of evermore attesting to God's perduring otherness by way of the distinction of our works and cleaving desires wherein "our minne and His minne are always alike."<sup>7</sup> While, at the same time, a conceptuality that holds onto the dynamic tension of Ruusbroec's more audacious claim of unity and sameness wherein we are "one in having joy, where His Spirit has drunk up our minne and swallowed it in Him in having joy and in one blessedness with Him."<sup>8</sup>

In approaching minne's superabundance as a dynamism of asymmetry, yet inseparable mutuality, this dissertation will regularly address this dynamism in attempting to situate Ruusbroec's minne along a spectrum of univocity—in its abiding sense of unity and sameness—while dynamically juxtaposed alongside analogy and its thinking of perduring otherness and the abiding distinction of our charitable praxis. Herein, it is this stress of excess, both in terms of Ruusbroec's minne, as well as Marion, as a thinker of "givenness" and the "saturated phenomenon" that has principally oriented our thinking—despite certain legitimate reservations—towards the univocal. A *sameness* of superabounding excess in its insistence that God cannot but love us with Himself. From which, as the charity of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts,<sup>9</sup> the distinct claim that the univocal mobilizes—in various ways both in Ruusbroec and Marion—is precisely its situating love's inescapable failure and impossibility to adequately return such a love as itself erotically safeguarding God's greater dissimilarity. Therefore, it is this impossibility, by ensuring and reaffirming the Creator-creature distinction that characterizes the thought of both Ruusbroec and Marion specifically as erotic. As Ruusbroec states: "[B]ut it is creature and cannot devour nor grasp the allness of God. And therefore it must year and yawn, remain thirsty and hungry for ever."<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spieghel*, ll. 2139-2140: "...daer wi een mede sijn in minnen, niet in wesene noch in natueren."

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, ll. 2141-2142: "...dat es der miinen kerne, die ons verborghen es in deemsterheit, in niet wetene sonder grond."

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, ll. 2147: "Want onse miine ende sine minne sijn altoes ghelijc..."

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, ll. 2148-2149: "...een int ghebruken, daer sijn gheest onse minne op ghesopen heeft ende in heme verswolghen in ghebrukene ende in eene saleheit met heme."

<sup>9</sup> See Rom. 5, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spieghel*, ll. 2095-2097: "Maer si es creatuere ende en mach die alheit gods niet begapen noch begripen. Ende hier omme moet si ghieren ende gapen, dorstegh ende hongheregh eewegh bliven."



Hence, Ruusbroec's erotic failure is in many ways exceedingly similar to Marion's erotic failure, as both are situated in proximity to the saturated excess and "allness" of God's love, which we can neither 'devour nor grasp'. And yet, so too does the difference between these two thinkers of excess emerge precisely in terms of the "economic". That is, precisely in terms of our individual and collective created capacity to respond to such an excess. Herein, Marion will insist upon maintaining the pure gratuitousness of love's phenomenalization, an excess in which it increasingly appears to undermine the capacity to conceive and in turn, ethically respond. Rather, by its adventitious anteriority, the event of the erotic phenomenon likewise evades any creaturely orientation—discussions, all of which this dissertation facilitates in terms of "obediential potency" and the natural desire for God. Herein, the constructive and critical perspective of Ruusbroec comes to the fore in providing a radically alternative, yet similarly robust erotic thinking of love. One in which thinks *minne's* inescapable failure, not in terms of a desire of lack, yet itself one of creaturely abundance. The centrality of Ruusbroec's mystical anthropology of "mutual indwelling" presents itself here in articulating this specific dynamism of natural, insatiable desire as itself, reflective of an abundance that is both asymmetrically Other, yet inalienable to our creaturely capacity to graciously respond. Therefore, it is precisely in view of this constructive/critical potential in Ruusbroec that explains, in classical terms, why primary attention is given to his "economic" thought more so than his specific "theological" reflections. That is, Ruusbroec's thinking of creation, grace/nature, theological anthropology, the role of mediation and immediacy in the sacramental life of the Church, as well as to his thinking upon deification in terms of the "common life" are of greater importance in this retrieval, more so than his equally substantial Trinitarian theology.

With this said, in **Chapter One**, after introducing certain openings that envision a constructive/critical encounter between Ruusbroec and Marion, the basis of Ruusbroec's economic thought commences with a thorough analysis of mutual indwelling. In **Chapter Two**, mutual indwelling is specifically approached in its anthropological domain, as well as with a firm attention to its praxiological character. This is specifically facilitated by a relational inquiry into human interiority with Ruusbroec's thematic of the "five voices" from *Vanden Vier Becoringhen*. Following thereafter in **Chapter Three**, mutual indwelling is presented specifically in a more cosmological vein, while deliberately counter-balancing our previous treatment of praxis, this time with a more speculative approach. Such speculation is specifically facilitated in view of Ruusbroec's "embodied realism" that concretizes such a speculative thrust amid a unique sense of greater continuity between the orders of nature, grace and glory. Moving specifically from a thick, textual analysis of Ruusbroec's mystical anthropology, we then segway in **Chapter Four** to a comprehensive, theological reflection upon the systematic theology of van Beek, who was both well-versed and strongly influenced by the mystical theological tradition and Ruusbroec in particular. Having secured a conceptuality of mutual indwelling and Ruusbroec's embodied realism, these insights are brought into greater relief through van Beek's thinking of "native attunement", as well as a contemporary, "intrincist" theological approach to grace/nature that is consistent with the orientations within Ruusbroec's own thought. This intrincist approach is done by way of orchestrating a variety of sub-themes in approaching questions such as the Modernist legacy upon mysticism via George Tyrrell; Blondelian immanence and the political; as well as deification. From this expansive, economic approach and theological orientation, beginning in **Chapter Five**, our encounter between Ruusbroec and Marion begins to explicitly emerge. Situated amid a contextual, theological aesthetics, under consideration is the theme of divided views of love, while theological appeal is made to seek out a renewed conceptuality

of love that creatively seeks to think both from within as well as beyond such divisions. In **Chapter Six**, the reading is put forward that what lies at the heart of such divided views of love is not necessarily to be found in a moral analysis of competing and contradictory objects of love. Rather, this division is seen in attempts at singularly privileging love's gratuitousness. A gratuitousness, which in turn results in the familiar construction between "pure" and "impure" love. Approaching Marion (and doing so, specifically from a mystical theological angle), these lines of thought are pursued in a historical reading of Fénelon's *pur amour* and its interesting linkages within postmodern approaches to the "gift". In **Chapter Seven**, the specifically erotic tenor of Ruusbroec and Marion's thought is brought into immediate relief, specifically herein in terms of the "impossible". A thorough analysis of several key thinking patterns within Marion is pursued via the [im]possible and how his erotic thought, contra Ruusbroec, responds in a fundamentally different manner to the impossible itself. In **Chapter Eight**, the question of the univocal is specifically confronted both in terms of Marion and Ruusbroec. For the latter, this announces the superabundant origins of our creaturely desires, which are radically set in familiar contrast to contemporary consumer capitalist narratives of desire as lack. Such a view of desire in Ruusbroec is then portrayed as inseparable from the relational demands of reciprocity and justice as underscored by Ruusbroec's thinking of "common life", while facilitated by an excursus of another modern theologian heavily indebted to Ruusbroec, Piet Fransen S.J. In turn, in strong contrast, we see a radically different orientation towards the univocal in terms of Nygren's agape, seen in greater continuity with that of Marion's own position, which is here further fleshed out in his work on Augustine. Thereafter, in **Chapters Nine and Ten**, our reading of Ruusbroec's *minne*, its erotic, insatiable desires and subsequent demands for contextual reinsertion, via the common life, are themselves tentatively pursued in terms of thinking through the continuing legacy of Christian Humanism, with Ruusbroec functioning as one of its early spiritual resources. Thereby, the prophetic and public engagement of these perspectives are envisioned amid competing, contemporary priorities of identity and plurality today.

## § 2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Despite the immediately obvious historical discontinuity between both Ruusbroec and Marion, such recognition begins to be counter-balanced by the frequent appearance of various canonical figures from the mystical theological tradition within postmodern thought. This is largely attributed to recent philosophical and theological attempts to "overcome metaphysics" in order to think a more radically *pure* transcendence (Derrida, Marion) and in so doing, have found support in the pre-modern mystical tradition (i.e. Dionysius Areopagita, Meister Eckhart, Tauler, St. John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, Angelus Silesius et al.). And yet, from a historical theological perspective, frequently, such systematic theological and philosophical re-readings are regarded as largely serviceable towards distinctly contemporaneous concerns and apart from historical-critical input. By contrast, this present retrieval is marked by a historically-rooted, fundamental theological reflection, which likewise adopts a more critical stance towards such hermeneutical strategies. Instead, the innovative character of this theological retrieval accepts the burden of its interdisciplinary character as a testing of the hermeneutical boundaries under which texts and concepts from the pre-modern mystical tradition can indeed be adequately retrieved in contemporary philosophical and theological thinking. Doing so, in a historically-grounded, theological manner, this research therefore explicitly

opts for a textual heuristic and close reading approach—in keeping with the tradition of Albert Deblaere and the Ruusbroecgenootschap<sup>11</sup>—in search of a rigorous conceptuality and unique theological hermeneutic of *minne* in Ruusbroec's texts. The enduring strength of this textual approach to mystical theological texts, while situated within a fundamental and systematic theological context of retrieval, can in part be translated as a refusal to instrumentalize such historical-theological sources by insisting that assessment of Ruusbroec's contemporary contextual *plausibility*, is an intrinsically necessary, yet secondary approach to the primary issue of its greater *theological relevance* and conceptual, *textual accountability*. Failure to heed such a dynamic tension, I maintain, ultimately disengages the reader not only from the very specificity of the text, but furthermore hinders assessment of the text's constructive and potentially enduring relevance.

A brief, background look will illustrate not only the contextual nature of this retrieval, yet furthermore, the research question that this retrieval simultaneously initiates. My initial engagement with these issues occurred several years ago, as I was then researching and writing upon postmodernism's turn to traditional mystical theological sources and the underlining reasons for it doing so. In particular, the well-known engagement between Derrida and Marion at Villanova<sup>12</sup> concerning kataphasis and apophasis, as well as Marion's defense,<sup>13</sup> contra Derrida, of the impossible possibility of the *via eminentiae* as a distinctly performative, non-predicative (and hence, outside deconstruction) response to the givenness of the call. In Marion's argument, the tradition of mystical theology's "third way" of *praise*, beyond kataphatic predication and apophatic denegation, is appealed to as primarily safeguarding God's pure transcendence. While subsequently, such a discourse of praise is established in fundamental accord with Marion's phenomenology of givenness and its stress upon givenness as radically anterior and asymmetrical to the donative subject. As a "vocative" discourse, Marion argues that the order of praise<sup>14</sup> found in speculative and mystical theology not only far exceeds the limits of both the kataphatic and apophatic, yet it equally undercuts and disqualifies their free standing validity as participative forms of knowing and loving God. Rather, the order of praise, as a response to the pure givenness of the call, Marion argues is a speaking *towards* God's unwavering incomprehensibility. The consequence of Marion's argument, however, is that such a unilateral emphasis upon this "third way" simultaneously and violently collapses any and all creaturely *difference, distinction* and *economic reciprocal response*—plateauing

---

<sup>11</sup> See Rob Faesen, "Albert Deblaere's Study of Mysticism and His Concern for Christian Humanism", in *Reading Medieval Mystical Texts Today*, (eds.) P. R. Cooper, S. Kikuchi (forthcoming): "Though he published relatively little, his influence as a teacher was great. He was a teacher who always compelled his students to read the texts in their particular literary form—as they are. This often produced a surprising effect."

<sup>12</sup> See John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, (eds.), *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of "Negative Theology"", in *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, 20-53.

<sup>14</sup> Marion has more recently returned to this theme in his work on Augustine and the rhythm of a double movement of the "*confessio laudatio*" as a speaking towards God, and its necessary 'inverse', the "*confessio peccatorum*", as a speaking towards the creature—from the place of praise—as itself, a rhythm that discloses the "meaning of praise", and therein as well, the "*Confessiones* [...] from beginning to end, an immense treatise of speculative theology". See Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, (trans.) Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012) 11-20; 289-306, 291. See supra, "Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part IV—"Common Love and the Univocal".

any and all particularity with praise's "words for saying nothing"<sup>15</sup>, given that "[s]ince no name says God, *as such*, then all are suitable [...]"<sup>16</sup>.

During this time of research and critically thinking alongside this fascinating debate, however, thanks to Prof. Rob Faesen, I was likewise introduced to works of Ruusbroec, as well as the esteemed, ongoing tradition of Ruusbroec scholarship in the Low Countries. And resulting from this exposure of careful, close readings of the Admirable Doctor's texts, I started to develop (what has remained) a continuous fascination towards both the breadth and nuance of Ruusbroec's mystical theological synthesis, as well as the unmistakable dynamism of his thought. A dynamism, such that it could easily lend itself to be both highly conversant with my then ongoing research into Derrida and Marion's respective positions, while unmistakably displaying a radical dissimilarity from that which frequently flew under the moniker of "mystical theology" in various philosophical and theological discussions. Herein, not only is there an existing lacuna of limited familiarity and reception of the Brabantine contemplative<sup>17</sup> in a variety of contemporary venues. But furthermore, the thought was born whether or not Ruusbroec's theology—and more generally, that of mystical theology itself—could well indeed constructively and critically contribute to such contemporary discussions (in theology, in philosophy, historical and literary studies) in which its legacy and positions were frequently invoked, yet itself left out of the discussion.

## §2. CONCEPTUALIZING MINNE'S DISTINCTIVENESS

Specifically in view of Marion's defense of the mystical theology's "third way" of praise, while indeed there is a similar apophatic rigour and a thinking of "impossibility" in Ruusbroec, however, unlike Marion, such "impossibility" does not rest upon speaking itself and praise's refusal to attribute, or to name. Rather, for the Brabantine contemplative, the impossible can be specifically characterized as an *erotic impossibility*, as a "hunger unstilled [...]. Man cannot leave it, nor grasp it; he cannot do without it, nor can he obtain it; he cannot speak about it, nor can he be silent about it

---

<sup>15</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, "Words for Saying Nothing", in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, (trans.) Stephen E. Lewis, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007)143-150.

<sup>16</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 289.

<sup>17</sup> Which in of itself, can be attributed to a variety of reasons, including: Ruusbroec writing in the middle-Dutch vernacular; the effects of his condemnation by the Parisian chancellor, Jean Gerson; the absence of a major religious order to continue to promote his works; in addition to a clear, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Flemish nationalism that upheld Ruusbroec distinctly as a 'Vlaamsche sint'. For the latter, See D. A. Stracke S.J., "Inleiding", in D.A. Stracke, J. van Mierlo, L. Reypens, *Ruusbroec De Wonderbare: Zijn Leven - Zijn Kunst - Zijn Leer* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 1932) 7: "Van den zaligen Jan van Ruusbroec is herhaalde malen gezegd dat hij geworden is door zijn leven, zijn leer, zijn werken, zijn invloed, een toppunt onzer Nederlandsche beschaving. Dien hoogen lof werd hem niet allen in dit jubeljaar toegedacht en toegewezen, ook bij kalme studie, in vroegere tijden, heeft men zóó over hem gesproken? Stellen wij ons op het standpunt der geloovige Vlamingen, dan is die lofspraak dubbel merkwaardig, want in Ruusbroec begroeten we dan niet allen 'n genie maar ook 'n heilige. Als zalige is, wie dan ook, 'n hoogtepunt in de echte en eenige beschaving van geest en gemoed, en 'n glorie voor het volk waaruit hij is gesproten. Dien roemtitel verdient Ruusbroec des te meer vanwege zijn Vlaamsche volk, niet alleen omdat hij al zijn levensdagen onder ons heeft doorgebracht, en sprekend in karakter en uitwendig leven onzen volksaard heeft belichaamd, maar ook omdat hij, door zijn volkschen aanleg gedreven, al wat hij was en vermocht in den dienst gesteld heeft van zijn land en stamgenooten, om ze hooger op te voeren in het rijk van deugd en zielenadel. "

[...].<sup>18</sup> In these initial lines, the distinctiveness of Ruusbroec's thought started to emerge amid its erotic insistence and his unique approach to God as *semper maior*— not as an excessive otherness and pure transcendence seen in its distance and perpetual withdrawal upon approach. Rather, as an "always greater", to which Ruusbroec's minne in its distinct modes as well as its "modeless practice" [*wiseloese oefeninghe van minnen*] unfailingly attests by way of the *mutuality* of its *impossible demands*.<sup>19</sup>

However, as my familiarity with Ruusbroec's writings grew considerably, it became increasingly clear that such emphasis did not simply amount to an exaggerated poetic and penchant for rhetorical flourish. Nor did Ruusbroec confine reflecting upon such restless desire exclusively within a creaturely domain, as though it were indicative of the Fall and set against the eschatological hope for beatitude and rest, as Augustine's famous opening to the *Confessions* announces. Rather, such an impossibility and the restlessness of its activity increasingly appeared as distinctly intrinsic and co-constitutive to Ruusbroec's depiction of minne itself—alongside its emphasis upon rest, unity and enjoyment [*ghebruken*]<sup>20</sup>—both in the stirrings of grace and speculated upon in its impossible and unceasing demands in eternal glory. Arguably, the eschatological discontinuity in Ruusbroec's thought is thus minimalized and instead, is punctuated by a greater Incarnational continuity<sup>20</sup> within the creaturely orders of nature and grace. Therein, eternity itself is speculated upon in terms of an inexhaustible abundance, continual activity and thus, by no means is it to be simply regarded as "unmoved and immovable", for "such an eternity would not be inexhaustible".<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia X, Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, (trans.) A. Lefevere, (eds.) G. de Baere, Th. Mertens, and H. Noë, (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), ll. 554, 555-557: "Ende dit es een hongher onghepait [...] Man caent ghelaten noch ghevaten; men caent ghederven noch gecrighen; men caent <oe> ghespreken noch verswighen [...]"

<sup>19</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 554-564: "[T]o always yearn in failure is to swim against the current [...] But we should look into ourselves: there we feel [*ghevoelen*] that the Spirit of God drives us and kindles us in restlessness of loving. And we should look above ourselves: there we feel that the Spirit of God draws us out of ourselves and consumes us to nothing in His own self, that is the superessential [*overweselijcke*] minne we are united with and possess more deeply and more widely than any other thing." "[a]ltoes crighen in dat ontbliven, dat es swemmen jeghen strom [...] Maer wij selen in ons binnenste sien; daer ghevoelen wij dat ons die gheest gods drijft ende stoect in dat ongheduer van minnen. Ende wij selen boven ons selven sien; daer ghevoelen wij dat ons die gheest gods ute ons selven trect ende verteert te nieute in sijns selfsheit, dat es in die overweselijcke minne daer wij een mede sijn ende die wij besitten diepere ende bredere dan alle dinc."

<sup>20</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia I, Boecksken der verclaringhe*, (trans.) Ph. Crowley, H. Rolfson, (ed.) G. de Baere (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 1981) ll. 34-41.

<sup>21</sup> See Dumitru Staniloaë, *Eternity and Time*, (trans.) Donald Allchin (Oxford: Fairacres Publication, 2001) 1. My thanks to Rik van Nieuwenhove for sending me this 13 page book. And indeed, it is a 'book', and not simply an article. See further as Staniloaë elaborates: "Eternity must include an interior dimension and freedom of will. Only thus can it be inexhaustible, a source of continual newness. If we think of the eternity of God simply in terms of pure reason, or of an eternal substance, then we have a false picture of eternity, not the true one. Eternity must be a fullness of life, and therefore true eternity must be the eternity of God, God being perceived as a subject who is true and always the same in himself, but who at the same time is the source of an eternal and infinite variety of manifestations." See also Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia X, Vanden Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 261-265; 274-278: "And we shall taste the goodness of God, which is sweet beyond all honey. And it shall feed us and go through our souls and our bodies and we shall be hungry and thirsty for it always, and through that hunger and thirst both our tasting and our being fed shall remain always and be made new: and that is life eternal. We shall embrace love with love and we shall be by love embraced [...] And therefore let no man deceive you with false idleness for our faith bears witness to what I tell you now, as do the holy Scriptures, for it is a truth eternal. We shall minnen and enjoy, work, and practice and possess rest, all in the same now, with no before or after." "Ende wi zelen gesmaken die goetheit gods, die zoete es boven al honech. Ende die sal ons

Moreover, the distinctiveness of Ruusbroec's minne increasingly begins to emerge—and therein, its rich potential for theological retrieval—as the Brabantine likewise theologically attributes minne's infinite desire and inexhaustible activity as equally and firmly placed within a Christological<sup>22</sup> sphere; in an immanent Trinitarian depiction of "whirling, essential minne" [*verwielen in die weseleke minne*] wherein the Divine Persons "embrace mutually [...] with an infinite and active minnen in unity"<sup>23</sup>; as well as in an economic Trinitarian setting, as seen in the following:

Our heavenly Father is avaricious [*ghieregh*] and generous [...] He generously gives His grace, His gifts and His bestowals, and demands of each one in particular that he respond to Him with thanks and with praise, and with all good works, in the measure of the gifts that he is given without and within. For the grace of God is neither given in vain nor for nothing [...] But above all works and practice of virtue [...] not only is [He] avaricious and generous in demanding and giving, but that He is avarice [*ghieregheit*] and generosity itself, for He wants to give Himself and everything that He is, and He wants us to give ourselves to Him in return with everything that we are. Thus He wants to be ours entirely, and wants us to be entirely His; and yet each one remains entirely what he is, for we cannot become God, but we are united to God by means and without means [...] He lives in us and we in Him by means of mutual minne [*underlinghe minne*], namely: His grace and our virtues.

Onse hemelsche vader es ghieeregh ende melde [...] dien gheeft hi meldelec sine gratie, sine gaven ende sine ghiften, ende eischt ieghewelken sunderlinghe dat hi heme antwerde met danke ende met love ende met allen goede werken, na dat hi ghegaeft es van buten ende van binnen. Want de gratie gods en werdt niet ghegheven idelec noch te vergheefs [...] Maer boven alle werke ende ufeninghe van dooghden [...] dat hi niet alleene en es ghieeregh ende melde in eisschene ende in ghevene, maer hi es selve ghieeregheit ende meldheit, want hi wilt ons hem selven gheven ende al dat hi es, ende hi wilt dat wi ons heme weder gheven met al dat wi sijn. Ende aldus wilt hi te male onse sijn ende dat wi te male sine sijn; ende nochtan blijft ieghewelc al dat hi es, want wi en moghen niet god werden maer wi sijn gode gheeneght met middele ende sonder middel. Wi sijn heme gheeneght overmids sine gratie ende onse goede werke; hi leeft in ons ende wi in heme overmids underlinghe minne, dat es sine ghenade ende onse dooghde.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, the relationality within Ruusbroec's shows a profound dynamism in and amid a startlingly degree of mutuality and similitude, while deployed within an equal sense of attention towards the impossibility of any autotheistic fusion resident in minne itself. And yet, the very origins of minne's impossibility appear inscribed—not as an impregnable barrier of distance, yet as an intrinsic desire and its natural inclination towards a "being other than we are."<sup>25</sup> Herein, we

---

voeden ende dore gaen ziele ende lijf. Ende dair na sal ons altoes hongeren ende dorsten; ende overmids honger ende dorst so sal smaken ende voeden altoes bliven ende verneuwen: ende dat es ewech leven. Wi selen met minnen minne begripen ende van minnen begrepen werden [...] Ende hieromme, en laet u niemene bedriegren met valscher ledecheit. Want dat ic u nu segge, dat tuget onse geloeve ende die heilege scripture, want het es ene ewege wairheit. Wi zelen minnen ende ghebruken, werken ende raeste oefenen ende besitten, ende altegadere in enen nu, sonder voer ende na."

<sup>22</sup> See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia 8, Spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*, (trans.) A. Lefevere, (ed.) G. de Baere (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), ll. 718-742.

<sup>23</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Boecksen*, ll. 332-333; 339-340: "Ende daer eest te nemene dat die persone wiken ende verwielen in die weseleke minne"; "Want die godleke persone behelsen hen onderlinghe...met grondelooser werkeleker minnen in enecheit."

<sup>24</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia 9, Van Seven Trappen*, (trans.) H. Rolfson, (ed.) R. Faesen (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 2003) ll. 884-903.

<sup>25</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 618-21 (with slight modification): "For we feel an eternal inclination towards an otherness than what we ourselves are. And this is the most interior and hidden distinction that we can feel between us and God, for beyond here, there is no other distinction." "Want wij ghevoelen een eewich

encounter what has generally been termed as Ruusbroec's "metaphysics of mysticism",<sup>26</sup> one in which regards the work of minne's perpetual desire as a thinking of difference and distinction as consequential to a more primary relationality, one in which is ensured by Ruusbroec's exemplarism and Trinitarian ontology. This convergence of difference and distinction in unity is seen here in an *admirably* concise depiction of the economic and soteriological strands of *exitus* and *reditus* as none other than the "same" immanent Trinitarian movement:

And in the living fruitful nature all things may possibly occur, for in the living fruitful nature the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son, and the Holy Spirit in them both. For it is a living and fruitful unity which is the source and the fount of all life and all genesis. And for this reason all creatures are there without themselves as in their eternal origin, one essence and one life with God. But in the bursting-out of the Persons with distinction, so the Son is from the Father and the Holy Spirit from them both. There God has *created and ordered all creatures in their own essence* [*wesen*]. And he has remade man by His grace and by His death [...] There, the Father with the Son and all the beloved [*gheminde*] are enfolded and embraced in the bond of minnen, that is to say, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. It is this same unity which is fruitful according to the bursting-out of the Persons and in the return, an eternal bond of minnen which can nevermore be unbound.

[E]nde in der levender vruchtbaere naturen sijn alle dinghe mogheleke te gheschiene. Want in der levender vruchtbaerre naturen soe es de sone in den vader, ende die vader in den sone, ende die heileghe geest in hen beiden. Want het es ene levende vruchtbare enecheit die een oert ende .i. beghen es alles levens ende alles gewerdens. Ende hier omme sijn daer alle creaturen sonder hen selven, also in hare eweghe sake een wesen ende een leven met gode. Maer in den utebroke der persone met onderschede, soe es die sone van den vader, ende die heileghe geest van hen beiden. Ende daer hevet god *alle creaturen ghemaect ende gheordent in hare eighen wesen*. Ende hi hevet den mensche weder hermaect met sijnre ghenaden ende met sijnre doet [...] Daer ed de vader, met den sone ende alle die gheminde, bevaen ende behelst in bande van minnen, dat es, in enecheit des heilechs geests. Ende dit es die selve enecheit die vruchtbaer es na den utebroke der persone, ende in den wederboghene .i. ewech bant der minnen die nemmermeer ontbonden en wert.<sup>27</sup>

## A. RESEARCH QUESTION

From this proceeding sampling of Ruusbroec's thought, it is evident—by way of both the Trinity's "breaking out" [*utebroke*] in endless activity in distinction [*onderscheet*] of Persons as well as the restlessness of the creature's graced return—that as an intrinsic mode of minne itself, Ruusbroec conceives of desire [*begheren*] as such, in terms of excess over lack; abundance, rather than scarcity. How then are we to *account* for Ruusbroec's logic of desire and furthermore, the question of its tenability and *theological relevance*. Additionally, in proposing to retrieve Ruusbroec's theology of minne within contemporary theological and philosophy of religion discourses, what avenues within Ruusbroec's thought are available in facilitating a constructive/critical *plausible* challenge to contemporary normative assumptions accorded to desire principally as desires of lack that are in turn, directed towards a scarcity of goods?

Secondly, in view of its interdisciplinary encounter with Jean-Luc Marion, the retrieval of Ruusbroec holds that desire's excessive abundance in no way appears in terms of a debilitating,

---

ute neyghen in eene anderheit dan dat wij selve sijn. Ende dit es dat innichste ende dat verborghenste onderscheet dat wij tuschen ons ende gode ghevoelen moghen, want hier boven en es nemmer onderscheet."

<sup>26</sup> See <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13280c.htm>, as accessed on 02.12.10

<sup>27</sup> Ruusbroec, *Boecksken*, ll. 366-376, 378-383 (my emphasis, with slight modification)

violent grace nor the demands of minne as a cruel, hegemonic imposition. Rather, in what perhaps amounts to an original re-articulation of Aquinas' *gratia non destruit, sed supponit et perficit naturam*, the unity of such abundance appears to fundamentally accord with the original, relational disposition of the creature to that of the greater dissimilarity to the Creator. Likewise, in its graced economic return, Ruusbroec stresses the enduring particularity of the works of minne as transformed [*overforminghe*] in the 'the unity of the Holy Spirit'. Thus, by coming to a rigorous conceptuality of Ruusbroec's minne, can such a retrieval, by way of its insistence for economic reciprocity and mutual return constructively encounter Marion's erotic phenomenological reduction and call for a renewed, univocal conceptuality of love, while critically challenging the pure passivity of Marion's weak, donative subject and thinking of the pure gratuity of love's givenness itself.

### **§3. STATUS QUAESTIONIS. MYSTICAL THEOLOGY TODAY—TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS APART FROM DOCTRINE?**

Recently within various contemporary theological perspectives, the "rediscovery" of (medieval) mystical theological texts has certainly taken place in various quarters to the extent that one may realistically gauge this sustained phenomenon no longer as idiosyncratic or sheer novelty. Rather, as an emerging resource of normative, creative theological reflection within Christian tradition, the ongoing hermeneutics of tradition-development and more specifically, its critical relevance within current research projects in seeking out a renewed theological anthropology open to the transformative-character of spirituality as reflective of the praxis of Christian identity. And yet, despite such renewed interest there are nonetheless many persistent gaps, misunderstandings and suspicions that make such a rediscovery and discussion across various theological disciplines still tenuous at best.

Retrieval, both within philosophical and theological quarters, can rightfully be called a major feature of renewed, contemporary approaches to late-medieval mystical texts. In terms of "continuity", this impetus, theologically, can be significantly traced back in part to the continuing influence of 20<sup>th</sup> Century *ressourcement*, or '*nouvelle theologie*' figures who advocated for a fresh return to various Patristic and Medieval sources amid the critique of Neo-Scholastic manual theology. While philosophically, diverse figures similarly pursued a renewed attention to the question of mysticism and its impact upon experience, subjectivity and the boundaries of rationality itself.

And yet, from a contemporary *socio-cultural* perspective, the full-force of retrieving (late)medieval mystical texts can be regarded as primarily motivated by the challenges and openings posed by postmodernism itself. "[U]p until the middle of the former century," writes Lieven Boeve, "Christian religious affiliation and identity were almost self-evident in large parts of Europe". However, due to secularisation and detraditionalisation, communal and individual identity construction is "much more reflexive than before".<sup>28</sup> Spanning the entire spectrum from "progressive" openings towards *différance* and radical plurality, to that of more "traditional" contextually-mediated approaches in response to secularisation and/or detraditionalisation, the

---

<sup>28</sup> See Lieven Boeve, "Orthodoxy in the Postmodern Context: The Interruption of the Christian Truth Claim", (Forthcoming) *Concilium* 2014.



rationale for the retrieval of such texts can in part be said to reflect the *instability* of contemporary religious identity itself (individually and communally), thus engendering an unavoidable degree of *reflexivity*.<sup>29</sup> And yet, it is most explicitly in the field of mysticism itself (and thus in turn, 'spirituality') that bears witness to these ongoing cultural debates, often pursued surrounding the question of (religious) experience. This is the case, both in terms of new multi-disciplinary academic trends that are now studying the 'praxis' of spirituality as a viable academic field of study, as well as their vigorous critiques. The latter of which, in part, argue that such developments are largely indebted to a late-capitalist consumerist economy and its manipulation of human desire that 'seeks' to construct such new identities and manufacture spiritual experiences. From this argumentative line, mystical texts become reduced to a preoccupation of 'techniques', founded upon a strong account of subjectivity and its construction of meaning.

In proposing a theological retrieval of the fourteenth century Brabantine contemplative, Jan van Ruusbroec and his understanding of love, or *minne*, and situating such a retrieval within contemporary discussions over love in theological and philosophy of religion quarters, I must equally bring into consideration that which *minne* presupposes, as an intelligible concept. And by doing so, distinguish presuppositions specifically intrinsic to *minne* from what may be contextually relevant in further expanding our understanding of *minne*, yet ancillary and hence extrinsic to *minne*'s own distinct, conceptual and theological rigour.<sup>30</sup> For Ruusbroec, this intrinsic presupposition can primarily be situated in terms of "mutual indwelling", both a cosmological principle of creation that bears a "vestigial" or "rough likeness to God" and more importantly, a specific relational anthropology between Creator and creature, a defining characteristic of late-medieval mystical theology of Northern Europe and specifically the Low Countries. As a uniquely Trinitarian, "interpersonal" *imago Dei* anthropology,<sup>31</sup> Ruusbroec uniquely stresses mutual indwelling as an intrinsic relationality of radical alterity within immanence wherein both eternal and exemplarist strains converge with the historical and soteriological modalities in this natural union of the human person and God. Thereby echoing the Johannine prologue: "'All that is made, was life in Him.'"<sup>32</sup>

Amid the current theological reception and retrieval of Christian mystical authors, considering such an anthropology and the various consequences stemming therefrom, I would like to suggest, appears more pivotal than "perennialist" readings that maintain the central importance to the very modern question of the (im)possibility of 'mystical experience'.<sup>33</sup> From a more modern historical

---

29 See generally, Lieven Boeve, *Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe*, in M. Hoelzl and G. Ward (ed.), *The New Visibility of Religion: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics* (Continuum Resources in Religion and Political Culture), London: Continuum, 2008, 187-209;

30 In this, we advance from what Jean-Luc Marion himself phenomenologically begins with in his conceptual plea in thinking anew, away from metaphysical closure, the primacy of the erotic phenomenon as "starting from themselves, without inscribing them from the outset and by force within a foreign horizon" and instead, "describ[ing] the erotic phenomenon in its own proper horizon [...]" See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 5-6.

31 See Bernard McGinn's typology of the differing schools of *imago Dei* anthropology: "intellectual, volitional, and the interpersonal", "*Humans as Imago Dei*" in E. Howells and P. Tyler (eds.) *Sources of Transformation: Revitalising Christian Spirituality*, (London: Continuum, 2010), 19-40, esp. 24-25.

32 Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia XIII, Spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*, ll. 901-902. See also Jn 1, 3-4.

33 See Louise Nelstrop's overview of "perennialist readings" in the tradition of William James, as one of four theoretical approaches to the contemporary study of Christian mysticism, in *Christian Mysticism: an Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches*, L. Nelstrop, K. Magill, B. B. Onishi (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 3-11.

perspective and by contrast, the central importance of such an mystical anthropology is that it stands in strong contrast to the implicit, modern/Cartesian anthropology of human subjectivity that we find in the manuals of "mystical" or "spiritual theology" predating Vatican II, of which, we can now say were overburdened in their own attempts to balance the competing claims of both mysticism with that of asceticism and moral theology. Mystical union in this sense was understood as occurring only once one has reached moral perfection.<sup>34</sup> Adding to this a further subdivision within the dialectics of contemplative union, as modulating between "acquired" (i.e. intentional) and the purely gratuitous "infused" union with God. Combine these laborious balancing attempts, wherein ultimately we derive our contemporary term "spirituality" as a forged synthesis—with the often pejorative connotations<sup>35</sup> that "mysticism" signified, attributed to the likes of George Tyrell, Alfred Loisy and others within the early twentieth Century Modernist movement.<sup>36</sup> While Modernist advocates like von Hügel sought refuge in Quietist figures such as Archbishop Fénelon and Mme. Guyon as an attempt to broaden the sources of Catholic tradition and its theological reflection distinctly away from Neo-Scholasticism and the manual tradition<sup>37</sup>, to their polemical adversaries, being "mystical" was deemed as either 'heterodox'; dogmatically and theologically insufficient; or at least 'vague' and 'ambiguous'. These developments thus contributed to theology's frequent understanding of 'mysticism' as extraneous to and at times mutually suspicious towards the nature of revealed, Christian faith in the former's own emphasis upon the subjectivity of "religious" or "mystical experience".<sup>38</sup> And while contemporary

---

34 See Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1955), 66-80. While in recent memory Garrigou-Lagrange is remembered by both defenders and adversaries alike as the staunch opponent to *ressourcement* theology, describing it as "la nouvelle théologie" and a resort back to Modernism. What is overlooked, however, is the fact Garrigou-Lagrange was already well-known in the field of Spiritual theology while teaching at the Angelicum in Rome. Here, contra Scaramelli's strong division between asceticism and mysticism, Garrigou-Lagrange argues for its unity: "The difference between this new way of dividing ascetico-mystical theology and the old way obviously arises from the fact that the old authors, unlike the modern ones, maintained that all truly spiritual souls can humbly desire and ask of God the grace of the infused contemplation of the mysteries of the faith [...] They considered this supernatural and infused contemplation to be morally necessary for that union with God in which the full perfection of the Christian life consists. Hence it may be wondered whether the new division, as propounded for example by Scaramelli, does not diminish both the unity and the sublimity of the perfect spiritual life." (69)

35 See e.g. Aidan Nichols' description of Loisy's "mystical faith" and its distinct, individualistic and modernist connotations in the following monograph, *From Newman to Congar: The Idea of Doctrinal Development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1990), 82: "Especially noteworthy here is the study of Loisy entitled *Un clerc qui n'apas trahi*, written by the Abbé Henri Bremond, the historian of French Spirituality [...] Bremond distinguished between 'dogmatic faith' and 'mystical faith'. He argued that at least until 1904 Loisy had what might be termed a mystical form of Catholic faith. That is, he did not accept the Church's dogmas as true in the sense in which her recognised doctors propounded them [...] 'all the dogmatic element had disappeared; all the mystical element remained [...]"

36 For a well-rounded critical reflection on figures linked to the Modernist crisis and their retrieval of mystical theological figures such as Fénelon, Mme Guyon, Catherine of Genoa and others, see *Modernists & Mystics*, ed. C.J.T. Talar, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

37 See William L. Portier & C.J.T. Talar, "Mystical Element in the Modernist Crisis" in *Modernists & Mystics*, 4. See also Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and her friends*, vol. I-II, (London: Dent 1961), vol. II, 129-181.

38 See De Lubac's modern historical description of the Council Fathers of the First Vatican Council's uneasiness with defining the Church as the "mystical body" as not only too much in line with the Reformation's own 'spiritualist' reaction to the Counter- Reformation, but furthermore, as demonstrating its own views towards that which is deemed as 'mystical': "When we read, for example, the observations made by the Fathers of the First Vatican Council on the plan put before them, whereby the Church was defined from the outset as the *mystical body*, we note that a good number of them were astonished. Not only did they object to this notion in its 'obscurity', or else its overly metaphorical character, or that, in contrast, it was too abstract. Some of them

studies on Christian mysticism and spirituality within academic settings have well moved beyond such handbooks as "dogmatically subordinate", in fact there is a greater amount of continuity with largely psychological and other intentionally non-theological readings of Christian mysticism in their perpetuating this conception of "mysticism" as extraordinary and extraneous to the Church and even at times Christian faith itself.<sup>39</sup> Conversely, by recognizing its theological basis and dependency, Christian spirituality need not however explicitly nor implicitly return us to the presuppositions of the manual tradition as inaugurated by Scaramelli S.J. *Direttorio ascetico* and *Direttorio mistico* (1751), Augustin Poulain S.J., and later on typified by Tanquerey's immensely popular *The Spiritual Life*.<sup>40</sup> Philip Sheldrake himself has argued for the distinctiveness of a contemporary "spirituality" as clearly distinguished from that of "spiritual theology", noting that spirituality today is "not simply the prescriptive application of absolute or dogmatic principles to life."<sup>41</sup> And yet, such an identity in discontinuity, I would cautiously assert is still more shaped by its distinctly *modern* heritage and tradition as typified by the manual tradition and its disputed relations invariably between asceticism—seen as preparatory and theologically based—to that of the extraordinary and overtly experiential character of mysticism. Hence, while this has led many to clearly assert spirituality's autonomy from that of theology, especially in its institutional application and academic study, such counter movements nonetheless owe much to the modern manual tradition's characterization of "mysticism" as overemphasizing spirituality's new self understanding, while clearly to the detriment of more classical spiritual texts that are disengaged from their hermeneutically grounded, theologically engaged religious context.

With this in mind, I am therefore significantly hesitant to see the term "*mystical theology*"

---

wanted to outlaw it as a possible source of dangerous error: the sole fact that the Jansenists had used it seemed to them to call for its condemnation without further appeal. Without going to such excessive lengths, several of them estimated that, valid as it was for mystical theology, *it was out of place in a dogmatic exposition on the Church, where there was a need to define its essence, rather than to offer nourishment to the life of piety [...]* in *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, (trans.) G. Simmonds, R Price, C. Stephens, (eds.) Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons (Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), pg. 117.

<sup>39</sup> See Emile Mersch S.J., *The Whole Christ*, trans. John R. Kelly S.J., (Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Company, 1938), 572-573, for a defense of mysticism and the doctrine of the Mystical Body precisely as a corrective to the Modernist crisis: "It is [the Mystical Body], lastly and chiefly, a remedy for the heresy of Modernism, for its false views on religion, and for its false doctrine of immanence. Modernism, as we know it, is an attempt to make all religion, or at least whatever we can know of religion, something purely subjective. The rest is Unknowable. Of God, of His nature, even our immortal soul, we can know nothing. *A fortiori*, the divinity of Christ and the transcendent character of the Christ-life and of the Church are wholly beyond the range of our intelligence. The most that we can attain is something subjective, an interior sentiment, an attraction for the divine, the need for an ideal; these alone can give meaning to religious formulas, and especially to the dogmas and facts of Christianity [...]. The aspiration toward a more interior religion, with which it has tempted minds of our present age, will ever appear false, even painfully commonplace to those who have come to know the doctrine of the Mystical Body. What a poor immanence is this, that imprisons man in himself, and how sad this cry that loses itself in the darkness! Immanence? Certainly. Why abandon a word that heresy has stolen from Truth? [...] But this immanence does not consist in man's isolating himself in himself, but in aspiring to the supreme Life and Immanence, to the God who is immanent Life. The Christ-life, too, is immanent, but with an immanence far superior to that of unaided man. Since we are all taken up in Christ, we are all united in God. It is eternal Life, which by vivifying the sacred humanity of the Savior, vivifies us all in Him [...] It is the presence within us of the Mystical Christ, the intimacy of all that is catholic, the union within the individual, in Christ and through Christ, with all of regenerated humanity and with God."

<sup>40</sup> A.A. Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*, (trans.) Herman Branderis (Tournai: ET, 1930).

<sup>41</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History* (London: SPCK, 1995), 58.

loose currency—as echoed by the early to mid-20th Century Belgian Jesuit Emile Mersch in his explicit, ontological usage of the term "mystical". In his larger theological project of developing the understanding of our life and participation in the "Whole Christ", Mersch deliberately opts for the term "Mystical Body of Christ" as reflecting the "realism and mysticism" of our "real and ontological union" with Christ and those united in His Body. Thus, an understanding of "mystical" which is by no means to be "synonymous with 'nebulous' or 'semi-real', etc."<sup>42</sup> At this point, the absence of such a perspective in part entails understandings of Christian spirituality as only further divorced and driven afield from both theological critical input and conversely, its own constructive/critical stance towards theology and more specifically, the identity of the theologian, echoing Philip Sheldrake<sup>43</sup> and his arguing for a "transformative" hermeneutic that spiritual texts confront the reader within a committed, theological perspective.<sup>44</sup>

Not only is the terrain of such discussions both foreign and in discontinuity with Ruusbroec's own mystical theological undertaking, but furthermore, as the ongoing retrieval of such patristic and medieval figures continue to be performed within contemporary continental philosophical and theological reflection<sup>45</sup>, the pending theological status and constructive relevance of figures such as Ruusbroec shifts away from the "possibility" of such mystical experiences as both "passive" and "immediate" as evidenced by various feminist and post-modern approaches. For up until recently, the question of the *possibility* of such mystical experience, traditionally seen in its extraordinary character

---

42 See Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 8-9: "Now that we have indicated certain false notions of the Mystical Body, what is the correct view? The answer is that there are two; both good, and both orthodox. The first is characterized by its realism and mysticism [...] According to this view, men have a true union with Christ, a real and ontological union; He is really and truly in them and we are in Him; we are really and truly one in Him as He is one with the Father [...] It is best to retain the traditional name and call it a "mystical" union. However, it must be clearly understood that this term is by no means synonymous with 'nebulous' or 'semi-real'. On the contrary, it signifies something which in plenitude and reality surpasses the things of nature and the positive concepts that our reason can elaborate."

43 Philip Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality*, 72 (my emphasis): [S]pirituality provides solid foundations for judging the *adequacy* of theological explanations [...] spirituality is the unifying factor that underlines all attempts to 'do' theology or, more properly, to *be* a theologian [...] Spirituality reminds theology that the theological enterprise is fundamentally practical and needs to be practiced [...] To do theology means becoming a *theological person*, not merely using theological tools."

44 Philip Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality*, 40: [A] number of scholars now refer to what has been called an 'appropriative method' in relation to interpreting Christian traditions and texts, whether scriptural or spiritual. By this, scholar's means that the purpose of interpretation is not merely accurate knowledge but *application*, and the purpose of application is *appropriation*. That is, 'understanding' a spiritual text fully is transformative rather than purely informative. Understanding is concerned with meanings but also with purpose and values. To be appropriated, texts need to be understood from the inside out, as it were."

45 In terms of the contemporary interest and reception of mystical texts, questions surrounding the 'possibility' of mystical experience and the academic reception of such authors, in the tradition of William James' influential *Varieties of Religious Experience* are appearing increasingly to be no longer at stake. This is evidenced in large part by the wide range of diverse engagements such contemplative authors have both provoked and served as resources within contemporary analyses. For example, recent philosophical and theological attempts to overcome ontotheological thinking structures in order to think a more purified transcendence in the works of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion have often relied upon the tradition of apophatic or negative theology, and in so doing, their arguments have sought support from the mystical tradition. Conversely, the growing influence of approaches such as those of Amy Hollywood within Feminist and Gender Studies have attempted within their own fields of discourse to rehabilitate the performative aspects of more "affective" and embodied forms of mysticism in figures such as Bl. Angela of Foligno, St. Teresa of Avila or Beatrice of Nazareth, gauged in terms of their contemporary reception as sufficiently resistant to more modern reductive psychological views of the 'hysteria' of female mysticism, as well as to categories that have previously sidelined such figures from serious reflection and consideration.

## Introduction

in terms of its *immediacy* and *passivity* to the human subject functioned as a testing grounds and determining criterion of its legitimacy and the possibility of its hermeneutical engagement. However, while refusing to cede primacy to the question of mystical experience and its (im)possibility, doing so while situated amongst various new forms of textual engagements<sup>46</sup>, I instead hold for a close, textual reading under the presumption that Ruusbroec's texts themselves operate within a specific, unique theological hermeneutic—with primacy accorded to *minne*—as itself prior to, yet intrinsic within its historical/contextual embedding. From this, I can gauge the unique fluency, particularities and nuances of his reflections upon mutual indwelling, while fully recognizing that the latter is nonetheless a common mystical theological theme. In Ruusbroec's case, such an anthropology is both thoroughly Christological and Trinitarian, while deeply rooted in his dynamic thinking of the primacy of *minne*. Such themes not only demand closer examination, yet further present themselves as key entry points in (re)thinking relationality within the contemporary demands for a distinct, reassessed theological anthropology. A reassessment, which may in turn function as a potential corrective to certain readings and the appropriation of mystical texts.

---

46 See Nelstrop, *Christian Mysticism*, 1-20, for her taxonomy of current theoretical approaches to Christian mystical texts, consisting of: Perennialist; Contextualist; Feminist; and lastly, various post-modern Performative language approaches.

## CHAPTER I

### A HUNGER UNSTILLED: RETRIEVING JAN VAN RUUSBROEC'S UNDERSTANDING OF LOVE AS MINNE IN VIEW OF JEAN-LUC MARION'S EROTIC TURN

#### §1. INTRODUCTION: THE EROTIC LOCALE

The following essay proposes a retrieval of Jan van Ruusbroec's univocal love concept of minne as critically responsive to the renewed, contemporary interest in thinking love anew within theological and philosophy of religion discourses.<sup>1</sup> This essay will first proceed by briefly examining the radical French phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion and the strengths and weaknesses of his erotic reduction. In turn, by acknowledging continuing scholarly interest in the mystical theological tradition, for both Marion *et al.*, as productively contributing to this contemporary rethinking of love's primacy, topics of fruitful and critical development will be explored in Ruusbroec as envisaging his sustained, future engagement within such discourses.

In Marion's introductory chapter to *The Erotic Phenomenon*, the "Silence of Love", he provocatively sketches the modern divorce between philosophy and love and in effect, calls for a renewed focus "that out of philosophy's amorous disaster we can reconstruct an inquiry on love."<sup>2</sup> Marion argues that our contemporary understandings of love and charity have been dramatically hollowed out and grossly sentimentalized, from which we increasingly are no longer able to either "describe it, nor distinguish it from other erotic dispositions, nor even from nonerotic dispositions, much less articulate them in a right and sensible act."<sup>3</sup> To reengage love on its own terms and within its own distinct rationality, Marion calls for a concept to think love from within its own primacy, as foundational to an "erotics of wisdom", while reminding us of the very original, sapiential endeavor of *philosophy*. By doing so, Marion advances the more radical claim that "philosophy defines itself as the 'love of wisdom' because it must in effect begin by loving before claiming to know."<sup>4</sup>

Resolutely moving away from more metaphysically predominant modalities such as truth and being, Marion puts forth three criteria to conceptually think the modality of love as primary: that a love-concept be "univocal"; that such a univocal concept can account for the rationality of that which "nonerotic thought disqualifies as irrational and degrades to madness"<sup>5</sup>; and lastly, that a "concept must reach the experience of erotic phenomena starting from themselves, without inscribing them

---

<sup>1</sup> See generally *Transforming Philosophy and Religion: Love's Wisdom*, (eds.) B.E. Benson and N. Wirzba, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, (trans.) Stephen E. Lewis, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 5.

from the outset and by force within a foreign horizon."<sup>6</sup> From these criteria, Marion advocates that our thinking of love must be informed by, yet ultimately rise above an exclusive, hermeneutically-based understanding of love as *praxis*<sup>7</sup>. Marion positions love's primacy as exceeding a narrow voluntarism, phenomenologically insisting that love possesses its own intrinsic, given content. However, as a univocal concept that attempts to think such primacy from the givenness of love itself and not conditioned by any foreign horizon, such a love concept must equally possess a critical capacity in order to attain rigorous conceptuality, if it is to endure exposure to a negative moment in which it can thus withstand easy negation. Thus, it is with the aim of developing this intrinsic, critical sense that Marion will make use of the mystical theological dialectics of kataphasis, apophasis and the *via eminentiae* [the way of eminence], or more frequently referred to contemporaneously as the "third way".<sup>8</sup> By insisting on the historical viability of this third way as a way of naming and responding to transcendence beyond metaphysical enclosure, Marion thus positions love as escaping both the formal impasse of binary predication of thesis and antithesis—in which he directly links to kataphasis and apophasis and hence, subject to easy negation—as well as preempting any hermeneutical charges of partiality by asserting love's own distinct rationality. And yet, the question remains whether his own erotic meditations are themselves responsive to the robust, conceptual plea that he sets forth. Does Marion's erotic meditations present a plausible, confessional witness, stemming from a conceptuality of love that sufficiently addresses the "disputes" heretofore between love's particularity and universality, of which "have not ceased to occupy the lover, who only conquers himself by trying to settle them."<sup>9</sup>

Instead of attempting to resolve such conflicts by way of speculative detachment, Marion proceeds confessionally via the "erotic reduction"<sup>10</sup> and his highly particularized erotic meditations are structured in response to the originating question, "Does anyone love me?", insisting that "one must speak of love in the same way as one must love—in the first person.... [For] loving puts in play my identity, my ipseity, those resources of mine that are more inward to me than myself".<sup>11</sup> As is customary with Marion's works, the definitiveness of his erotic turn, its phenomenological status and questioned theological neutrality have all been critically challenged. And yet, while Marion's distinct, Pascalian-tinged French Catholicism and theological commitments are clear and unavoidably apparent, is such particularity really all that problematic, especially when gauged in terms of love's primacy? As Marion's draws upon St. Augustine's Sermon 34 in his prefatory remark, "*nemo est qui non amet*" [There is no one of course who doesn't love], it is not a question of whether or not we love—of which falsely presumes suspending erotic determinacy and instead, makes possible my neutrality towards love (or hate) itself. For, if we accept the premises of the erotic reduction—and its priority to the modalities of reason/rationality, being and non-being—only to later on critique its application and distinct hermeneutics as overly particular, phenomenologically implausible and theologically determined, such a critique fails to address the erotic reduction itself and the legitimacy

---

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> See generally Werner Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010) for a general, topical introduction to a hermeneutically-based, theological reflection on love as *praxis*.

<sup>8</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology'", in *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, (eds.) John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999) 20-53.

<sup>9</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 101.

<sup>10</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 19-26.

<sup>11</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 9.

for phenomenology to proceed from love's primacy. Rather, such familiar critiques fundamentally aim at disqualifying that which Marion claims to initially bracket—what St. Augustine himself proclaims to be at issue—though Marion deliberately chooses not to reference: "There is no one of course who doesn't love, *but the question is, what do they love.*"<sup>12</sup>

Claude Romano's "Love in its Concept" makes a similar critique, aptly illustrated when observing Marion's erotic terminology in thinking its univocity wherein "love is qualified here as a 'phenomenon', a word whose *neutrality* and *indetermination* is important."<sup>13</sup> Romano's stress upon the 'neutral' field of the phenomenon itself—and by extension, phenomenology—is thus critically at odds with Marion's confessional attempt at thinking the univocity of love, as Romano instead situates love more as a second order, derivative phenomenon to that of the gift.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, as the erotic phenomenon exposes reason's insufficiency "to give love reason thus marks not only the principle of insufficient reason, but erects above all the lover as reason in himself,"<sup>15</sup> Marion argues that the phenomenality of the beloved appears "in the measure that I, the first to love, love."<sup>16</sup> Marion further elaborates upon the particular phenomenality of the beloved in the following:

the lover alone sees something else, a thing that no one other than he sees—that is, what is precisely no longer a thing, but, for the first time, just such an other, unique, individualized, henceforth torn from economy, detached from objectness, unveiled by the initiative of loving, arisen like a phenomenon to that point unseen. The lover, who sees insofar as he loves, discovers a phenomenon that is seen insofar as it is loved (and as much as it is loved).<sup>17</sup>

Hence, Marion strongly argues against such an apparent 'neutrality' and indeterminateness—not to be confused with the saturated, intuitive particularity of the beloved itself, as a phenomenon, which arises and is foregrounded—yet understood as the worldly context of "objectness" that recedes into a background of ontological indifference to the erotic phenomenon.

---

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, vol. II, Sermons (20-50) on the Old Testament, (Trans.) Edmund Hill, (Ed.) John E. Rotelle, (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1990), 166.

<sup>13</sup> Claude, Romano, 'Love in its Concept', in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, (trans.) Stephen E Lewis, (ed.) Kevin Hart, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 319-335, 320-1. Here, Romano further expounds upon the explicit neutrality of constituting the erotic appearance as a phenomenon. "In its indeterminate neutrality, it has almost the same meaning as the word 'weight' that St. Augustine, doubtless for analogous reasons, privileged, thus refusing to allow himself to be caught in the trap of these oppositions [...]. Thus Marion dismisses such questions as whether love is of the order of an emotion or of an intention. Is it something we undergo or is it voluntary? Does one who loves seek the good of the other or his own satisfaction? Is love essentially altruistic or selfish? If love presents itself here in the neutrality of a simple 'phenomenon', it is precisely in order to escape the dichotomies in which the problem has become mired, to the point of becoming insolvable[...]"

<sup>14</sup> Romano, 'Love in its Concept', 321. Indeed, Romano makes such an argument, characterizing the erotic reduction as a "partial reduction" and as "eidetic" to that of a universal one—wherein "the erotic phenomenon simply comes under a universal phenomenology of the gift, in relation to which it would be, in some way, a particular case." Romano's critique is that the erotic reduction leads to an inquiry about the essence of love, of which is a "particular phenomenon", whereas "Marion holds that all phenomenality finds itself modified by the erotic reduction: the task of the erotic reduction is to give access to a new domain of phenomenality, more originary than that of objects and of beings considered in their being, and thus more originary than the domains brought to light respectively by Husserl and Heidegger."

<sup>15</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 82.

<sup>16</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 80.

<sup>17</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 80-81.



Devaluing such a worldly, contextual backdrop is a reoccurring position of Marion, as he frequently regards such worldly relations explicitly in terms of an economy of exchange that evaluates, demands and reciprocates that which it distinguishes by way of "comparisons, of calculations, and of commerce".<sup>18</sup> While in strong contrast, the isolated lover, as *ratio sui* "can no longer see otherwise, nor see anything other than what he sees—and what he sees decidedly no longer has the status of a thing, but of a beloved."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, while aiming at pushing love itself beyond all worldly relations seen as inextricably linked with a metaphysical duality, the very particularity of Marion's confessional rhetoric—as rooted within a retrieved, neo-Augustinian tradition that aims beyond onto-theology—may rightfully be seen as responding to a distinct rationale of the erotic reduction itself.

Rather than perpetuating such continuing debates over the proper status of Marion's work, the question to me steers away from critiques of accessibility and openness to difference and multiplicity in response to Marion's radically particular reflections of love. Instead, given the unavoidable theological overlap of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, as confessionally emerging from the first person, to what extent does Marion abandon himself to the erotic phenomenon itself, a givenness mediated by his conceptual understanding of such a love? As his conceptual plea for love's univocity not only gives way to *difference* as it differentiates that which accedes to the name of love, from that which does not, so too does it give way to *distinction* in individualizing and distinguishing oneself as a lover, via the praxis of such loving in mediating our erotic reflections. Thus, to what extent does Marion's conceptualizing of love allow for him to receive and respond to the erotic phenomenon itself and do so—with authority—as a lover?

To access this, if love is to be thought of according to its primacy, a *place* is requisite for the immediacy of its reception, as primary. The phenomenality of love needs a concrete place, as do lovers, beyond reification (the *what* of the lover) and identity (its *who* interrogated), a relationality that is primary and reflective of its erotic origins. And yet, in Marion's erotic meditations, concretizing relations—in all of its desire for possessiveness, commitment and sincere, yet implacable demands—within the phenomenon of love is a dangerous place, as the relational exchange between lover and beloved always risks devolving into an economy of indebtedness, determining relations and hence, compromising love's gratuitousness. Hence, the meeting between lovers, Marion argues, emerges as an unforeseeable advent in the crossing between lover and beloved, such that the phenomenon of love is a "*crossed phenomenon* with a double entry—two intuitions fixed by a single signification."<sup>20</sup> And while Marion is here certainly bold and phenomenologically innovative in speaking of a singular, shared phenomenon between lover and beloved, he then immediately retreats and foregoes ascribing this shared phenomenon any permanence or enduring signification. For the meeting place of this shared signification that both individualizes and binds the lover and beloved in the erotic phenomenon, "aris[ing] like an oath"<sup>21</sup>, Marion describes as the intuitively rich, yet formally empty "Here I am!".<sup>22</sup> Such a relational place,

---

<sup>18</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 81.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*

<sup>20</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 105.

<sup>21</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 104.

<sup>22</sup> See *contra* the analysis of Stijn Van Den Bossche for a substantially different take on Marion's "*me voici*" [Here I am!] as directly implying the vows of marriage as a "performative oath". Stijn van den Bossche, 'From The Other's Point Of View: The Challenge of Jean-Luc Marion's Phenomenology to Theology', in *Religious Experience and Contemporary Theological Epistemology*, (eds.) Lieven Boeve, Yves De Maeseneer and Stijn Van Den Bossche, (Leuven: University Press, 2005), 61-82, 78-9.

this 'here', which Marion describes as as drearily banal and anonymous as a hotel room, a place, which "as such signifies nothing and even has no meaning... applicable to everyone and implying nothing" until someone "performs it."<sup>23</sup> Thus, for Marion, all love language and actions that mediate the immediacy of lovers in their relationality and common bond are themselves empty and devoid of meaning, stressing such mediation by way of its hollowed-out, formal universality to offset the otherwise particularity and individuation that the performance of love ushers forth. What promise does such a love concept hold in refounding *philosophy* based upon such a poor 'erotics of wisdom'?

In turn, Marion's emphasis on the erotic phenomenon as individualizing—and hence, away from concrete, substantive relation—is expressed in terms of the flesh and advances from his earlier accounts in *Being Given* and *In Excess* in terms of its strict auto-affection to include more of a heteronymous range<sup>24</sup>, wherein "the other gives me what she does not have—my very flesh. And I give to her what I do not have—her very flesh."<sup>25</sup> However, while breaking away from the extreme insistence of auto-affectivity and its inescapable self-enclosure, similar to *Being Given* and by extension, *Phenomenality of the Sacrament*<sup>26</sup>, the problem of receiving the gratuitous primacy of the erotic phenomenon persists, such that by way of its immediacy, not only does it individualize me—for "I do not have flesh, I am my flesh and it coincides absolutely with me,"<sup>27</sup>—but furthermore, that such identity as prior to relation risks idolizing the other. Affirming thus substantive, meaningful degrees of the alterity of the other—beyond any and all empty formality—exposes itself to a phenomenological "difficulty [...] not in its supposed distancing, poverty, or transcendence [...] [but] in its absolute immanence".<sup>28</sup> Here, Marion encounters a significant constraint in erotically thinking alterity—for example, the other's touch—beyond the flesh's own self-reflexive claim of identity, to the exclusion of a thicker description of the possessiveness of relationality, desire for union, as well as the immediacy of desire's reference towards, affirmation of, and address to the other's alterity. For Marion, viewed within the paradigm of givenness, relationality primarily does not reflect such alterity, yet is retained within its own self-reference, as the other's touch gives me that which I lack, while in turn the phenomenality of "the other appears in the very measure in which she gives me my own flesh."<sup>29</sup> However, within the dynamic of such love dialectics, if the lover is to respect the other's alterity, while maintaining such self-reflexivity, then the flesh's reception of such touch—the locus or meeting place of receiving the primacy and givenness of the erotic phenomenon—Marion maintains is one characterized solely in terms of abandonment and dispossession. For "one can possess a body," as physically extended within the world, one that accrues both debt and demand, yet "possession closes access to the flesh."<sup>30</sup> Hence, Marion goes to great lengths in establishing the beloved's alterity, as particular and lacking neutrality, though doing so, not as an invitation for ever-

---

<sup>23</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 107.

<sup>24</sup> See Shane Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 130-158. and his analysis of Marion's thinking flesh, its evolution and Mackinlay's charge that such heteronymous openings occasioned in Marion's more recent writings challenges its earlier claim as "absolute".

<sup>25</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 120.

<sup>26</sup> See also Patrick Cooper, *Feeding from His Flesh: The Enduring Eucharistic dimensions of Jean-Luc Marion's Thought* (Unpublished Thesis, KU Leuven, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, 2010) for a more thorough analysis of the enduring relevance of Marion's Eucharistic thought with his later phenomenological writings.

<sup>27</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 112.

<sup>28</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 121.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

deepening union as responding to and affirming such alterity, yet as an impregnable limit of unrelenting distance. Where thus has the erotic fled and the possessive desire for union?

In short, there is nothing new in Marion's posture of receptivity and the affective passivity of the flesh—the seat of the lover's identity<sup>31</sup>—regarded as continuously exposed, with hypersensitivity towards the threat of idolatry and idolatrous appropriation. For such themes are consistent and recurring in Marion's works, expressed in the early precaution to "admit a distance in order that the other may deploy in it the conditions of my union with him," as justifying Marion's recourse and distinct approach to the theology of transubstantiation as preserving an irreducible externality, thus safeguarded from idolatrous appropriation when sacramentally approaching the Eucharistic *flesh of Christ*.<sup>32</sup>

However, can we not say that Marion's thinking the univocity of love in such instances moves beyond a certain predilection for and emphasis of kenotic abandonment and instead, shows itself as an overall weakness in terms of its relational poverty and inability to think of the immanent other in any other modality than such dispossession and lack? Are we ultimately prohibited from thinking the immediacy of desire towards the other, as enfleshed, in any other manner than its ultimately self-referential character, as refusing its inclination to anything more than myself as "*that* [...] [which] I lack."<sup>33</sup> For if desire maintains both its ultimate self-reference—as loving love itself—and its particular response to such lacking absence, then conceiving of desire as such, irrespective of its responsiveness towards the other, I would argue necessarily constrains both responding to the immediate affectivity of the flesh as well as thinking the full extent of love's primacy. The presumption of privileging identity over and against relation hinders Marion's thinking of flesh from love's primacy, especially in terms of its unitive erotic character, of which I would argue is both inevitably possessive and relational. Hence, I submit that the difficulty of receiving the alterity of the other and its poor relationality within the immediacy of erotic thought restricts Marion's otherwise notable effort to rethink love from within its own given primacy.

In response to these standing critiques, the following proposes exploring the possibilities of retrieving central ideas and thinking patterns of the 14th Century contemplative theologian, Jan van Ruusbroec to not only heed the contemporary call from Marion, et. al. in renewing our approach in thinking love, but furthermore, seeing where Ruusbroec can be called upon in both constructively adding to, as well as critiquing certain dimensions of this renewed discourse.

#### A. METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

Why Ruusbroec? The prospects of retrieval opens onto two vulnerable fronts and their critiques: from the historian as well as the contemporary interlocutor. As such retrieval engages historical sources and attempts at situating them within contemporary discourse, doing so largely exposes one to the inevitable critique that such retrieval lacks sufficient, historical

---

<sup>31</sup> See Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 112: "Passivity makes me, insofar as it makes me become a lover."

<sup>32</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, (trans.) T. A. Carlson, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 176-7.

<sup>33</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 108.

comprehensiveness. The second critique emerges more from the contemporary angle, citing the possibility of retrieval as unavoidably partial and reconstructive.<sup>34</sup> In the face of apparent discontinuity as final and irreconcilable, retrieval of pre-modern figures rightly tests the critical-hermeneutical conditions under which texts and concepts from the contemplative tradition can be retrieved in contemporary philosophical and theological thinking. These tests can be quite vigorous, as historical-theological input often tends to be considered by many contemporary thinkers as merely instrumental to a first and foremost systematic reflection. And while this critique is more often than not occasioned by the very content of that which is being proposed, standing contentions and their critiques are not so much content-centered as they are methodological and therefore, the only way that I presently see for those whose work engages in retrieval to counter such claims of over-partiality is to address them right off from the beginning.

In so doing, I put forth the claim that Ruusbroec's understanding of love as *minne*—a unitive, dynamic concept of love that is differentiated from, yet incorporates dimensions of both *caritas/agape* and *eros*—has a critical potential to both expand and give further depth to our rethinking of love, as well as its distinct promise to do so from the seat of its own enfleshed primacy. As a unitive concept both "above reason and yet not without reason"<sup>35</sup>, Ruusbroec's *minne* can enable us to refine, nuance and provide a unique alternative to otherwise polarized, contemporary theological discussions over the competing priorities of *caritas* and *veritas*, resultant in part by the failure to think love beyond what modern metaphysics has thus divided. While maintaining its unity, love by necessity needs a third term to think such primacy beyond the current impasse between self-possessive and self-denying love. In turn, if we are to uphold a unified love concept, we then need a conceptuality of love that is able to seamlessly thread the linkages between love's various movements, its gratuitousness, its graciousness as well as its possessive desire for union and

---

<sup>34</sup> In a fascinating passage on "minne" as "totally eliminated from living German speech because it had been so misused", c.f. the popular 20th Century Thomist philosopher Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1997) 148-149, which, given its relevance, I quote at length: "In the works of medieval poets like Wolfram von Eschenbach and Walter von der Vogelweide, but also in general, nonpoetic usage, *Minne* was 'the usual word for love'....In fact, *Minne* seems to have been the more exacting term, compared to *Liebe*. It signified, according to the Grimm *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, not only man's devoted love for God (*Gottesminne*), but the solicitude accorded those in need of help and the love between man and woman. But by the year 1200 Walter von der Vogelweide was already complaining that 'many a false coin is struck' with the image of *Minne*. The word remained in use for quite a while; but the progressive vulgarization of its meaning eventually had the consequence that employing it 'became impossible'. Then it was extinguished with a kind of fierceness; it was even replaced in already printed books by pasting the word *Liebe* over it. In Notker's German Psalter, written around the year 1000, *Minne* held sway unassailed; for Luther, five hundred years later, the word no longer existed....And so it has remained to the present day. None of the efforts of the romantics and none of the Wagner operas has succeeded in bringing the word back to living speech. Although a new German translation of Kierkegaard by Emmanuel Hirsch attempted to render one of the two Danish expressions for love by *Minne*, that effort has remained an isolated bit of archaizing without any significance for actual contemporary German speech."

<sup>35</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia 3: Die geestelike brulocht*, (trans.) Helen Rolfson, (ed.) Jos Alaerts, (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols 1988) b, ll. 1481-1485: "In the unity of spirit, in which this vein wells, one is above activity and above reason, but not without reason; for the enlightened reason, and especially, the faculty of loving, feels this touch, and reason can neither comprehend nor understand the mode or manner, how or what this touch might be." "In eenicheit des gheests, daer dese adere walt, es men boven werken ende boven redene, maer niet sonder redene; want die verlichte redene, ende zonderlinghe de minnende cracht, ghevoelt dit gherinen, ende redene en can niet begripen noch verstaen wise noch maniere, hoe ochte wie dit gherinen si."

unbounded excess, without downplaying one modality over another, if love is indeed to convincingly assert its primacy.

In the following contribution, I would like to briefly introduce some of the major themes and thinking patterns that are closely related to Ruusbroec's understanding of *minne*. These aspects include: the unitive, ecstatic character of *minne*; its primacy, as "above reason, but not without reason"<sup>36</sup> to the modality of truth as normative; its participatory, dynamic character that is thoroughly Christological and Trinitarian, understood as both a continual "going out" in works, desire and restlessness, all of which affirms the otherness of God in terms of the Divine Persons, as well as its continual "return", immersion and rest in the unity of God.<sup>37</sup> With due attention to these themes, I will introduce them, while explicitly focusing upon the theme of ecstatic yearning and the restlessness of loving that is intrinsic to Ruusbroec's understanding of *minne*. From this, I would like to introduce the unique, critical potential of affirming God's alterity within the immanent life of *minne* itself, a critical capacity that arises in part from the excess of feeling [*ghevoelen*] the immediacy of the Other's touch [*gherinen*] that spurns our continual restlessness and yearning for greater union with God in His "greater dissimilarity".<sup>38</sup> With these basic orientations in mind, I would now like to put forward a few initial remarks concerning further possible openings for retrieving Ruusbroec's thought.

## B. POSSIBLE OPENINGS

First, attention must be given to the reinvigorated theological debates concerning the priority of *caritas* or *veritas* within fundamental theology, which has contributed to this current rethinking of love within both theology and philosophy of religion quarters. More specifically, within various theological disciplines, a renewed assessment of 'love' is being performed, in part motivated by the prominence that Benedict XVI has made of the issue in his encyclicals, *Deus Caritas Est* (2006)

---

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia*, 1: *Boecksen der verclaringhe*, (trans.) Ph. Crowley and Helen Rolfson, (ed.) Guido de Baere, (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 1981) ll. 332-340 : "And there you must accept that the Persons yield and lose themselves whirling in essential *minne* [*weseleke minne*], that is, in enjoyable unity; nevertheless, they always remain according to their personal properties in the working of the Trinity. You may thus understand [*proeven*] that the divine nature is eternally active according to the mode of the Persons and eternally at rest and without mode according to the simplicity of its essence [*wesen*]. It is why all that God has chosen and enfolded with eternal, personal *minne* [*personenleker minne*], He has possessed essentially, enjoyably in unity, with essential *minne*. For the Divine Persons embrace mutually in eternal pleasure with an infinite and active love in unity." "Ende daer eest te nemen dat die persone wiken ende verwielen in die weseleke minnen, dat es, in ghebrukeleker enecheit, ende nochtan altoes staende bliven na persoanleker aert in werken der drieheit. Ende aldus moghedu proeven dat die godleke nature ewech werkende es na wise der persoene, ende ewech ledech steet ende wiseloes na eenvoldecheit haers wesens. Ende hieromme, aldat god vercoren hevet ende begrepen met ewegher persoanleker minnen, dat hevet hi al weseleke beseten, ghebrukeleke in enecheiden, met weseleker minnen. Want die godleke persone behelsen hen onderlinghe in .i. ewech behagen met grondelooser werkeleker minnen in enecheit."

<sup>38</sup> From the Second Canon of the Fourth Lateran Council, See Giovanni Domenico Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, vol. XXIII (Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt 1960-1962), 986: '[B]etween creator and creature no likeness can be recognized which would be greater than the unlikeness that is to be recognized between them.'

and *Caritas in Veritate* (2009). Of particular note is Benedict's decided praise of *eros*, from which he argues has been historically marginalized and downgraded in various strands of Christianity's history. However, Benedict makes explicit his reappraisal, equally asserting the fundamental priority of *veritas* towards love—*eros* and *caritas*—as a corrective to such a unified love going astray or becoming mis-directed. Retrieving Ruusbroec's conceiving of *minne* as "above reason but not without reason", can both widen and nuance these current discussions, as it not only locates *minne*, within the context of union with God, as above the province of reason, but it further articulates that such *minne* indeed possesses its own rationality, even when it goes against normative reason itself.

This position is not only an advance from the heritage of Gregory the Great's "*amor ipse notitia est*" [love itself is knowledge], wherein love itself possess its own knowledge and distinct conceptuality but it furthermore counters what later metaphysics would itself deny, what Marion articulates as the division between rational love and irrational passion, the latter of which is discarded by the Cartesian ego seen as both voluntaristic, secondary and thus non-essential to the primacy of the *res cogitans* [thinking thing].<sup>39</sup> Thus, Ruusbroec's understanding of *minne*, as that which dwells in the very "groundless abyss" of the created self appears uniquely posed to deliver both an intelligible concept of love and with it, a rich theological basis in joining contemporary appeals to think the primacy of love anew, as an "erotics of wisdom" and away from metaphysical closure.

Ruusbroec strongly challenges basic dimensions of this discourse, namely the treatment of *caritas* and *veritas* as somehow mutually distinct and isolated from one another, whereas speaking in terms of our various forms of union with God—with mediation, without mediation, and without difference or distinction<sup>40</sup>—in order to both feel and understand this union requires that one "must live for God with all the fullness of his self so that he may respond to the grace and divine movements [...] And because he practices this he has a clear understanding and a rich and abundant feeling for he is joined to God, with faculties uplifted, with a pure intention, a heartfelt desire, an unsatisfied craving, with the living ardor of his spirit and his nature."<sup>41</sup> By his insistence of thinking both feeling and understanding, Ruusbroec assumes this perspective by rejecting a distinctly, hierarchical view of union with God, in terms of gradation and ascent, and with it, a view that stresses the activity and achievement of uniting oneself with God and instead, argues for more of a

---

<sup>39</sup> See Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 6-8.

<sup>40</sup> See generally Ruusbroec, *Boecskén*, ll. 34-41 (with slight modification): "See, I have thus said that the contemplative lover of God is united with God by means, and again without means, and thirdly without difference or distinction [*sonder differentie ochte onderscheet*]. And this I find in nature and in grace and in glory. I have further stated that no creature can become or be so holy that it loses its own condition of creature and becomes God, not even the soul of our Lord Jesus Christ: it will remain eternally creature and other than God." "Siet, ic hebbe aldus gheseghet: dat de scouwende minnere gods met gode verenecht es overmidts middel, ende oec sonder middel, ende ten derden male sonder differentie ochte onderscheet. Ende dit vende ic in naturen ende in der gratien ende oec in der glorien. Ic hebbe voert gheseghet, dat en ghene creature en mach soe heilech werden noch sijn, dat si hare gheschapenheit verliese ende god werde, noch oec die ziele ons heren Jhesu Cristi: die sal eweleke creature bliven ende een ander van gode."

<sup>41</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Boecskén*, ll. 172-173; 181-185: "[H]i moet gode leven met gheheelheit ende alheit sijn selves, also dat hi der gratien ende den beweghene gods ghenoech si [...] Ende omdat hi hem hier inne oefent, soe es hi clare van verstane, ende rike ende overloedech van ghevoelne. Want hi es te gode geboeghet met op gherechten crachten, met rechter meininghen, met herteleker begherten, met onghepaeyder ghelost, met levende eernste sijns geests ende sijnre naturen."

dynamic view of union with God, one which always fluctuates and changes, building off and deepening one's union, but never going beyond and leaving behind the liturgical practices and virtuous activities that ground one's relations, commitments and concrete responsibilities in the world.<sup>42</sup>

### 1. The place of impress: Ruusbroec's Theological Anthropology

Another possible opening for retrieving Ruusbroec are the critical demands placed upon a renewed, adequate theological anthropology, seen within specific reference to love's primacy, and with it, a view of the human person capable of union with the other without risk of idolatry nor disregarding the alterity of the other. This opening is in part motivated by various attempts at moving love beyond the divided impasse between self-possessive and self-denying love and with it, the 'problem of love' and metaphysics' difficulty in thinking the possibility of 'disinterested love' that falls beyond egoism and self-benefit. As earlier noted, Marion rightfully critiques the basis of this metaphysical dilemma and its presumption of an "erotic neutrality", of which we can never in fact affirm, "without lying to ourselves [...] [For] Man is revealed to himself by the originary and radical modality of the erotic. Man loves—which is what distinguishes him from all other finite beings, if not the angels. Man is defined neither by the *logos*, nor by the being within him, but by the fact that he loves (or hates), whether he wants to or not."<sup>43</sup>

Thus, affirming love's primacy occasions a critical review of this very "self" that is suspected of having thus contributed to a divided view of love. More specifically, retrieving the dynamic view of Ruusbroec's understanding of the primacy of *minne* subsequently demands for an adequate theological anthropology—*locus capax Dei*<sup>44</sup> [place capable of God]—that can both receive such love as indeed primary and immediate in its unitive character—as well as reflective of the necessary mediated character of such a love, glimpsed both in terms of its cultural and theological milieu, as well as its necessary activity as sacramental, virtuous and always "going out" and affirming the otherness of God, to whom one responds in and through its works.

Ruusbroec can critically aid in such a renewed anthropology, as he situates the otherness and uncreatedness of *minne* as emerging within the very distinction and particularity of individuals.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> See e.g. Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 1-7: "A man who wants to live in the most perfect state offered by Holy Church must be a zealous and good man, and an inward and spiritual man, and an uplifted man contemplating God, and an outflowing, common man. If a man combines these four things his state is perfect and it will grow and increase always in grace and all virtues and knowledge of truth before God and all men of reason." "Die mensche die leven wilt inden volcommensten staet der heilgher kerken, hi moet sijn een eernstachtich goet mensche ende een innich gheestelijc mensche ende een verhaven god scouwende mensche ende een uutfloende gheme[e]yne mensche. Also dese viere dinghe vergaderen in eenen mensche, dan es sinen staet volcomen, ende altoes wassende ende toenemende in meer gracen ende in allen doechden ende in kinnessen der waerheit vore gode ende vore alle redelikcke menschen."

<sup>43</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 7

<sup>44</sup> Aelred, R., *Speculum Caritatis*, b. 1, c. 1, PL. 195, 505, as quoted from Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love*, 202

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. Ruusbroec, *Boecskén*, ll. 188-189: "The impulse of *minne* is always directed to the advantage and the capacity of each and everyone." "Ende *minne* beweget altoes na orbore ende na hebbelecheit ieghewelcs menschen."

Affirming the ecstatic otherness of minne, "drunk and replete in God"<sup>46</sup> Ruusbroec does so, not by sequestering and distancing that which is beyond and "above" myself and my understanding, but places such affirmation of its otherness firmly within the "groundless abyss" of our erotic, created selves, "hungry and thirsty", wherein "he must feel that the foundation of his being is unfathomable, and as such he must possess it."<sup>47</sup> From this groundless foundation, Ruusbroec articulates such "possession" as a continuing relational dynamics within contemplative life, such that "we live completely in God, where we possess our bliss, and completely in ourselves where we practice our love towards God."<sup>48</sup> Rooted within such mutual indwelling and Ruusbroec's Trinitarian and relational anthropology, this insistence of dwelling in both myself and my continual desires, as well as in the Other and its bliss again attests to the general, dynamic approach of Ruusbroec's thought, a dynamism that is never "idle" and seen very much at the core of his thinking of minne. For we are not being presented with an older, Neoplatonic framework of a "spiritual ladder" of progress, stasis, and leaving behind more imperfect modes and practices in view of one's union with God as a first principle<sup>49</sup>. No, quite the opposite is at work here in Ruusbroec's thinking, which attests to the dynamism of his thought as well as the distinctly Catholic manner of his approach in upholding the continual necessity of mediation. This dynamism and the relational core in which Ruusbroec speaks of in terms of minne I consider as critical points in potentially envisaging its sustained, future engagement with both theological issues over *caritas* and *veritas*, as well as in related discourses contributing to re-thinking love's primacy.

## 2. Minne as a *modeless practice*

From such openings, attention to Ruusbroec's understanding of minne, I maintain, can best be approached with due attention to both its theological and hermeneutical basis that is profoundly Christological and Trinitarian, as well as its phenomenological aptitude, wherein the intelligibility of minne is made fully accessible not merely by *what* he says of it, but *how* he speaks of such love.

This contemplation always hangs upon *Desen scouwene es altoes anehanghende eene [anehanghende]* a modeless practice, which is an *wiseloese oefeninghe, dat es een vernieutende leven.*

---

<sup>46</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 575: "[...] in gode droncken ende sat"

<sup>47</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 70-72: "Dat eerste poent es dat hi dat fundament sijns wesens grondeloes ghevoele, ende alsoe moet hijt besitten."

<sup>48</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 579-581: "Ende aldus [aldus] leven wij gheheel in gode, daer wij onse salicheit besitten; ende wij leven gheheel in ons selven, daer wij ons in minnen te gode oefenen."

<sup>49</sup> See contra von Balthasar's reading of Ruusbroec within a distinct, neo-Platonic perspective, read in terms of the "[...] central point of indifference. Indifference, for the Christian, means Catholic love, which lets itself be robbed of form in the movement from the world to God and transformed in the movement from God to the world." Such an analysis, which thinks of love more so as a 'principle' than as an unending, desirous yearning for the Other, is itself a familiar assessment and/or critique that often fails to reckon precisely with the uniqueness of Ruusbroec's thinking of minne, and its continual work and rest as fundamentally averting from neo-Platonic categories that privilege stability, presence and permanence over against multiplicity, change and becoming. Hence, the continual charge directed towards the neo-Platonic heritage, namely its inability to think happiness outside of presence, stability and the rest of contemplation is itself, we would contend, problematized when taking seriously Ruusbroec's distinct understanding of minne. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, vol. V, The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, (trans.) Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil C.R.V., John Saward and Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), p. 76.



annihilating life. For where we go out of ourselves into darkness and modelessness that is unfathomable, there shines the simple ray of God's brightness always, in which we are grounded and which draws us up out of ourselves into the superessential being and the immersion of minne [*ontsonckenheiden van minnen*]. And this immersion always hangs upon and followed by a modeless practice of minne, for minne cannot be idle, but it wants to know and taste to the full the unfathomable richness that lives in its ground. And this is a hunger unstilled: to always strive in failure is to swim against the current. Man cannot leave it, nor grasp it; he cannot do without it, nor can he obtain it; he cannot speak about it, nor can he be silent about it for it is above reason and understanding and above all that has been created, and therefore he can neither reach it nor overtake it. But we should look into ourselves: there we feel [*ghevoelen*] that the Spirit of God drives us and kindles us in the restlessness of loving. And we should look above ourselves: there we feel that the Spirit of God draws us out of ourselves and consumes us to nothing in his own self, that is in the superessential minne [*die overweselijcke minne*] we are united with and possess more deeply and more widely than any other thing.

Want daer wij ons selfs ute gaen in donckerheiden ende in onwisen sonder gront, dzer scijnt die eevuldighe raeye der claeurheit gods altoes, daer wij inne ghefundeert sijn ende die ons ute ons selven trecht in overwesene ende in ontsonckenheiden van minnen. Ende deser ontsonckenheit van minnen es altoes ane hanghende ende na volghende eene wiseloese oefeninghe van minnen, want minne en mach niet ledich sijn, maer si wilt doerweten ende doersmaken die grondelose rijcheit die in haren gronde leeft. Ende dit es een hongher onghepait; altoes crighen in dat ontbliven, dat es swemmen jeghen strom. Man caent ghelaten noch ghevaten; men caent ghederven noch noch gecrighen; men caent <oe> ghespreken noch verswighen, want het es boven redene ende verstaen, ende onthoghende alle creatueren. Ende hier omme en machment ghereyken noch verhalen. Maer wij selven in ons binnenste sien; daer ghevoelen wij dat ons die gheest gods drijft ende stoecht in dat ongheduer van minnen. Ende wij selen boven ons selven sien; daer ghevoelen wij dat ons die gheest gods ute ons selven trecht ende verteert te nieute in sijns selfsheit, dat es in die overweselijcke minne daer wij een mede sijn ende die wij besitten diepere ende bredere dan alle dinc.<sup>50</sup>

In this provocative passage concerning the ecstatic quality of contemplation and our "immersion" into minne, while such contemplative union is described as an "annihilating life" that is "modeless" and "unfathomable", the *practice of love endures*, which "cannot be idle". Here, Ruusbroec affirms the abysmal ground of minne "in which we are grounded" as "above reason and understanding" not by way of its removal from, negation or frustration of our desires, yet by their very affirmation as a "hunger unstilled", the core of which Ruusbroec identifies as the "Spirit of God drives us and kindles us in the restlessness of loving." This portrait of restlessness is characteristic of Ruusbroec as well as his thinking of minne and yet, such an image significantly diverges from an otherwise familiar, Augustinian heritage, for it is not simply a matter of juxtaposing the finitude of our restlessness as symptomatic of our fallenness, in the future promise of its eternal relief in glory, but of maintaining both rest and restlessness as the life of minne itself. As a dynamic thinker, Ruusbroec maintains both modes of rest and restlessness as co-constitutive of the life of minne itself, as lived both here in grace as well as in glory. Such ecstatic desire and its ever-increasing hunger for union with God, are not to be ultimately overcome and abandoned. Rather, such desire forms the relational basis for our "going out" and encountering God through the activity of loving, affirming our created selves and eternally remaining a "creature and other than God."<sup>51</sup> In turn, such mediated works and active love can be understood as erupting, not only from our lack and the poverty of our desirous selves but

---

<sup>50</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia*, 10: *Vanden blinkenden steen*, (trans.) A. Lefevere, (eds.) G. de Baere, Th. Mertens, and H. Noë, (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), ll. 546-564.

<sup>51</sup> Ruusbroec, *Boecksen*, ll. 40-41: "[...] die sal eweleke creature bliven ende een ander van gode."

furthermore as craving for the "richness"<sup>52</sup> that stems from our "immersion" into the unity of God's self. Hence, these two core movements of *minne*, as both an eternal going out in mediated works and an eternal return in the unitive immediacy of God, show the dynamic character of *minne*, as well as its thorough Trinitarian basis.

In short, not only do I contend that Ruusbroec's theological understanding of *minne* can necessarily contribute to widening the horizons of contemporary discussions concerning the primacy of love, but furthermore, I put forth that with an adequate and balanced attention as well to its phenomenological dimensions of Ruusbroec's speaking from within the *modeless practice* of contemplating *minne*, such attention has a tremendous capacity to teach us what it means to desire as an ongoing response to love's primacy. Such a focus has the potential to further articulate the unique rationale of our "restlessness" that arises from the immediacy of love's excess, a continued restlessness which affirms, *a contrario*, the otherness and incomprehensibility of the Other for whom I yearn, by way of the impossibility of sustaining such a continued desire solely as a form of self-production and self-reference. Further, the rationale of such restlessness accounts for its affirmation of paradox and reinsertion within mediation and the praxis of love as equally constitutive of love's primacy. In this manner, by rehabilitating our desires worthy of such a love, the necessity of love's activity that "demands our action, namely that we love the love eternal." [*dat wij minnen die eewighe minne.*]<sup>53</sup> is seen as arising out of the *immediacy* of its ecstatic excess and the capacity of our *continuous* and unrelenting desires to receive such an immediate and inexhaustible love, thereby countering the charge against claims that the conditional externality of such a "demand" and its historical "debt" threatens love's gratuitousness and risks its dissolution into any economy of exchange.<sup>54</sup> For out of the continual, enduring praxis of loving, Ruusbroec repeatedly argues that "the more we love, the more we lust to love; and the more we pay what Love demands of us, the more we keep owing."<sup>55</sup>

### 3. The Critical Capacity of Minne

---

<sup>52</sup> See e.g. Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 574-576: "And therefore we are poor in ourselves and rich in God, hungry and thirsty in ourselves, drunk and replete in God, working in ourselves and empty of all things in God." "Ende hier omme sijn wij in ons selven arm ende in gode rike; in ons selven hongherich ende dorstich, in gode droncken ende sat; in ons selven werkende ende in gode alles ledich."

<sup>53</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 726-727: "Want dat uutfloeyende gherinen gods stoecht ongheduer ende eyscht ons werc, dat es dat wij minnen die eewighe minne."

<sup>54</sup> See e.g. Ruusbroec, *Brulocht*, b, ll. 1152-1159 and his thinking of the "demands" of love as arising out of our individual desire to love: "For He shows Himself as so rich and generous, and so fathomlessly good, and in this manifestation, He demands *minne* and honor in proportion to His dignity. For God wants to be loved [*ghemint*] by us according to His nobility; and in this, all spirits fail; and thus, their *minne* becomes modeless and mannerless. For they know neither how to achieve it nor how to induce it, for the *minne* of all spirits is measured. And therefore, *minne* always begins again from the beginning, so that God may be loved [*ghemint*] according to His demand and according to their desire." "Want hi toent hem soe rijcke ende soe milde, ende soe grondeloes goet, ende in desen toene eyschet hi minne ende eere na sijn weerde. Want god wilt van ons ghemint sijn na sine edelheit, ende hier inne faelgeren alle gheeste, ende aldus wert de minne zonder wise ende zonder maniere. Want si en wetent hoe [hoghe] gheleisten noch toe bringhen, want alre gheeste minne es ghemeten. Ende hier omme wert de minne altoes van[den] eersten begonnen, op dat god ghemint worde na sine eysch ende na hare begherte."

<sup>55</sup> Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia*, 9: *Van seven trappen*, (trans.) Helen Rolfson, (ed.) Rob Faesen, (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 2003) ll. 1108-1110: "[...]want soe wi meer minnen, soe ons meer lust te minnen; ende so meer betalen dat ons minne eyscht, soe wi meer sculdegh bliven."

The primacy and intelligibility of *minne*, its reception and response in terms of its furthering desire also includes with it a critical capacity in Ruusbroec's works, especially as towards claims of having permanently moved beyond both mediation and the active practice of love, the sacramental life of the Church in its mediation of God's grace as well as claims of "resting" beyond the yearning and active dimensions of love itself. In this respect, in no way is Ruusbroec negating or moving beyond mediation in view of union with God as solely passive and immediate. In fact, Ruusbroec continuously insists on the necessity of mediation, which is at once both conversant with his conception of *minne* in and through its desirous practice of "going out" towards the Other as well as a theological basis that informs such a conception, seen as an extension of the sacramental life of the Church in her mediation of God's grace. Ruusbroec's insistence on this is rightly seen in its historical context amid the "Free Spirit" heretical movement that sought to do away with the 'imperfect' and 'unnecessary' sacramental life of "Holy Church the Lesser".<sup>56</sup> In at times passionately countering these widespread claims in his vernacular writings, Ruusbroec not only depicts such positions and their claims of having "united themselves to the blind, dark emptiness of their own essence [*wesen*]" as "lack[ing] real faith, hope and love", but furthermore, because of their lack of works and "going out" towards the Other, he argues that their autotheistic claims and inactivity results in a self-enclosure wherein the "essential repose which they possess they feel neither God nor otherness."<sup>57</sup> I find this remark continuously fascinating, as it both positively recognizes what such persons "possess"—namely, the reduced and simplified autonomy of their own enclosed subjectivity as a "place of rest"—as well as what they lack as a consequence of such a self-understanding: the loss of the otherness of God, not as a transcendental beyond, but as an otherness that affirms its alterity by giving itself, as Other, to the rich and porous life of one's feeling [*ghevoelen*], desire and its natural inclination towards a "being other than we are."<sup>58</sup>

Secondly, another consequence of this position of supposedly going 'beyond mediation' is that, by endeavoring to simplistically and exclusively be 'turned within themselves', this disposition—and with it, their own subjectivity—robs or blunts their feeling [*ghevoelen*] and in particular, its orientation towards the Other. This entails, amongst other things, that with the presumption of overcoming mediation (the sacraments, the virtues and practices of the Church), these claims exhibit a blunting, a *desensitizing of sense for otherness* and ultimately, for God. This loss of feeling in its orientation towards the other, the loss of responsiveness as well as the muting of desire to go out and abide in the Other has, as Ruusbroec identifies, been dulled. And it is this critique of the dulling of sense and the evacuation of desire for the Other, which demonstrates both the critical capacity of *minne* itself and its prompting in speaking out of such love as a passionate defense.

---

<sup>56</sup> See generally Edmund College, O.S.A, J.C. Marler "'Poverty of the Will': Ruusbroec, Eckhart and *The Mirror of Simple Souls*" in *Jan van Ruusbroec. The sources, content, and sequels of his mysticism*, eds. Paul Mommaers, N. De. Paepe, (Leuven: University Press, 1984), 14-47.

<sup>57</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Boecskén*, ll. 134-135; 99-100; 139-140.

<sup>58</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 618-21: "For we feel an eternal inclination towards an otherness than what we ourselves are. And this is the most interior and hidden distinction that we can feel between us and God, for beyond here, there is no other distinction." (My Translation). "Want wij ghevoelen een eewich ute neyghen in eene anderheit dan dat wij selve sijn. Ende dit es dat innichste ende dat verborghenste onderscheet dat wij tuschen ons ende gode ghevoelen moghen, want hier boven en es nemmer onderscheet."

Another critical feature in Ruusbroec's thinking minne is the manner in which it mobilizes the distinct inseparability between our feeling love from that of our understanding or "possessing" love, the conjunction of which opens onto intelligibility—and by extension, conceptuality—of minne, from within its own primacy and without having to seek recourse to an anterior concept to justify, condition, nor limit its felt immediacy. However, from such claims of "possession", the issue arises whether or not the otherness of God may well indeed be given and radically affirmed by such felt immediacy, while doing so without risking 'fusion' or 'collapse'.

In short, by taking serious Ruusbroec's manner of discernment—the distinct inseparability of *ghevoelen* and understanding—does the erotic disposition of minne itself have anything substantial to say concerning the otherness of God?

And therefore, when we feel he wants to be ours with all this wealth and wants to dwell with us always, all the powers of our soul open and most of all our avid desire, for all the rivers of God's grace are flowing. The more we taste it, the more we desire to taste; and the more we desire to taste, the more deeply we crave to be touched by him; and the more deeply we crave to be touched by God, the more the flowing of his sweetness flows through us and over us; and the more his sweetness flows through us and over us, the better we feel and know that the sweetness of God is incomprehensible and unfathomable.

Ende hier omme, als wij dan dat ghevoelen dat hi met al deser rijcheit onse wilt sijn ende altoes met ons wonen wilt, hier jeghen ontpluken alle die crachte onser zielen ende sonderlinghe onse ghierighe ghelost. Want alle die rivieren der ghenaden gods die vloeyen. Ende soe wijs meer ghesmaken, soe ons meer lust te smakene; ende soe ons meer ghelust te smakene, soe wi dieper crighen in sijn gherinen; ende soe wij diepere crighen in dat gerinen gods, soe ons die vloede sijnre soeticheit meer doervloeyen ende overvloeyen; ende soe wij meer doervloeyt werden ende overvloeyt [sijn], soe wij bat ghevoelen ende bekinnen dat die soeticheit gods ombegripelijc es ende sonder gront.<sup>59</sup>

Here, in this intricate passage that describes the responsiveness to and "avid desire" for the otherness of God, affirmed here specifically in terms of the "sweetness" of the Divine nature as "incomprehensible and unfathomable", Ruusbroec invites consideration of the otherness of God not as a limit of conditionality nor as a border for the possible and impossible, a "beyond" that pivots upon the subject and its spatio-temporal categories of immediacy and finitude. Rather, by way of Ruusbroec's erotic logic and the "avid desire" of minne, the otherness of God gives itself as a "sweetness" and in turn consoles both one's feeling of and understanding of God's otherness—"the *better* we feel and know that the sweetness of God is incomprehensible and unfathomable."<sup>60</sup>

### C. CONCLUDING REMARKS

What sort of consolation is this and is such a statement immediately apparent to us today? Does the persistence of my avid, unsatisfied desires yield consolation, both in terms of my desiring itself, as well as that of which I am desiring? Am I satisfied, well-pleased and consoled by the otherness of God as Other? Does not invoking transcendence occur today more so as a radical injunction and interruption of an image that totalizes, one which is "closed", forgetful of difference in

---

<sup>59</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 737-747.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*, my emphasis.

its risk of idolatry? In turn, does not mention of the erotic and its possessiveness immediately occasion suspicions of a breakdown of "greater dissimilarity" and in turn, usher in a series of reductionistic analyses? We can safely say that not only has the *erotic* become so debased, so banal and immanently sexualized to the degree of being virtually synonymous with the pornographic and objectifying, which in turn, because of such culturally-based images and its current, situated character, it irrevocably challenges our ability of conceiving the erotic and its possessiveness as positioned to affirm the felt immediacy of God's transcendence as anything other than perverse and limiting. Therefore, precisely due to this apparent discontinuity and cultural unease, we should not look away from what Ruusbroec and others in the late-medieval (vernacular) mystical theological tradition say precisely on these points, not so as to reduce God's transcendence as exclusively reliant upon *eros*, nor to misappropriate relevant themes and risk in our retrieval a critical imbalance that hinges on distortion.<sup>61</sup> Rather, to reaffirm His otherness, by way of rehabilitating our own desires for His "sweetness" that is "incomprehensible and unfathomable".

From this injunction, the task remains whether we can in fact conceive, speak of and indeed feel God's alterity—both critically and devoutly, remaining thus within tradition—while thoroughly inhabiting such an erotic posture? In this context, Ruusbroec's consolation in the "sweetness" of God's transcendence is an exemplary portrait of the unique, critical capacity of love itself. As a contemplative lover of God, the avidity of Ruusbroec's desire is fueled by the recognition that the excessive otherness of God is such that no desire can fully satisfy and comprehend God's transcendence.<sup>62</sup> And yet, as a lover, such failure results not in rendering 'still' one's hunger, for "he cannot speak about it, nor can he be silent about it". Thus, the "sweetness" that Ruusbroec speaks of is not merely an immersion into "performative" speech and rhetorical excess, yet as a unique and intelligible form of critical speech that speaks from the origins of its very excess, occurring not as an extrinsic placid injunction, yet as that which is "sweet to one's throat"<sup>63</sup>, as *minne* is both "above reason, yet not without reason", which knows the difference and settles for nothing less.

---

<sup>61</sup> See also Barbara Gist Cook, "Essential Love: The Erotic Theology of Jan Van Ruusbroec" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2000)

<sup>62</sup> See e.g. Ruusbroec, *Brulocht*, b, ll. 1554-1557: "God's touch in us, insofar as we feel [*ghevoelen*] it, and our loving craving [*minlijcke crighen*], are both created and creaturely, and therefore they can grow and increase and long as we live." "Gods gherinen in ons, also verre als wijs ghevoelen, ende onse minlijcke crighen es beide ghescapen ende creatuerlijc, ende hier omme maghet wassen ende toenemen alsoe lange als wij leven."

<sup>63</sup> Sg 2, 3 as quoted from Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 750-752: "I sat in the shadow of him whom I desired, and his fruit is sweet to my throat." "Ic hebbe gheseten onder des gheens scaduee dien ic begherde, ende sine vrocht es soete mijnder kelen."

## CHAPTER II

### POSSESSING THE UNFATHOMABLE. APPROACHING JAN VAN RUUSBROEC'S MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AS RESPONSIVE TO THE PRIMACY AND PRAXIS OF MINNE.

'Let him who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit of God says to the churches,' (Rev. 2, 11) [...] Whoever is more inwardly inclined to God's speaking in him, than outwardly inclined to the words of man, and rather listens to the word of God to live by than to know, and for whom the word of God is an inleading food in which God tastes better to him than all things, and who stays onefold with the inner word of faith and trust, that is the one who has ears to hear, for he is able to understand all the truth God is willing to reveal to him.

'Die ooren heeft te horne, hi hoere wat die gheest gods sprecht de kerken' (Rev. 2, 11) [...] So wat mensche die meer inweert neycht tot den insprekene gods dan uutwert tot den woorden der menschen, ende dien meer lust te hoorne dat woort gods omme leven dan om weten, ende dien dat woort gods es eene inleidende spise daer hem god in smaect boven alle dinc, ende die met ghelove ende met trouwen eenvuldich biden inwindighen woorde blijft, dat es de ghene die ooren heeft to hoorne. Want hi es hebbelijc alle waerheit te verstane die hem god vertoenen wilt [...] <sup>1</sup>

#### § 1 INTRODUCTION

In the following analysis, I contend that the contemporary reception and possible critical retrieval of figures from the late-medieval contemplative tradition—and in particular, the works of Jan van Ruusbroec—within larger theological, philosophy of religion discourses as well as the academic study of spirituality hinge more upon the plausibility of a mystical anthropology of mutual indwelling more so than the question of 'mystical experience' as a determining criterion of legitimacy and hermeneutical engagement. By way of these shifting approaches, the particularities and nuances of this uniquely relational *imago Dei* anthropology—which in Ruusbroec's writings are both thoroughly Christological and Trinitarian, while deeply rooted in his dynamic thinking of the primacy of love as *minne*—are themselves themes called upon for closer examination. Furthermore, it will be argued that they function as key entry points in addressing contemporary demands for a distinct, reassessed theological anthropology, while simultaneously functioning as a potential corrective to certain readings and the appropriation of such mystical texts.

Amid contemporary interest and the reception of mystical texts, questions surrounding the 'possibility' of mystical experience and the academic reception of such authors increasingly appear to no longer be at stake. More specifically, in the tradition of William James' influential *Varieties of Religious Experience*<sup>2</sup>, which earlier had well established the parameters of a renewed engagement of mystical authors within diverse academic fields such as phenomenology, hermeneutics,

---

<sup>1</sup> Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia*, 10, *Vanden Vier Becoringhen* (trans.) A. Lefevere, (eds.) G. de Baere, Th. Mertens, and H. Noë, (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), ll. 1-2; 5-12.

<sup>2</sup> See generally, William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience; A Study in Human Nature. Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1929.)

psychology of religion as well as branches of theology has lost much of its earlier appeal and resourcefulness.. This is evidenced in large part by the wide range of diverse engagements such contemplative authors have both provoked and served as resources within contemporary analyses. For example, recent philosophical and theological attempts to overcome onto-theo-logical thinking structures in order to think transcendence in the works of Jacques Derrida<sup>3</sup> and Jean-Luc Marion<sup>4</sup> have often relied upon the tradition of apophatic or negative theology, and in so doing, their arguments have sought support from the mystical tradition (Dionysius Areopagita, Meister Eckhart, Angelus Silesius *et al.*). Conversely, the growing influence of approaches such as those of Amy Hollywood<sup>5</sup> within Feminist and Gender Studies have attempted within their own fields of discourse to rehabilitate the performative aspects of more "affective" and embodied forms of mysticism in figures such as Bl. Angela of Foligno, St. Teresa of Avila or Beatrice of Nazareth. For Hollywood, such canonical figures are depicted as sufficiently resistant to more modern reductive psychological views of the 'hysteria' of female mysticism, as well as to categories that have previously sidelined such figures from serious reflection and consideration. Thus, "by taking seriously the words of those women", without however addressing the question of mystical experiences as such, Hollywood's approach advocates that such female mystical texts often challenge the "very antithesis between affective and speculative forms of mysticism, as well as the resistance to the gendering of that distinction, [of which] has its roots in texts written by and addressed to medieval women."<sup>6</sup>

In these contemporaneously diverse, yet highly influential scholarly approaches towards medieval mystical texts, seldom are they concerned with defending and/or repudiating the possibility of "mystical experience" itself. This is especially the case when such experience is understood in terms of an "immediate" and "passive" experience. Rather, attention has noticeably shifted and centers now more upon the participatory and *performative* character of such mystical texts, both within their historical contextual reception as well as, in specific reference to Marion's reading *et al.*, of mystical theology's move beyond predicative speech of naming and affirming the truth and/or falsity of that which it speaks. Thus, the performativity of mystical texts are depicted as moving beyond both kataphasis and apophasis, and in turn resolutely moving toward a third mode of speaking. A "third way" characterized not in terms of a hyper-affirmative, yet as a mode of speaking that passes through such negation that subsequently cannot be separated from the praxis of such saying or "unsaying" itself. Hence, like the language of lovers, as Marion himself explicitly states, the pragmatic, nonconstative language of mystical theology is seen as speaking towards the other not so much to name or describe (and thereby to predicate), yet to call out towards and in a "prelocutionary" mode of address prompts and elicits enjoyment of the alterity of the other.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> See Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials", in (eds.) Peggy Kamuf, Elizabeth Rottenberg, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, Volume II (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008) 143-196. See also, Thomas A. Carlson, "The Naming of God and the Possibility of Impossibility: Marion and Derrida Between the Theology and Phenomenology of the Gift", in *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 190-238.

<sup>4</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology'", in (eds.) J.D. Caputo, M.J. Scanlon, *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999)

<sup>5</sup> See Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and The Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

<sup>6</sup> Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, "What Cannot Be Said: Apophasis and the Discourse of Love", in K. Hart (ed.) *Jean Luc Marion: The Essential Writings* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) 325-338; "Words for Saying Nothing", *Erotic Phenomenon*, 143-150.

However, while I am somewhat cautious in my overall assessment of this approach, I nonetheless see that it is a mistake to assume that such a 'pragmatic' or 'performative' approach to mystical texts thus relieves the text of its content, its claims and kataphatic affirmation, no matter the radicality of such an apophatic approach, as is the case for Marion. Instead, by such a performative approach to mystical texts, the weight of affirmation noticeably shifts away from that which is said and/or negated—as understood as an impartial or exclusive body of thought, a science, or a discourse that is sufficiently disembodied from concreteness and particularity—and is more dynamically relocated to the speaker himself, to the performer or the *performed* of the performance and the very praxis that such texts initiate and have as their demand. Hence, while we are by no means being presented with an anthropological turn as it were, construing the subject as having eclipsed the text, its claims and particularity, such a pragmatic approach can neither disentangle the content of that which it speaks from the very (un)saying or performing that the text itself demands.

In this current scholarly climate, Mark McIntosh's *Mystical Theology*<sup>8</sup> helps clarify how contemporary readers have become once again alerted to issues of praxis within mystical texts. Speaking from a distinct theological perspective that aims at re-examining and reasserting the mutual interdependencies between theology and spirituality as academic pursuits, McIntosh notes the limited, yet positive contributions that both feminist and liberation theological perspectives have made in helping overcome such divides that have bifurcated theory and practice within theology itself. Thus, McIntosh notes the privileging of praxis within various feminist and liberation theological perspectives and its positions of solidarity and "preferential option for the poor" and marginalized as broadly encompassing a "participatory model of truth rather than a purely propositional adequacy model."<sup>9</sup> McIntosh states: "Feminist and liberationist religious perspectives have recovered a fundamental assumption of earlier eras; namely, that living, practical involvement in reality is not a recipe for subjective beclouding of our understanding but is rather the prerequisite for true insight in conceptualization."<sup>10</sup> McIntosh then adds: "[T]ransforming practices of life give rise to a theoretical account of reality as it is understood by those practitioners. This account, in turn, is intended not as a higher ascent towards reality by means of theorization, but as a preliminary guide for those seeking to follow the transforming way of life themselves."<sup>11</sup>

Following such a re-examination, Louis Dupré has also highlighted mystical theology's *praxis* approach as a central characteristic of Christian love mysticism. When briefly describing Ruusbroec's distinct views of dynamic participation in the Son, within the Persons of the Trinity, as "form[ing] the basis of the mystic's view of the finite within the infinite",<sup>12</sup> Dupré then anticipates certain critical responses to such thinking that would inquire: "Is all this more than speculative theology? If through its ontological dependence upon an eternal source, the soul does indeed reside in God throughout all eternity, then a union realized from the beginning, in even the least devout person, appears to

---

<sup>8</sup> Mark McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 27.

<sup>10</sup> McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 24-5.

<sup>12</sup> Louis Dupré, "Unio Mystica: The State and the Experience" from *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, (eds.) Moshe Idel & Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1996), 3-23, 16.



require no mystical ascent at all—only intellectual speculation."<sup>13</sup> In response to this critique that such texts are nothing more than purely speculative and demanding not of discernment, yet only of consent, Dupré then asserts:

The [mystical] union...takes place not in the order of pure speculation but in that of *praxis*. It is in the practical order, then, that the answer to this objection lies. A persistent use of the language of love should alert us that far more than intellectual speculation is at stake. Even those speculative mystics who speak of a substantial union grounded in man's ontological nature (such as Ibn' Arabi or Eckhart and some of the kabbalists) have recourse to the language of love and *praxis*.<sup>14</sup>

Thereby recognizing such a praxis character to these texts, Dupré rightly observes the "integrative" aspect of Ruusbroec and other exemplary figures within mystical theology, which aims at uniting contemplation with action without either collapsing nor confusing the distinctiveness of them both. And yet what precisely keeps these aspects from collapsing into each other is itself an open question and one that I shall return to later on. Dupré is nevertheless right to stress the distinct understanding that various figures of the mystical theology tradition hold towards love. Ruusbroec's understanding of *minne* is exemplary in this regard in view of its perpetual activity. A dynamic that significantly problematizes an otherwise overly hasty reading of his works as indelibly constrained by a Neoplatonic privileging of stability, presence and permanence over against multiplicity, change and becoming. Or conversely, the charge of Neo-Platonism's inability to think happiness outside of presence, stability and the rest of contemplation. To these critiques, understanding the continuing, erotic praxis of *minne* sets itself apart from such an immediate, direct, Neo-platonic reading. Rather, the praxis of such a loving union goes strongly against a more "reified" anthropology. And yet, is such a characterization appropriate for what Ruusbroec has in mind in his understanding of mutual indwelling? This issue of forming an alternative mystical anthropological understanding of the created human person indwelling in God, other than such a static "reified representation", will appear again in the following analysis. But for now, as our brief examination has pointed out, current hermeneutical approaches to mystical texts mark a shifting attention towards more praxis oriented and performative modes of language pragmatics. All of which attests to the overall fact that the question of "mystical experience", while remaining an important inquiry, nonetheless is no longer primarily at stake and in its place, such approaches to mystical texts thereby explicitly raises the question of the mystical anthropology operative within such texts.

#### A. REPOSITIONING MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INQUIRY AWAY FROM 'WHAT' OR 'WHO', TO THAT OF 'WHERE'

To address now more clearly the specific issues at hand, Bernard McGinn provocatively characterizes the distinct progression of late-medieval mystical anthropology seen in terms of union with God: "The union between God and the human person [...] challenges traditional views of

---

<sup>13</sup> Dupré, "Unio Mystica", 17.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

anthropology as well as of theology."<sup>15</sup> And in referring to the lineage of mystics that uphold the possibility of union without distinction, McGinn characterizes the challenge that arises:

Such strong expressions of mystical union (or rather mystical identity, or, better, indistinction) between God and the human seem to lead to the following dilemma—either they are guilty of a form of autotheism by which the human subject divinizes itself in an unwarranted way, or else they imply the complete obliteration, absorption, or annihilation of the human personality. In either case, is there room for anything that can still be called an anthropology, a doctrine of the human as human or a psychology that studies *human* consciousness?<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, McGinn will fully defend the works of figures such as Ruusbroec and Meister Eckhart against charges of autotheism, both of whom speak of union with God without distinction. This is especially so for Ruusbroec, who quite clearly defended the theological legitimacy of union with God 'without difference and distinction' [*sonder differentie ochte onderscheet*].<sup>17</sup> The question that McGinn then asks is precisely "*who*" is such a human person? McGinn, who speaks of mysticism specifically in terms of "consciousness", maintains that this is what the "mystics are really about [...] to transform both consciousness and the self, the subject of consciousness". Herein, it is the *who* of the human as person, as identity, which appears as the decisive criterion to evaluate such a transformed consciousness. Following from this position, McGinn situates certain mystics, especially those who hold out the possibility for a union without distinction, as admitting of the "perdurance" of consciousness, one that "challenges [...] all forms of both ancient and modern anthropology and psychology that reject in an a priori fashion the possibility of the transition of the limited, discursive ego to levels of transcendent awareness [...] the mystics hold out the possibility of the transconscious and the suprapersonal."<sup>18</sup> McGinn's emphasis is clearly upon the more radical position and discontinuity of the mystical tradition from its historically situated character, characterizing such figures in a more prophetic light of praxis and of heeding the call not to abandon the world, in all of its "quotidian multiplicity", but rather to "transform it", as attested by their committed activity within their respective communities and "their subsequent influence on their traditions".<sup>19</sup>

However, turning now specifically to Ruusbroec, while the question of who/what of the "creature" remains in the union *sonder onderscheet ochte differentie*—Ruusbroec continuously maintains throughout all of his works that the creature shall eternally remain, "*een ander van gode*".<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, the guiding presuppositions of this question of who/what remains in the union without distinction appears to reveal less about Ruusbroec's own mystical anthropological understanding than it shows a more modern perspective in two distinct instances. First, the question of 'who' or 'what' of the human as human remains in such "obliteration, absorption or annihilation"

---

<sup>15</sup> Bernard McGinn, "Comments" in *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 185-194, 190.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, 190-1.

<sup>17</sup> See Rob Faesen, "The Radical Humanism of Christian Mystics: William of Saint-Thierry, Hadewijch and Ruusbroec versus Abaelard and Ockham", *Seeing The Seeker: Explorations in the Discipline of Spirituality. A Festschrift for Kees Waaijman on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 263-276.

<sup>18</sup> McGinn, "Comments", in *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 192.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, 193.

<sup>20</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Boecskén*, ll. 40-41: "[...] it [the human person in union with God] will remain eternally creature and other than God." "[...] die sal eweleke creature bliven ende een ander van gode."

in the union without distinction appears at least to presuppose a stable identity of the finite, human person understood as *autonomous*. Closely following is the presupposed understanding of deification as discontinuous. Or, in other terms, as a 'trans-formation'. Here, we can see a strong contrast with the reoccurring, Ruusbroecian neologism of "over-formation" [*overforminghe*] in its stress of greater continuity. Here, union with God is gauged neither in terms of diminishing or increasing its transformed "consciousness", yet the very relational autonomy of the human as such, from which such an anthropology assumes as its ground. Secondly, seen from a distinct, Ruusbroecian perspective, the difficulty with such an anthropological perspective is namely, the presumption that the human as human, in its autonomy and removed from relation, is regarded as *intelligible in of itself*. Such a perspective—as a foundational assumption within modern psychology—is the contention that the identity of the human "psychology that studies *human* consciousness", at its foundational core, can render me myself intelligible, enough so as to ground it as a scientific pursuit. This is a position that not only contradicts Ruusbroec's anthropological conception, but furthermore is itself a limited position that nullifies the very richness and depth of our very interiority as indelibly marked by the alterity of the Other.

In this regard, a possible opening for retrieving Ruusbroec are the critical demands placed upon a renewed, adequate theological anthropology, seen within specific reference to the primary modality of love—to competing modalities of truth and ontology—in both affirming the alterity of the Other, oneself and in turn, a view of the human person capable of receiving such a love as beloved and its return, as lover. This opening is in part motivated by various attempts at moving love beyond the divided impasse between self-possessive and self-denying love and with it, the "problem of love"<sup>21</sup> and metaphysics' difficulty in thinking the possibility of "disinterested love" that falls beyond egoism and self-benefit. Jean-Luc Marion critiques the basis of this metaphysical dilemma and its presumption of an "erotic neutrality", of which we can never in fact affirm, "without lying to ourselves [...][For] Man is revealed to himself by the originary and radical modality of the erotic. Man loves—which is what distinguishes him from all other finite beings, if not the angels. Man is defined neither by the *logos*, nor by the being within him, but by the fact that he loves (or hates), whether he wants to or not."<sup>22</sup>

Thus, affirming love's "radical modality" as primary occasions a critical review of this very "self" that is suspected of having thus contributed to the divided view of love. More specifically, retrieving the dynamic view of Ruusbroec's understanding of the primacy of *minne* subsequently demands for an adequate theological anthropology. A *place*, which is to say, a relational inquiry of the self. Therefore, primarily not as a reified substance or a 'what'; nor as a principle of identity and its self-enclosure as a 'who'. Rather, as a 'where': that is, in terms of both its created origins and its progressive, desirous, salvific fulfillment for the place of meeting and union in and with the Other and the human, who shall "eternally remain a creature and other from God"<sup>23</sup>. Such a relational view of the self and its interiority inquires specifically over a *locus capax Dei*<sup>24</sup> and its horizon of deification

---

<sup>21</sup> See Alan Vincelette's Introduction to Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution*, (trans.) Alan Vincelette, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001.), 12-13.

<sup>22</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> See *supra*, note 20.

<sup>24</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Speculum Caritatis*, b. 1, c. 1, PL. 195, 505, as quoted from Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love*, 202.

that can both receive such love as indeed primary and immediate in its unitive character—as well as reflective of the necessary mediated character of such a love, glimpsed both in terms of its cultural and theological milieu, as well as its necessary activity as sacramental, virtuous and always "going out" and affirming the otherness of God as Other in and through its works.

Ruusbroec can critically aid in such a renewed anthropology, as he situates the otherness and uncreatedness of *minne* as emerging within the very distinction and particularity of individuals.<sup>25</sup> Affirming the ecstatic otherness of *minne*, "drunk and replete in God"<sup>26</sup> Ruusbroec does so, not by sequestering and distancing that which is beyond and "above" myself and my understanding. Rather, he places such an affirmation of its otherness firmly within the "groundless abyss" of our erotic, created selves—"hungry and thirsty", wherein "he must feel that the foundation of his being is unfathomable, and as such he must possess it."<sup>27</sup> From this groundless foundation, Ruusbroec articulates such "possession" as a continuing relational dynamics within contemplative life, such that "we live completely in God, where we possess our bliss, and completely in ourselves where we practice our love towards God."<sup>28</sup> Ruusbroec's mystical anthropology as inherently relational insists upon our dwelling in both myself and my continual desires, as well as in the Other and its bliss again attests to the general, dynamic approach of Ruusbroec's thought. A dynamism that is never "idle" and seen very much at the core of his thinking of *minne*.

In this regard, Rik Van Nieuwenhove's strong, Trinitarian approach to Ruusbroec's corpus also observes this unique relationality as fundamental to Ruusbroec's mystical anthropology: "The most remarkable element in Ruusbroec's anthropology is his teaching that the essence of our created being is not a substance but a relation to God. Ruusbroec clearly states that the essential unity—the unity between our created being and our eternal life in God's Image—is the same as the active unity (the ground of the faculties)."<sup>29</sup> Van Nieuwenhove perceptively acknowledges that as relationality is itself at the core of our creaturely *wesen*, our "essential unity refers to the union between our created being and our life in God, not just to the latter".<sup>30</sup> This is itself an interpretation based off the reading that *wesen* is understood, not as a reified substance, yet as a relation in and of itself. From this, Van Nieuwenhove reminds us that only such a principle of relationality—as 'one-in-the-other'—is able to make sense of why Ruusbroec will assert that "we possess the essential unity both in ourselves, and in fact, above ourselves as a principle and support of our *wesens* and our life"<sup>31</sup> Again,

---

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Ruusbroec, *Boecksen*, ll. 188-189: "The impulse of *minne* is always directed to the advantage and the capacity of each and everyone." "Ende *minne* beweget altoes na orbore ende na hebbelecheit ieghewelcs menschen."

<sup>26</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 574-5: "Ende hier omme sijn wi in ons selven arm ende in gode rike, in ons selven hongherich ende dorstich, in gode droncken ende sat".

<sup>27</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 70-72: "Dat eerste poent es dat hi dat fundament sijns wesens grondeloes ghevoele, ende alsoe moet hijt besitten."

<sup>28</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 579-581: "Ende aldus [aldus] leven wij gheheel in gode, daer wij onse salicheit besitten; ende wij leven gheheel in ons selven, daer ons in minnen te gode oefenen."

<sup>29</sup> Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec, Mystical Theologian of the Trinity*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 119.

<sup>30</sup> Van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec*, 107.

<sup>31</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Brulocht*, b, ll. 41-49: "Now note attentively: we find a triple unity in all people naturally, and in good people also supernaturally. The first and the highest unity is in God; *for all creatures hang in this unity with (their) being [wesene], life and subsistence [onthoude]*; and if they should be cut off in this way from God, they would fall into nothingness and become annihilated [*si vielen in niet ende worden te niete*]. This unity is in

the essential unity is not found in both the human and God, from which their relationality would appear as secondary to such a shared *wesen* as *identical*. No, quite the opposite is being argued, as the relation itself *is* the *wesen* and prior to any self-enclosed substance. Therefore, to construct and develop these lines of thought within view of a contemporary retrieval of Ruusbroec's thinking, not only do we need to have an adequate understanding of *minne* that better articulates such a relation (which admittedly is not so much at the forefront of Van Nieuwenhove's source-based engagement with Ruusbroec). Subsequently, so too do we need to better understand such a relationality with both the Other, others and its Trinitarian basis if we are to understand Ruusbroec's understanding of *minne*. Therefore, we now turn to a textual analysis of Ruusbroec's *Vanden vier becoringhen* (The Four Temptations) to see more clearly how he understands and observes such a mutual indwelling within human interiority and marked by alterity that is progressively made accessible by way of the praxis and primacy of *minne*.

## § 2. VANDEN VIER BECORINGHEN ANALYSIS

As a short, concise work, with abrupt and provocative transitions and linkages, Ruusbroec's *Vanden Vier Becoringhen* is unfortunately a far lesser-known and certainly less commented upon work than others in his corpus. In this work, historical scholarship has situated this text "at the beginning of 1343, as a farewell to Brussels" before Ruusbroec leaves for Groenendaal and the Sonian Forest, where he would spend the remainder of his life in the emerging community that would eventually adopt for itself the rule of St. Augustine.<sup>32</sup> In this text, Ruusbroec begins by distinguishing four basic temptations that both mark his current historical context<sup>33</sup>, and more generally, "all men who seem to lead the life spiritual but are neither true nor virtuous in their life have been misled and misguided in one of these four errors."<sup>34</sup> From this careful examination of such temptations Ruusbroec first calls for a humility in which one may "ground an elevated life".<sup>35</sup> Ruusbroec then leads us in the "common practice of virtue [...] [to] overcome all temptations"<sup>36</sup>, so that we may then "observe [*waernemen*] our interiority even more closely so that we may clearly

---

us essentially by nature, whether we are good or evil, and it renders us neither holy nor blessed without our effort. We possess this unity in ourselves, and in fact, above ourselves, as principle and support of our being [*wesens*] and of our life." " Nu merket met ernste: drierhande eenicheit vintmen in allen menschen natuerlijcke, ende daer toe overnatuerlijcke in goeden menschen. Die eerste ende die hoogste eenicheit es in gode, want alle creatueren hanghen in deser eenicheit met wesene, met levene ende met onthoude; ende scieden si in deser wijs van gode, so vielen in niet ende worden te niete. Dese eenicheit es weselijc in ons van natueren, weder wij sijn goete ochte quaet, ende si en maect ons sonder ons toedoen noch heylich noch salich. Dese eenicheit besitten wi in ons selven ende doch boven ons [selven], als een beghin ende een onthout ons wesens ende ons levens."

<sup>32</sup> See Paul Mommaers' Introduction to *Vanden Vier Becoringhen*, 223.

<sup>33</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 45-47 (slightly modified): "For now in this time reigns four temptations in the world and through them every man may prove whether he is in error or truly follows after our Lord Jesus Christ." "Want nu in desen tide regneren .iiij. becoringhen in de werelt, daer hem eenyege<lijc> mensce mede proeven mach oft hi in dole es oft een ghewarich na volgher ons heren Jhesu Cristi."

<sup>34</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 48-50: "Ende alle die menschen die gheestelijc scinen, ende niet warachtich noch doochsam en sijn van levene, die sijn verleydt ende verdoelt in eene wise van desen vieren."

<sup>35</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 219: "Ende op dese nederheit mach hi fonderen een hoghe leven [...]."

<sup>36</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 247-9: "Ende dit es eene ghemeine wise van duechden dier alle menschen noot es die gode <behaghen> selen ende alle becoringhe verwinnen."

and more closely find the richness of God that lives in our spirit."<sup>37</sup> And in doing just this, Ruusbroec introduces us to a provocative reflection of the "richness" of God's dynamic dwelling within us, of which distinctly marks us by its *five voices* that give rise to our ever-active, ever-yearning spiritual interiority and the work of desire in lovingly responding to His "incomprehensible truth," in whom we find "its Image in us, and our image mirrored in it, and therefore one with it".<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, *Vier becoringhen* is interesting not only for the historical context in which it is situated, yet also for its distinct anticipatory character in which the text gives us some concrete sense of how Ruusbroec himself had envisioned and justified his forthcoming move to Groenendaal as a one of *jubilee*—in its Biblical dimensions as the 'remittance of all debts'. Which, in its allegorical interpretation, Ruusbroec will often reinterpret that which was proscribed as law in the Old Testament in distinctly spiritual terms. Thereby, the 'jubilee' of Groenendaal likewise signifies Ruusbroec's arrival at a state of spiritual maturity as "all bonds of disorderly affection for any creature have been broken and annihilated,"<sup>39</sup> and is now ready to come into his "inheritance":

In the fiftieth year the earth was allowed to rest under Jewish law. And all debts were remitted and all prisoners set free and all freeborn slaves became free men. And everybody again came into his inheritance that had been his own or that of his ancestors. And this is what I want to say: we begin to live when we have received the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ in us, and then we must serve, work and strive in the temple of God, i.e. in ourselves, with penitence and holy practice; until with God's help we drive out and overcome our sinful earthly life and all that goes against God and virtue in conduct, in words and works and in all our practice and chase it away so that minne becomes so powerful in us that it raises us to the highest height, which is minne itself. And then its goodness will flow through all our interiority and fill it with such great pleasure and joy, that our earth shall lay idle and rest. For our outward earthly man shall then be empty of all work and all practice. This then is our fiftieth year of remission and of joy, which is called 'jubilee' in Hebrew. Here we count fifty years from the time Christ, God's Son, was born in us and that is our holy pilgrimage to Rome.

Inden vijftichsten jare zoe lietmen die eerde ratsen inder joedscher wet, ende alle scout wart verlaten, ende alle ghevanghene verlost, ende alle knechte worden vry die van vryer ghebornen waren. Ende yegelijc quam weder tot sinen erve dat sine ochte sire vorderen gheweest hadde. Ende aldus willic nu segghen: wannerer dat wij die gheborde ons heeren Jhesu Cristi ontfaen hebben in ons, dan beghinnen wij te leven; ende dan moeten wij dienen, arbieten ende pinen inden tempel gods—dat es in ons selven—met penitencien ende met heiligher oefeninghen, alzo manghe dat wij met der hulpen gods verdriven ende verwinnen onse zondich eertsche leven, ende al dat gode ende der duecht contrarie es in seden, in woorden ende in werken ende in al onser oefeninghen, alsoe dat minne zoe mechtich werde in ons, dat si ons verheffen moghe in die overste hoocheit die si selve es. Ende dan sal hare goetheit <al> ondr inwindicheit dore vloeyen ende vervollen met alsoe groter wellust ende vrouden, dat al onse eerde ledich ligghen sal ende rusten. Want onse uutwendigje eertsche mensche, die sal te dier tijt ledich staen alre arbeite ende van alre oefeninghen. Ende dit es onse vijftische jare der verlatenissen ende der vrouden, datmen jubileus noemt in hebreuscher talen. Hier tellen wij .l. jaer van dier tijt dat Cristus, die gods sone, in ons ghebornen es. Ende dit es onse heilighe roemsce vaert.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, II. 250-2 (translation slightly modified): "<M>aer ic beghere dat wij noch diepere onser inwindicheit waernemen, opdat wij clerre ende naerre bevinden die rijcheit gods die in onsen gheeste leeft."

<sup>38</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, II. 254-5.

<sup>40</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, II. 308-28.

*In nucleo*, we here see Ruusbroec allegorically intertwining both the ambitious promise that Groenendaal represented—with an interesting and perhaps not so oblique, critical irony, terming the Sonian Forest as "our holy pilgrimage to Rome"—as well as a unique, clear instance of his thinking on the distortive impact of original sin, of which calls for continual "penitence and holy practice", yet in no way robs us of our original "inheritance". The aims of such external mediated works, seen in relief of the four temptations, consists precisely in ultimately becoming "empty of all work and all practice", and resting in the "goodness" of God "that flow[s] through all our interiority". However, such a statement does not in any way entail an end to all such works themselves, as such practices are not merely confined to an outward working of virtue and charity. Groenendaal was by no means a "retirement home" or a luxurious, extended holiday. Rather, Ruusbroec anticipates the spiritual "freedom" of this inheritance as prompting the necessary and ongoing interior work of loving, thanking, praising and serving God "in every way, without any hinder[ance]...".<sup>41</sup> Thus, even in rest, the work of minne within the active yearnings of the interior life is constantly new and renewing, as Ruusbroec himself states: "For the angels and the saints and Christ himself will work, love and desire, give thanks and praise, want and know for all eternity. And without these works they would not be able to be blessed. And God himself would not be able to be either God or blessed if He did not work."<sup>42</sup> Hence, unlike many of Ruusbroec's other, more elevated, contemplative texts, *Vier Becoringhen* may be characterized as more of a praxis oriented text in both its insightful, contextual observations of the four temptations as well as the repeated stress on the ongoing, internal work of minne that morally prepares one to receive our original inheritance.

Again, this praxis dimension of the virtuous life and the ongoing work of minne that opens up to the richness of God's own active dwelling within us differs considerably in its stress from the more uniquely gratuitous aspect of contemplation that is "modeless" and hence, beyond any and all works and praxis. The latter of which we see in other Ruusbroec works, i.e. *The Spiritual Espousals* or *The Sparkling Stone*, *The Twelve Beguines* (Book 1). By understanding such an exclusive focus on the interior, active life, it thus becomes understandable his admission that "many people would be able to soon accomplish this life sublime, if only they practiced as vigorously and as wisely as I have showed them to. But this way of dying to the flesh and the blood and their own will is very hard and unloved and also unknown by many people."<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, as is the case in nearly all of Ruusbroec's works, we are keyed off to such particularities in his opening passages that are often Scripturally-based and set the course for the remainder of the text. *Vier Becoringhen* offers no exception to this, as Ruusbroec begins by citing the following passage from the Book of Revelation: "Let him who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit of God says to the churches."<sup>44</sup> Immediately, Ruusbroec's scriptural citation both commands our attention and more specifically, our very

---

<sup>41</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 333-4: "[...] in alre wijs sonder eenich hinder [...]."

<sup>42</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 192-5: "Want inghele ende heilighen ende Cristus selve, die selen eewelijc werken, minnen ende b<e>gheren, dancken ende loven, willen ende weten. Ende sonder dese werke en mochten si niet zalich sijn. Ende god selve, en wrachte hi niet, hi en ware noch god noch zalich sijn."

<sup>43</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 290-2: "Ende dese hoocheit van levenne mochten vele menschen haestelijc vervolghen, waert dat si hem alsoe vromelijc ende alzoewijslijc oefenden als ic hier nu gheseect heb. Maer het es herde swaer ende onghemint ende oec met menighen ombekint, hoemen vleeschs ende bloet ende eyghens willen sterven sal."

<sup>44</sup> See Rv. 2,11 as quoted in Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 1-2.

attentiveness by way of listening. For readers of Ruusbroec, such an appearance of the auditory dimension will draw a likely contrast with the opening scriptural injunction from *Brulocht* and its visual/contemplative stress, namely: "See, the Bridegroom comes; go out to meet Him."<sup>45</sup> And indeed, by way of a certain phenomenological approach, that which gives itself to visibility presents itself, manifests itself and is thereby constituted in our understanding in a fundamentally distinct manner than that which gives itself to be heard.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the necessary mediation and distance that sight implies—a mediation which Ruusbroec's foundational optics affirms<sup>47</sup>—there is a seeming absence in his auditory conception, as both hearing and that which is heard are given within a greater degree of immediacy than that of sight. Such an immediacy is fitting, as the general focus of this work is primarily upon the inner, yearning life, the second of his familiar triptych—the active life, the inner, yearning life and the contemplative life. These primary reflections we will soon revisit as they become radicalized in the irruption of the "five voices" and their corresponding unities as a furthering of the "likeness" of our created image as mirrored in the Image of the Son and "God's incomprehensible truth".<sup>48</sup> Hence, by introducing a greater sensitivity to such an auditory dimension, such reflections are not exclusive to a phenomenological presentation alone, yet are also a potential hermeneutical key to reading *Vier Becoringhen* itself.

Lastly, the structure of Ruusbroec's *Vier Becoringhen* highlights the centrality of his mystical anthropology, both in his presentation of such temptations, the possibility of overcoming them as grounded in virtuous humility. Which in turn leads to a continuously growing recognition and loving inclination towards the endless depths of our very interiority in which God dwells in us and we in Him. Such a mystical anthropological approach is in turn supported by the foundational injunction that "to save ourselves from falling into grievous sins we must learn to know ourselves and observe ourselves and turn inward into ourselves, onefold, and keep our dwelling with God's speaking in us."<sup>49</sup> Therefore, we will first briefly examine the four temptations that Ruusbroec highlights from which we will then explore the five voices that characterizes this interior encounter of such mutual indwelling.

#### a. The 1<sup>st</sup> Temptation

---

<sup>45</sup> See. Mt. 25, 6 as quoted from Ruusbroec, *Brulocht*, bk 1, ll. 1.

<sup>46</sup> The phenomenologist, Robert Sokolowski provides a helpful introduction to the primary distinction between the phenomenal appearing of words and images and its subsequent implications. "[Phenomenology] investigates the important philosophical distinction between words and images: words express things and images depict things, and the manner in which each of them works is different. It is interesting to explore this difference, to show how images contain the presence of what they depict without having the thing itself there, while words refer to things without seeming to contain them in the way that images do. There is a more radical absence and transparency in words than in images. Both words and images, of course, must be contrasted with the direct perception of the thing itself, with the presence the thing has when it is directly experienced. These philosophical explorations show how the various kinds of presence and absence interweave with one another to constitute the recognizable identity of an object that can be given through all of them: one and the same object can be directly experienced, can be imaged in a picture or a drama, and can be referred to and articulated in speech." From "Phenomenology and the Eucharist" in Robert Sokolowski, *Christian Faith and Human Understanding*, (Washington: Catholic University Press, 2006), 77.

<sup>47</sup> For Ruusbroec's foundational optics, c.f. *Brulocht*, a, ll. 58-70.

<sup>48</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 253.

<sup>49</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 28-31: "Wantzelen wij staende bliven ende behuedt werden dat wij niet en vallen in groven zonden, soe moeten wij ons zelve leeren kinnen ende ons selfs waer nemen, ende eenvoldich inkeren in ons zelve, ende inwoenende bliven biden insprekene gods."



The 1<sup>st</sup> Temptation<sup>50</sup> Ruusbroec describes as an unrestrained nature—lust in the body and in the senses—the lack of control from which its consequences are primarily seen as blunting one's sensitivity towards and taste for the greater depth and otherness of God and the spiritual life in general: "And even though they pray much, and sing, and recite the Lord's prayer, they have no taste for it. For they are turned outward and live according to the flesh, not the spirit."<sup>51</sup>

b. *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Temptation*

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temptation<sup>52</sup>, Ruusbroec describes as a hypocritical spirit, one who "performs" at times excessive works, though does so more so "out of self concern" and thereby suffers from spiritual pride, "for his love is nature not grace".<sup>53</sup> Such a hypocritical spirit—Ruusbroec critically observes, again with a touch of sharp humor—is prone to loving more the *experience* of God over God Himself, wherein he states, "And some want God to send them a special message written with golden letters, or else they want God to reveal his will in visions or dreams. Look, people who suffer from spiritual pride often think they are worthy of such special treatment. For even if these things happened to certain saints, men of this sort [those who suffer from such spiritual pride] should not take them as an example."<sup>54</sup>

c. *The 3rd Temptation*

The 3rd Temptation<sup>55</sup>, Ruusbroec describes as the ever-present threats within academic and intellectual pursuits in maintaining the spiritual pride that one may alone "reach and understand the first truth with their natural light".<sup>56</sup> In this subtle, precise critique, presumably in reference to the rise of Scholasticism and the extended, prolonged influence of the cathedral schools over the various religious orders and their institutions, Ruusbroec characterizes such emerging patterns of rationality and intellectual discourse as founded upon the seeking of self-pleasure in the performance of such thinking, wherein their "inner senses flow over and glory in the light of nature. And they possess this natural light with such pleasure and self-sufficiency [...] without God's supernatural help."<sup>57</sup> In turn, by locating such self pleasure at the performative basis and origins of their thinking, the conceptual

---

<sup>50</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 60-93.

<sup>51</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 83-5: "Ende al eest day sy vele lesen ende singhen ende pater noster spreken, en smaect hen niet. Want si zijn uutwendich, ende leven na den vleesche ende niet na den gheeste."

<sup>52</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 94- 140.

<sup>53</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 107: "Ende hier omme es sine minne natuere, ende niet genade."

<sup>54</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 114-119: "Ende selc beghert dat hem god sinde enen sonderlinghen brief met gulden letteren, oft in visioene oft in drome vertoenen sinen wille. Siet, dit comt dicwile can gheestelijcker hoverden, dat hem <dunct> dat hi werdich es sulcker sonderlin<c>heit. Want al esst ghesiet selcken heilighen, dat en selen dese menschen te exempelen niet trecken."

<sup>55</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 141-180.

<sup>56</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 153-4: "Want selcke wanen met natuerlijcken lichte ghereiken ende begripen die eerste waerheit."

<sup>57</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 146-8; 150 (with slight modification): "Want hare natuere ende har inwendighe zinne vloeyen ende glorien inden lichte der natuere. Ende dit natuerlijc licht besitten si met amsoe groter wellost ende eyghenheit....sonder die overnatuerlijcke hulpe gods."

grasping of ideas become thus reflective of oneself and their own mastery of such ideas, which in turn Ruusbroec accounts for why "they feel more inner taste and joy in the things they themselves find and understand inwardly with their reason than in the things that are beyond reason, the very things that have to be taken on faith and give us eternal bliss."<sup>58</sup> On several differing levels I find Ruusbroec's critical observations made here as both unique, as well as productive in situating Ruusbroec's vernacular, mystical theology amid the increasing widening of the gap between theology, as understood and practiced within various monasteries from those of the cathedral schools. In these critical judgments, Ruusbroec clearly shows a certain affinity for a more Franciscan-Bonaventurian line, more so than Dominican perspective, as seen in his criticism of those that find greater delight in the 'light of nature'. Simultaneously, Ruusbroec shows his indebtedness to his mystical anthropology as forming his basic assessment of this distinct, emerging rationality: namely that such persons "act and speak from selfness" in their intellectual grasp and productivity and therefore are neither interrupted by, nor "have...awareness of God" within their rational engagement.<sup>59</sup>

#### d. *The 4th Temptation*

And lastly, the 4th Temptation—common to readers familiar with Ruusbroec—we find a brief analysis of the fundamental traits of the heresy of the Brethren of the Free Spirits. And in a somewhat rare moment, Ruusbroec himself states in the first person as having often spoken of before.<sup>60</sup> However, Ruusbroec's presentation on this familiar topic to those in Brussels, who themselves must have also been thoroughly aware of this movement, thus has somewhat of a different stress, focusing not so much upon heretical claims of autotheism and "becoming God",<sup>61</sup> yet instead showing once more, what he argues as a fundamentally misguided anthropology that underlies their 'quietism'. That is, a moral disposition that aims at privileging self identity as fundamentally constitutive and prior to the relationality of otherness as such. "They find their essential being [*weselic sijn*] in themselves and possess it in the naked idleness of their spirit and nature."<sup>62</sup> Immediately there after, Ruusbroec then shows how such an anthropological conception of the human person as an autonomous self, constituted by and subsisting within its own self-

---

<sup>58</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 164-7: "Ende si hebben meer inwindichs smaecs ende vrouden in dien dinghen die si van binnen met redenen bevinden ende verstaen, dan in die dinghen die boven redene sijn, die men gheloven moet ende die ons eewighe zalicheit gheven."

<sup>59</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 168-170: "Altoes willen si nieuwe dinghe uutspreken met loste der natueren. Want si werken ende spreken ute eyghenheit haers selfs."

<sup>60</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 210-11: "And that is why they are most seriously deceived, as I have often said." "Ende hier omme sijn si alder swaerlijc<t> bedroghen, alse ic dicwile ghesecht hebbe."

<sup>61</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Boecksken*, ll. 543-556: "And therefore, as I have told you before, watch out for the conceited men, who, through their vacant imagelessness, with their bare simple vision, have found within themselves in a natural manner the indwelling of God and pretend to be one with God without the grace of God and without the practice of virtues and in disobedience to God and to the Holy Church. And with all this perverted life, which I have already described, they wish to be a son of God by nature. And in the Prince of angels was cast out of heaven because he exalted himself and wished to be like God, and the first man was driven out of Paradise because he wished to be like God, how shall the worst of sinners, that is the unfaithful Christian, come from earth to heaven, he who himself desires to be God with no similarity (to Him) in grace and virtue? For no one ascends to heaven through his own power save the Son of Man, Jesus Christ."

<sup>62</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 185-6: "[...]haer weselijc sijn in hem bevinden ende besitten in bloter ledicheit haers gheests ende harer natueren."

enclosure is fundamentally at odds with both the external practice of virtues and its underlying humility and charity that predispose us towards others, as well as understanding of the primacy of minne and its activity within created persons as inclining us towards our created origins. "For they lapse into an idle blind emptiness of their essence [*wesens*] and are no longer attentive to any good works, both outer and inner. For they spurn all inward work, that is wanting, knowing, loving [*minnen*], desiring and all works that join them with God."<sup>63</sup> However, similar to other presentations on this theme, Ruusbroec repeatedly stresses not only that such positions are fundamentally at odds with Christian faith, but furthermore, he ventures to point out the fundamental contradictions within such claims themselves. For while such Free Spirits claim to do away with all such inner works in a pure, idle emptiness, he shows the utter impossibility for the human to do so on one's own initiative without the grace of God.<sup>64</sup> "For they lapse into sleep and sink away from themselves in essential [*weselijcker*] natural rest. And when they find that rest in themselves without love or practice of virtue, they want to possess it and hold on to it. And this leads to great unbelief and a perverse, false freedom of spirit."<sup>65</sup> This particular error and the unsustainability of resting in oneself, apart from relation, shows itself in tension of wanting to "possess" such rest, while also claiming to be free from such wanting in the first place. Therefore, Ruusbroec concludes in very strong terms that for the Free Spirits, "...their essence [*wesen*] is their idol", the anthropological basis that in turn undergirds the "impossibility" in which "they have and are one essence [*wesen*] with God."<sup>66</sup>

From this brief consideration, not only does Ruusbroec wish to uncover for those remaining in Brussels to understand the core reasons for such errors by way of a dogmatic and apologetic approach. But more importantly, and especially within proximity to internal divides and contests of spiritual authority<sup>67</sup>, Ruusbroec repeatedly insists that we must observe [*waernemen*] ourselves and our very interiority as marked by a relational alterity and as continuously dwelling with God in order to adequately confront such challenges. Here, by way of the injunction to "observe ourselves", Ruusbroec's relational anthropology of mutual indwelling with God is introduced not simply as a refuge and counter to that which "often goes against sound doctrine...lead[ing] to much quarreling and argument [as] it makes for hearts divided and it is a great obstacle to true charity".<sup>68</sup> Rather, as a hermeneutic of interiority in of itself, which we will now analyze in the section of the "five voices".

---

<sup>63</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, 186-190 (translation slightly modified): "Want si vallen in <ene> idele blende ledicheit haers wesens ende werden on[ghe]achtsam alder goeder werken van buten ende van binnen. Want si versmaden alle inwindich werc, dat es willen, weten, minnen, beghere, ende al werkelijkck toevoeghen te gode."

<sup>64</sup> See also *Boecksken*, ll. 145-152.

<sup>65</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 196-201: "Want si ontslapen ende ontsincken hem selven in weselijcker natuerlijcker rasten. Ende alsoe si deser raste in hem bevinden sonder minnen ende sonder oefeninghe van doechden, soe willen sise besitten ende daer bi blivan. Ende hier ute comt groet onghelove ende verkeerde valsche vriheit van gheeste."

<sup>66</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 207-210: "[...] soe en doerliden si hem selven niet, maer si rasten in haers selfs wesen. Ende alsoe es hare wesen haer afgod. Want hem denct datsi hebben ende sijn een wesen met gode, ende dat es onmoghelijc."

<sup>67</sup> See Ruusbroec's tensed position between obedience towards one's superiors and the "harsh words" and "angry mien" at the sight of hypocrites, which gives significant room for speculation as to precisely the basis for his leaving Brussels in the first place. See *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 237-244.

<sup>68</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 22-23; 24-25: "Ende hier omme es hi dicwile contrarie ganser leeren [...] Ende hier ave comt vele stridens ende crighens, ende maect ghedeylde herten, ende es een groot hinder rechter karitaten."

A. RUUSBROEC'S FIVE VOICES—A CHORUS ABYSS.

Having thus addressed the four main temptations as well as the continuing virtuous actions that we commit ourselves to, grounded in humility wherein one "must put himself in the lowest place beneath all men...who cannot do anything or want anything without God's help and grace," that from such "humility he can ground an elevated life," Ruusbroec now enjoins us to observe our interiority even more deeply so as to find the "richness of God that lives in our spirit".<sup>69</sup> In this context, it is important to recall that throughout this entire work, his focus has been primarily upon the inner, yearning life. The second life of his familiar triptych: the active life, the inner, yearning life and the contemplative life. Ruusbroec then prefaces the section of the five voices with two foundational statements whereby we observe our interiority more closely: namely, we are to "deliver" (*leveren*) our "bare, unimaged understanding"<sup>70</sup> to God's incomprehensible truth, thus situating our work within our interiority as distinctly *above reason* and conceptual grasp. From this, Ruusbroec then immediately states that from such a giving of our "bare, unimaged intelligence" to the truth of God as "incomprehensible" we shall then "find in us the Image and our image mirrored in it, and therefore one with it."<sup>71</sup> Interestingly enough, in this account Ruusbroec, more vigorously maintains a certain "incomprehensible" dimension of God's image and our created image "mirrored in it, and therefore one with it" within our very interiority by refusing to further qualify such a *ghebeelt*.<sup>72</sup> Rather, Ruusbroec articulates the further specificity of this Image that dwells within us within the very praxis of our observing the depths of our interiority marked by God's relational alterity, such that the dynamism of this Image and our created image mirrored in it is brought into

---

<sup>69</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 216; 217-219; 251-252: "Want hi moet hem setten inde nederste stat onder alle menschen [...] en heef [dan alle ghebrec] noch en vermach noch en wilt [niet] sonder de hulpe ende die ghenade gods. Ende op dese nederheit mach hi fonderen een hoghe leven,"; "[...] opdat wij clerre ende naerre bevinden die rijcheit gods die in onsen gheeste leeft."

<sup>70</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 252-253: "[...] ende leveren onse blote onghebeelde verstandicheit der ombegrijpelijsker waerheit gods."

<sup>71</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 253-255: "Ende die zelen wij vinden in ons ghebeelt ende ons wederbeelt in hare, ande alsoe een met hare."

<sup>72</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Spiegel*, ll. 1786-1800: " In the beginning of the world, when God wanted to make the first human being in our nature, then He spoke in Trinity of Persons: 'Let us make human beings to our image and to our likeness.' God is a spirit: His speaking is His knowing; His working is His willing. And He can do all that He wants. And all His working is gracious and well-ordered. and He has created each person's soul as a living mirror, whereupon He has impressed the image of His nature. And so He lives imaged in us, and we in Him; for our created life is one, without intermediary, with the image and with the life that we have eternally in God. And the life that we have in God is, without intermediary, one with God. For it lives with the Son unborn in the Father, and it is born with the Son out of the Father, and flows out of them both with the Holy Spirit. And thus we live eternally in God and God in us. For our createdness lives in our eternal image that we have in the Son of God." "In beghinne der werelt, doe god den iersten mensche maken woude in onser natueren, doe sprac hi in drivuldegheit der persone: 'Maken wi den mensche toe onsen beelde ende toe onsen ghelike.' God es .i. gheest: sijn spreken dat es sijn bekinnen, sijn werken dat es sijn willen. Ende hi vermach al dat hi wilt. Ende al sijn werken es gratioos ende wel gheordent. Ende hi heeft ieghewelcs menschen ziele gheschapen alsoe eenen levende spiegel daer hi dat beelde sijnre natueren in ghedruct heeft. Ende alsoe leeft hi ghebeeldt in ons ende wi in heme. Want onse gheschapene leven es een sonder middel met dien beelde ende met dien levende dat wi eewelec in gode hebben. Ende dat leven dat wi in gode hebben, dat es sonder middel een in gode. Want het leeft met den sone ongeboren in den vader, ende het wert gheboren met den sone ute den vader, ende vloeyt ute hen beiden met den heileghen gheeste. Ende aldus leven wi eewelec in gode ende god in ons. Want onse gheschapenheit leeft in onsen eeweghen beelde dat wi hebben in den sone gods."

further relief by way of our *responding* to the Image in terms of five voices and the *rijcheit gods* that lives in our spirit.

a. *The "clearest voice"*

The 1<sup>st</sup> voice Ruusbroec begins with is the "clearest voice" [*clærste stemme*]:

And this is the clearest voice in which we call the Son of God in to us and possess with him his heritage and ours. With this high honor we shall come back to ourselves and we shall bow down before God's omnipotent goodness in negation of our self, and we shall be prepared to suffer whatever God is pleased to have befall us in time and eternity.

Ende dit es de clærste stemme daer wij den sone gods mede [moghen] in roepen, ende met hem sijn erve ende dat onse besitten. Met deser hogher eeren selen wij weder comen tot ons zelve, ende zelen ons nederbughen voer die almogende goetheit gods in een vernieuten ons selds, in ghedoochsamheiden al dat te liden dat god gestaden wilt op ons in <tijt> ende in[der] eewicheit.<sup>73</sup>

At the outset of us observing our interiority and God's indwelling, by beginning with the "clearest voice", Ruusbroec makes several important initial moves at once. By beginning with Christ, seen in His divinity as the Word incarnate in whom we have been created, Ruusbroec situates the threshold in which we are poised to delve into the further depths of our interiority by way of such an incarnate wisdom. Namely, such wisdom thus teaches us, by way of Christ's kenosis itself, that in order to "possess with him his heritage and ours," we must do so by way of self-denial and preparation "to suffer whatever God is pleased to have befall us". Thus, our turning inwards joins itself to a "negation of our self" as preparatory to the rich alterity of God that further dwells within our negated self.

b. *The "gracious voice"*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> voice then, the "gracious voice" [*gracioeste stemme*] is as follows:

And this is the most gracious voice. And in this way Christ went down in his human nature and earned us life eternal. And with this we invoke God's justice and go down with Christ into the unfathomable depth which will remain unfathomable for ever. From this deep lowliness we shall, with a free mind, raise ourselves to the highest height. And with all angels and all saints we shall love, thank and praise God in Christ Jesus, now and for all time.

Ende dit es die gracioeste stemme. Ende aldus ghinc Cristus neder nader menscheit ende verdiende ons ewwich leven. Ende hier mede aenroepen wij die gherechticheit gods, ende gaen met Cristo neder in die grondelose diepheit die nemmermeer vergront en werc. Ute deser dieper nederherit selen wij ons oprechten met vrien moede in die overste hoocheit. Ende met allen inghelen ende met allen heilighen, in Cristo Jhesu, selen wij gode minnen, dancken ende loven, nu ende inder eewicheit.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 255-260.

<sup>74</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 260- 267.

Ruusbroec continues within a Christological mode and its incarnational process, this time as concerning the full humanity of Christ and its indelible mark upon our very human nature, as creatures that mirror the gift of redemption and possibility of "eternal life". Thus, on an anthropological level, it is our shared human nature that mirrors the full extent of the incarnation of Christ in His life, passion, death and resurrection and whose grace opens up for us within our very interiority both "an unfathomable depth" and "height" . By way of "invoking God's justice", we too follow Him within the reality of our very own human nature in which Christ himself has traversed and in its unceasing depths, has elevated and redeemed. Thus, in its foundational core, we see here the basis of Ruusbroec's distinct, Christian humanism, whereby the depths and heights of our human nature, otherwise inaccessible to us, by way of such a "gracious voice" allow for us to dwell with the "whole Christ" in its ecclesial nature in the profound and "unfathomable" sufferings that He continuously bears alongside others. A "lowliness", amid its unceasing call for justice, which "will remain unfathomable forever", as well as to ascend to the very heights of human potential, as liturgical creatures, in "lov[ing], thank[ing] and prais[ing] God in Christ Jesus, now and for all time."

*c. The voice of "greatest joy"*

The gracious works that traverse the very heights and depths of our human nature and our life in Christ thus incline us to another dimension of our interiority, namely the inclination of such works towards the enjoyment of "divine unity" in which we respond with the 3<sup>rd</sup> voice that Ruusbroec describes, the voice of greatest joy [*blijdste stemme*]:

And this is the voice of greatest joy with which we invoke the Holy Trinity. And we shall find it dwelling in us with the fullness of all its gifts, and we shall find that we, too, are turned back to divine unity, with all our virtues. We shall freely flow from this rich unity with God's mild goodness and we shall flow through heaven and earth with generosity of heart, with grace and with glory and with all good things necessary to each one.

Ende die es de blijdste stemme daer wij mede aenroepen die heilighe drivoldicheit. Ende die selen <wi> vinden woende in ons met volheyt alre gaven, ende ons met allen duechden wederboecht in die godlijcke eenicheit. Ute deser rijcker eenicheit selen <wi> vrielijcke vlieten met der melder goeth<i>t gods, ende selen doervloeyen met melder herten hemel ende eerde, met graciën ende met glorien, ende met allen goede des yeghewelcken noot es.<sup>75</sup>

In this third voice, we see in Ruusbroec's description of our interiority a fundamental change and reorientation, a pivoting upon which "we shall find that we, too, are turned back to divine unity, with all our virtues"—a fundamental 'inclining towards', or natural desire for God. Theologically, while remaining in union with the divinity and humanity of our Lord, Ruusbroec's Christology opens onto a larger Trinitarian unity, wherein we find that the Holy Trinity itself dwells in us "with the fullness of all its gifts". And interestingly enough, we also see another pivoting, wherein Ruusbroec transitions from his more vertical reflections upon our redeemed human nature in and through the humanity of Christ in the 2<sup>nd</sup> voice, to that of the Trinitarian 3<sup>rd</sup> voice, one in which opens up a new horizon from such an interiority "through heaven and earth", while responding to the unique particularity of "all good things necessary to each one". Hence, the "voice of greatest joy" Ruusbroec describes as able to respond to the Trinitarian "overflow" of goodness within creation itself is initially seen in terms of the "divine unity" and as envisaging order, mutuality and necessity.

---

<sup>75</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 267-273.

d. The "sweetest voice"

Therefore, to make sense of such a pivoting, from the distinctly Christological to that of the Trinitarian; from crossing the vertical depths and heights of our shared human nature, to that of an opening horizon and the distinct goodness of creation at large is itself made possible by the primacy of minne itself. Ruusbroec introduces us to this more explicitly in the 4<sup>th</sup> voice, the sweetest voice [*suetste stemme*]:

This is the sweetest voice in which we invoke the Holy Spirit and with it we possess the width of loving [*wijtheit der minnen*] and grow one with it. And when love captures the spirit in unity in this way, it touches the very life of the spirit and love makes the spirit taste its unfathomable riches. And then all man's inner faculties are moved with delight. And they make him yearn for love's infinity [*minnen ongheinheit*] and crave it.

Dit es de suuetste stemme daer wij mede aenropen den heilighen gheest, ende daer wij mede besitten wijtheit der minnennn ende met een werden... Ende als minne aldus den gheest beveet in eenicheit, zoe gherijnt sy des gheests levendicheit ende doet hem ghesmaken hoer grondelose rijcheit. Ende dan wert met loste beweecht al des menschen inwindicheit. Ende hier af comt ghieren ende crighen inder minnen ongheinheit.<sup>76</sup>

From the divine unity and overflow of the Holy Trinity within the goodness of creation, such a unity now shifts away from the external, created horizon to that of the expanding interiority of the human person and one's response to the Holy Spirit wherein "we possess the width of loving and grow one with it." From a Trinitarian perspective, actively possessing such an expanding width of loving embrace complements what Rik van Nieuwenhove has repeatedly stressed as Ruusbroec's distinct understanding and application of *regiratio* to the "[S]pirit as the active principal of the return of the divine Persons into their perichoretic unity".<sup>77</sup> While anthropologically, Ruusbroec shows how such "width" finds the inner faculties—memory, intelligence and will—actively united and "moved with delight" as such active loving gives access to the "unfathomable riches" that are contained within our very interiority itself. This robust activity of loving, or "possessing" minne's unending width thereby unveils such "riches" within our very interior, yearning life, namely the unfathomability of our erotic selves responsive to "love's infinity".

e. The "most hidden voice"

And lastly, as "we possess the width of loving" in affirming our very erotic selves in desiring the alterity of the Other, Ruusbroec then describes the 5<sup>th</sup> voice, the most hidden voice [*verborhenste stemme*] in which we respond to minne itself:

And this is the most hidden voice in which we invoke love [*minne*], that it may consume us and swallow us in its fathomlessness, where all spirits fail at their work and give in to enjoyment. That is where the dark silence reveals itself, which stands idle and above all manner. We are dead in it and

Ende dit es die verborghenste stemme daer wi minne mede aenropen, dat si ons vertere ende verslinde in huer afgrondicheit, daer alle gheeste haers wercs flieren ende wiken der ghebrukelijcheit, daer alle gheeste haers wercs falieren ende wiken der ghebrukeledich steet. Daer in sijn wij ghestoriven

<sup>76</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 273-279.

<sup>77</sup> Rik van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec*, 83.

live above our selfhood. For that is our enjoyment and the highest bliss of us all. There is an eternal silence in this our superessential being [*overweselijcheit*]. Not a word is spoken in the unity of the Persons. And nobody is able to go there without love and practice of virtue in justice.

ende leven boven ons selfsheit. Want dat es onse ghebrulen ende onze <alre> hoochste zalicheit. Daer es een eewich swighen in onse overweselijcheit. Daer en wert nie woort ghesproken inder persone eenicheit. Daer en mach oec niemen comen sonder minne ende oefeninghe der duechde in gherechticheit.<sup>78</sup>

Here, Ruusbroec uncovers for us the abyss of minne itself, wherein the active possession of and return to our very origins in the "unity of Persons" gives way and ultimately yields to the "fathomlessness, where all spirits fail at their work and give in to enjoyment". Consistent with other accounts, Ruusbroec describes both the enjoyable abyss of minne itself as "idle and above all manner" as well as our relationship to it, having become "consume[d] [...] and swallow[ed] [...] in its fathomlessness". And in turn, he locates the very basis of our relationality and mystical anthropology of mutual indwelling, as seen within the primacy of minne, whereby "nobody is able to go" to this fathomless abyss "without love and practice of virtue in justice" where we are both "dead in it and live above our selfhood". Furthermore, in its core, we can see Ruusbroec' thinking our unity with the divine Persons, in minne without difference nor distinction, seen here in terms of the "eternal silence in this our superessential being". In the abyss of ourselves wherein the divine Persons dwell in unity, "no word is spoken" thus characterizes both the fathomless origins of our created selves and this "dark silence" not as an absence nor as a privation, yet itself as a modeless plentitude and excess beyond distinction, the fruitfulness of which gives rise to our continuing desire to respond to "where all spirits fail at their work and give in to their enjoyment".

## B. CONCLUSION

As we have seen in this unique glimpse of his mystical anthropology with the "five voices", Ruusbroec specifically locates *where* we become infinitely more human in terms of our observing and responding to the indwelling of God within our own interiority. And yet, thinking the human person in terms of the groundless abyss of *minne* is itself a non-foundationalist view of the self that completely reorients and challenges our more contemporary perspective that the intelligibility of the human person as such can only be attributed by some form of reified nature, contextually-fluid identity or (im)permeable principle, such as "freedom" or "inalienable rights", as adequately grounding and safeguard the distinctiveness of the human person as particular and asymmetrically dissimilar from other living life.

By contrast, Ruusbroec's non-foundationalism of mutual indwelling, characterized by and possessing it through minne, articulates an understanding of the human person, created in the image and likeness of the Trinitarian God, the relationality of which expresses both the continuing and eternal intra-Trinitarian dynamics of minne, as well as its economic, creaturely participation in the Son, and His love of the Father and the Father's love for the Son in and through the Holy Spirit. Thus situating this eternal minne within the abyss of the human person locates and makes sense of other central related themes within Ruusbroec's works, such as the relationality between *wesen* and

---

<sup>78</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vier Becoringhen*, II. 279-287.



*overwesen*, *differentie* and *onderscheet* as distinguished from *anderheit* or conversely, frequent expressions such as "*boven redene maer niet sonder redene*". By understanding relationality in view of his Trinitarian thinking and the primacy of *minne*, Ruusbroec's non-foundationalist view of the human person allows for the Brabantine mystic to both uphold and theologically substantiate such claims without collapsing them in either their seeming contradiction, nor resolving their tension by way of a dialectic.

Instead, possessing the abyss of love affirms the triptych of *minne* as above reason, but not without reason as well as beyond reason and hence without reason, all of which uniquely functions in supporting the particularity and distinction of the human person in whom God dwells. Therefore, to assume that Ruusbroec advocates some form of annihilation and/or merging with such a groundless love is one of the key mistakes and errors that he identifies in some of the more enthusiastic Free Spirit doctrines. Namely, views that both obfuscate the demands of love in the continuing practice of virtue, while obstinately insisting that their understanding is free from images, as we have previously seen in the 4<sup>th</sup> temptation. Instead, by insisting upon *minne*'s distinct praxis character, such views are highly incongruous with Ruusbroec. Indeed, for the Brabantine contemplative, we are united with such a *Minne* as none other than our own *minne*. That is, without distinction in terms of its enjoyment; and without difference, in terms of the relational union that we share in the Son and the love between the Father and the Son in the active unity of the Holy Spirit—such that the infinite practice of loving makes one more creaturely, more particular.. As the width of one's loving, in union with the Holy Spirit, further expands and implicates the extent of our loving, the width of its grasp of that which is beyond grasp, both in our virtuous *going out* into the world and towards others, as well as inclining and resting in the loving abyss of the Other, is none other than located at the depths of *our* very origins in whom we are continuously created anew.

## Chapter III

### **"WE SHALL SEE GOD WITH THE EYES OF OUR BODY". MINNE, MUTUAL INDWELLING AND JAN VAN RUUSBROEC'S EMBODIED SPECULATIONS ON THE GLORIFIED BODY.**

"And God has considered from all eternity that it is fitting and proper that good people should be rewarded in soul and body, since they have loved God and served him with soul and body."<sup>1</sup>

#### **§ 1. INTRODUCTION**

In a short, lesser known catechetical work, *Christian Faith [Vanden Kerstenen ghelove]* the Brabantine contemplative theologian Jan van Ruusbroec curiously devotes over half of this entire dogmatic and speculative theological reflection to the last two articles that the Church confesses in the Nicene Creed,<sup>2</sup> namely: that "we must believe in and look for the general resurrection of all bodies"<sup>3</sup> as well as "life everlasting".<sup>4</sup> Eternal life, or the life of glory, should be our desire, Ruusbroec says.<sup>5</sup> Such is why, he continues, the "[A]postles and holy Church say amen at the end of our creed, as a sign that we all should expect and desire the future bliss God has promised us. For it is the end and the fulfillment of all we believe now."<sup>6</sup> A guiding question in this following reflection is both the manner in which Ruusbroec speculatively envisions such a life of glory and how his speculations are both informed by and nourished from his embodied sense of desire [*begheren*]. For Ruusbroec, desire is an essential, constitutive aspect or mode within his overall thinking of love, or its middle-Dutch vernacular expression, *minne*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia X, Vanden Kerstenen Ghelove*, (trans.) A. Lefevere, (eds.) G. de Baere, Th. Mertens, and H. Noë, (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 1991) ll. 158-161: "Ende dit heeft god eweleec aengesien, dat behoerlec es ende recht, dat die gode mensche in ziele ende in lichame gheloent werde, die met ziele ende met lichame gode gemint ende ghedient heeft".

<sup>2</sup> See introduction to *Kerstenen Ghelove*, in *Opera Omnia X*, pg. 347: "The Brabant mystic offers an explanation of the different articles of faith contained in the Nicea-Constantinople Symbolum, i.e. the Credo as used in mass to this day." And a footnote gives further clarification that in two isolated instances, "Ruusbroec also uses the *Symbolum (pseudo-) Athanasianum*" in the following: 1) "Whoever wants to be saved and go in to the life eternal, he needs must possess the Christian faith and keep it until he dies." "So wie behouden wilt sijn ende comen in dat eweghe leven, heme es van node noer dat hi hebbe ende behoude tote in sijn inde dat kerstenen gheloeve." (ll, 1-2); 2) "For just as body and soul together make one man, just so the Son of God and the Son of Mary is one Christ." "Want gelikerwijs dat ziele ende lichame te gadere maken enen mensche, also es die gods one ende Marien zone een Cristus." (ll, 31-33)

<sup>3</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 150-152.

<sup>4</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 196.

<sup>5</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 195-196.

<sup>6</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 197-200.

And yet, at a glance, Ruusbroec's near exclusive attention to these remaining two, exceedingly speculative, eschatological articles of the Credo, in contrast to giving almost no comment whatsoever on the core Christological statements, may appear to us today as either curious, or strangely unbalanced. However, we should not be misled by this unbalanced attention, as Ruusbroec indeed has a well-developed Christological and Trinitarian theology, set in continual relation to his overall thinking of *minne*—what I have termed as his 'desirous Christology'.<sup>7</sup> But how then should we account for this imbalance? Historically, while we have little direct evidence to aid us in coming to know the contextual basis for this work, I find it highly plausible that much like his other works, *Kerstenen Ghelove* was also originally intended for either a specific person or specific group of people. Entertaining this reasonable hypothesis could thus account for why Ruusbroec focuses so much of his attention on these subjects. In all likelihood, someone, or a specific group of people in Brussels, would have approached Ruusbroec regarding soteriological and eschatological questions involving the resurrection of the body and life eternal, both as general queries, as well as perhaps the significance of these themes in relation to Ruusbroec's previous writings. In an exceptionally rare admission, we are invited to better consider the contextual basis that may have well led to Ruusbroec writing *Kerstenen Ghelove*, as he gives an explicit, personal comment upon the open question of the nature of eternal suffering as not exclusive to, yet inescapably tied to the body:

To lack God for ever and all bliss is a pain that comes from loss. The pain is spiritual and stronger than any pain man can feel in the body [...] But because they turned towards creatures with disorderly love, against the honor of God, to that disorderly love corresponds an eternal fire. But whether that fire is spiritual or physical, or both, as is rather my opinion, is better left to God.

Gods derven ewelec ende alre salecheit, dat es ene pine die comt van scaden. Die pine es geestelec ende si es meerre dan enege pine van lijfleke gevoelen....Maer want so hen gekeert hebben toten creaturen met ongeordender mine jegen die ere gods, der ongeordender minnen antwert een ewech vier. Maer dat vier wedert sye geestelec ochte materileec ochte beide, daer icht bat voer houde, dat bevelen wi gode.<sup>8</sup>

While in principle he allows for the question on the nature of eternal suffering (and conversely, eternal bliss and enjoyment in glory) as either bodily, spiritual, or both to remain open, in fact Ruusbroec's own position is quite clear. This is humorously displayed in an exemplum that Ruusbroec tells—not without certain subtle allusions—of "three gluttonous monks over there by the Rhine",<sup>9</sup> two of which die "suddenly and unexpectedly" and whose excruciating, bodily sufferings are poignantly described by Ruusbroec.<sup>10</sup> Hence, we can say that the *fides quae* of this standard catechetical work is uniquely infused with Ruusbroec's own *fides qua*, a personal faith that is deeply informed by and consistent with his understanding of *minne*, and its founding revelatory sources within Christian faith. Thus, Ruusbroec affirms with Christian tradition that "Faith leads the soul

---

<sup>7</sup> See infra my description of Ruusbroec's 'desirous Christology' in, "Chapter 9. *In the place of Christ: retrieving the locus of Ruusbroec's Christology within contemporary Christian Spirituality.*"

<sup>8</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 301-304; 308-312 (my emphasis).

<sup>9</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 357-358.

<sup>10</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 362-9: "And the monk who was still alive asked him if he was in great pain. And he [the damned monk] lifted his hand and let a drop of sweat fall on a tin or metal candelstick that stood there. And it melted in one moment like tallow or wax in a glowing oven. And the stench became so great that the monks had to abandon the monastery for three days. And the monk who had seen this left the monastery and became a Franciscan. And the man who told me the story had been a monk there too, and he had become a Dominican."

to trust in God, and gives it a blessed knowledge of God and things eternal."<sup>11</sup> Though by speculatively elaborating upon such eternal things and their rootedness within the *praxis* of minne, Ruusbroec affirms in a more typical manner:

And we shall taste the goodness of God....And it shall feed us and go through our souls and our bodies and we shall be hungry and thirsty for it always, and through that hunger and thirst both our tasting and our being fed shall remain always and be made new: and that is eternal life. We shall embrace love with love and we shall be by love comprehended.

Ende wi zelen gesmaken die goetheit gods....Ende die sal ons voeden ende dore gaen ziele ende lijf. Ende dair na sal ons altoes hongeren ende dorsten; ende overmids honger ende dorst so sal smaken ende voeden altoes bliveende vernuwen: ende dat es ewech leven. Wi selen met minnen minne begripen ende van minnen begrepend werden.<sup>12</sup>

Here, Ruusbroec plays with the dual sense of "*begripen*" and "*begrepend*" as entailing both minne's active embrace of the other, as well as its conceptual sense of knowing, or being comprehended in and through the mutuality of minne. Analogous to faith as both personal act—"faith by which" (*fides qua*)—and the content of faith understood as an object of revelation (*fides quae*), for Ruusbroec, minne too possesses both a strong praxiological dimension as well as a participative form of desirously knowing/being known by God.<sup>13</sup>

With this said, a relevant question for us today is precisely what gives Ruusbroec license for such speculation? Is this simply 'speculative', which is to say 'groundless'?<sup>14</sup> Or must we fall back upon a more typically "modern" position and inquire whether or not Ruusbroec has had an extraordinary, "mystical experience" of private revelation? In response to such positions, I find them both to be insufficient as well as failing to respond to the particularity of Ruusbroec's own texts. Rather, it's Ruusbroec's own repeated stress of minne's embodied sense—that "we shall see God with the eyes of our body"<sup>15</sup>— which appears to mitigate against and at least offer the possibility in our critical retrieval to respond to such critiques. For the basis and perhaps the legitimacy of Ruusbroec's theological speculative reflections on the life of glory is his utter insistence on its extension from a very real, concrete sense of embodied reality. Such a position is theologically possible by recognizing both the formal discontinuity and difference between the orders of grace and glory that needs to be maintained, while nonetheless strongly accenting the continuity between these two orders, via our loving union with the exalted Christ in His continuing embodiment. Such an emphasis on continuity between the orders of grace and glory, as mediated by Christ's exalted embodiment and the Church's profession of the future general resurrection of all bodies thus gives a new soteriological consideration of eternal life and its 'fulfillment of all that we believe now'. More specifically as a dynamic, ongoing life of continued creaturely hungering, thirsting and tasting the goodness of God, as well as our enjoyment, nourishment and 'being fed' by this love. And this is

---

<sup>11</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 4-5. "Gheloeve leidt die ziele in een ghetrouwen gode ende gheeft hare een salech bekinnen gods ende eweger dinghe."

<sup>12</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen ghelove*, ll. 261-265.

<sup>13</sup> For a more praxiological reflection on Ruusbroec's understanding of minne and its mystical anthropology of mutual indwelling, see *supra* Chapter 2, "Possessing the Unfathomable. Approaching Jan van Ruusbroec's Mystical Anthropology as Responsive to the Primacy and Praxis of Minne."

<sup>14</sup> See *supra* "Possessing the Unfathomable" and in particular, Louis Dupré's response to critiques of speculation as being off-set by the "[P]ersistent use of the language of love [which] should alert us that far more than intellectual speculation is at stake."

<sup>15</sup> See *supra*, note 3.

not only consistent with Ruusbroec's overall thinking of *minne* as both dynamically one of rest and restlessness, but furthermore it retains its linkage with the issue of the body itself as central in mediating such continuity. In short, Ruusbroec's speculative depictions on the life of glory as continuous with our very own temporal and spatially embodied life in the world in effect appear to humanize such a glorious, deified life. However, is such a theological view of continuity between grace and glory a contemporaneously viable position for us today? Before addressing this question, this reflection will first proceed to inquire over such sources of continuity that Ruusbroec himself draws upon and their relationship to *minne* as ultimately supporting his unique, embodied speculations over the glorified body.

## §2. RETRIEVING RUUSBROEC: CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

It first needs to be recalled that this following reflection stems from an ongoing retrieval of Ruusbroec and his understanding of love as *minne*—a unified love concept that I maintain is uniquely responsive to the contemporary interest in thinking love anew within fundamental theological and philosophy of religion discourses. And more specifically, contemporary discussions that aim at a renewed understanding of love as primary to modalities of 'truth' or 'being', as performed within a post-modern context. At the basis of this constructive/critical retrieval, consideration must be given to that which Ruusbroec presupposes specifically in terms of *minne*. By doing so, one can distinguish presuppositions specifically intrinsic to *minne*, as distinct from what may be contextually relevant in further expanding our understanding of *minne*, yet ancillary and hence extrinsic to *minne*'s own distinct, conceptual rigor. In this, we advance from what Jean-Luc Marion himself phenomenologically begins with in his conceptual plea in thinking anew the primacy of the erotic phenomenon as "starting from themselves, without inscribing them from the outset and by force within a foreign horizon" and instead, "describ[ing] the erotic phenomenon in its own proper horizon".<sup>16</sup>

For Ruusbroec, this presupposition can be primarily situated in terms of mutual indwelling, a pervasive concept within Ruusbroec's works as well as a defining characteristic of late-medieval mystical theology of Northern Europe and the Low Countries in particular. In Ruusbroec's formulation, mutual indwelling can be said to uniquely ground *minne*'s conceptual rigor as foundational to the Brabantine's corpus. More specifically, mutual indwelling can be said to both secure and dynamically deepen the fundamental alterity between Creator and creature/creation as an asymmetrical dissimilarity, affirmed not by way of its difference and multiplicity, yet as an Otherness-in-relation with the creature itself. The mutual indwelling between the human person and God—or one may say, the 'naturalness' of union with God—thereby ground *minne*'s own internal rhythm as dynamically juxtaposing the following as constitutive of *minne* itself: (1) the enduring relational autonomy of the human person; (2) mutuality of relations, not of the order of being [*wesen*], yet that of *minne*; and lastly, (3) the intrinsic condition of alterity in *minne*, both as intra-Trinitarian, as well as the creature's relationship to God as Creator. These constitutive features thus envision our personal, created image within the overall economy of salvation and the life of grace and glory as an ever deepening of growing in likeness unto, yet never full possession of, the

---

<sup>16</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 5-6.

2nd Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, as the eternal uncreated *Image*, in whom 'all things were made.'<sup>17</sup> By recognizing minne's Christological and Trinitarian dynamism, Ruusbroec's understanding of the various modes of mystical union of God—without mediation; without difference or distinction [*sonder differentie ochte onderscheet*]<sup>18</sup>—are invariably regarded as accenting mystical union not as a lifting one above and beyond one's embodied self and the creaturely order in the form of a wholly disembodied, two-tiered "supernatural grace". Rather, we can say that by affirming the fundamental autonomy of the created order and its enduring distinction with God as Creator, union with God can be depicted in terms of "deifying nature" itself by way of God's grace.<sup>18</sup> From this stems the conviction that in terms of minne's radical language of union with God—without difference [*sonder differentie*] in terms of identity, and without distinction [*sonder onderscheet*] in terms of our loving and virtuous works—affirms that by drawing closer to the "greater dissimilarity" of God, such movement equally renders us more concretely human in our very particularity.

Anthropologically, minne's presumption of mutual indwelling can be regarded as entailing both an affirmation of radical alterity within immanence as well as union with God primarily as *natural* and intrinsic to the relationship between Creator and creature. Along such an anthropological axis, we see Ruusbroec affirming the following:

[The] simple ground of the soul's essence...bears the image of God and is a natural realm of God. With respect to the body, a person is created from the four elements, and with respect to the soul, (he is created) from nothing, unto the image of God.

[I]n den eevuldighen gront des wesens der sielen. Die draghet dat beelde gods ende es een natuerlijk rike gods. De mensche es ghescapen na den lichame van den .iiij. elementen, ende na der sielen van nieute toe den beelde gods.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, as we shall soon see by affirming the human soul as the "natural realm of God", in order to maintain relational "greater dissimilarity" within the God/creation distinction, Ruusbroec will stress a line of *discontinuity* within an otherwise immanent frame, regarding our souls as created *ex nihilo* and hence, always growing towards or inclining "unto" [*toe den*] the image of God—the Son of God as Word—yet never confused nor identical with such an Image. And while we can say that Ruusbroec's overall understanding of minne and mutual indwelling largely give emphasis to this mystical anthropological dimension, we cannot discard its noticeable cosmological aspects. That is to say, a cosmological dimension that articulates key components of what is in total, a compelling synthesis that regards minne as a vibrant, sensible reality in its dynamic movement both within the Trinity and our mutual embrace—with the Father, in the Son and in the unity of the Holy Spirit—that overflows and enriches the world as created.

Thus, in mutual indwelling's more cosmological frame of reference, or the "outward way of the senses" [*de uutwendighe senleec wech*]<sup>20</sup>, Ruusbroec stresses a continuum of relations between God and world as created. In addition to his specific reflections on this "outward way of the senses" in his first work, *The Realm of Lovers* [*Dat rijcke der ghelieven*]<sup>21</sup> and nature's adornment by the

<sup>17</sup> Jn, 1,3.

<sup>18</sup> See Louis Dupre's chapter "From Deified Nature to Supernatural Grace" in *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, CN, Yale University Press, 1993), 167-189.

<sup>19</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, Opera Omnia IV, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven*, ll. 234-237 (with slight modifications).

<sup>20</sup> Ruusbroec, *Rijcke*, ll. 228.

<sup>21</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Rijcke*, ll. 172-229.

way of minne, Ruusbroec's cosmological emphasis upon the continuity of relations contributes to fueling minne's dynamism between the orders of nature, grace and glory as fundamentally continuous. More generally, this continuity is evidenced in diverse, yet related thematic areas such as his strongly realistic Eucharistic theology as well as what we shall later on see in his speculations over the humane glorified body of Christ and our beholding of Him, who sits at the right hand of the Father, as "see[ing] God with the eyes of our body".<sup>22</sup> Thus, along this axis of continuity, Ruusbroec's cosmological sense of mutual indwelling can be generally regarded as ordering and codifying the nature of world as creation, both in its autonomy as world, as well as its divine participation as an "[O]utward, sensible realm of God, a vestige of God, and a rough likeness of God."<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, in terms of our overall critical retrieval of minne, its founding presumption of mutual indwelling and more specifically, mutual indwelling's cosmological reference that stresses an axis of continuity between God and the created world, the present objective in this reflection is to specifically highlight that which is central to this embodied, "outward, sensible way". And in doing so, distinguish its central, retrievable tenets from what is otherwise a pre-modern cosmological worldview that is no longer feasible nor desirable within a contemporary scientific rationality. It will be argued that these core theological tenets can indeed be isolated from such a pre-modern cosmology—without textual distortion—specifically in terms of Ruusbroec's understanding of embodiment and the outward, "life of the senses" [*in dat senleke leven*].<sup>24</sup> Such a retrieval is crucial, in that for Ruusbroec, such embodiment is directly associated with Ruusbroec's overall mystical theology as tied to the "active life" of charitable works towards God and others as indispensable and of enduring worth to our human nature, human knowing and loving. Thus, Ruusbroec's early-humanistic emphasis on the endurance of human autonomy and particularity are well attested in those very realms—union with God, the life of glory— by which we today regard as perhaps the most discontinuous from our "being-in-the-world" and the mundane of everyday life. By this, it is my hope to show the very provocative and fascinating linkages Ruusbroec's understanding of minne and mutual indwelling allows for him to make, upholding both the necessity of alterity in union with God, while refusing to "spiritualize" such differences between nature, grace and glory. And in contrast, insisting instead upon their greater continuity and concreteness as an affirmation of all that is human, all that is created in their graceful inclining towards God.

#### A. CONTEMPORARY INTERLUDE: OLIVER DAVIES AND THE NEED FOR COSMOLOGICAL READINGS WITHIN MEDIEVAL MYSTICAL TEXTS

A plea for a renewed theological sensitivity to world and embodiment has been given strong emphasis by Transformation theologian, Oliver Davies, in recent works such as *The Creativity of God*<sup>25</sup> as well as his contributions to the inaugural publication of the transformation theological movement, *Transformation Theology*.<sup>26</sup> Broadly situated, in many of his recent contributions Davies

---

<sup>22</sup> See supra, note 3 (Ruusbroec, *Vanden Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 182-189.0

<sup>23</sup> Ruusbroec, *Rijcke*, ll. 174-175.

<sup>24</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia 1, Boecskén der verclaringhe*, ll. 519.

<sup>25</sup> See Oliver Davies, *The Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> See "Lost Heaven" and "The Interrupted Body" in Oliver Davies, Paul D. Janz, Clemens Sedmak,

has aimed at revivifying a contemporaneous, theological cosmology that creatively looks towards the world and our embodiment as created. This is largely pursued by a critical retrieval of the doctrine of the exalted, ascended Christ. That is, a doctrine seen in continuity with his strong Incarnational theology, the combination of which looks to reaffirm and think anew the ascended Christ's continuing, living presence within the world, made possible by the linkage with His continuing embodiment within our everyday, sensible perception of the world as created.<sup>27</sup>

Retrieval of the embodied, exalted Christ, is historically and contextually situated as beginning with the narrative of the birth of modern theology and its "turn to the subject" as arising out of the collapse of the pre-modern, Ptolemaic cosmology. While this shift within early-modern cosmology can be gauged in nearly every forum of human culture and society, Davies argues that this paradigm shift was especially felt within Christian faith and theology in its specific disruption of God's ongoing relationship, or *creatio continua* to the world and the performance of its rationality within a world regarded as created. This difficulty is especially poignant with the Church's reciting of the Apostles Creed and its affirmation of the exalted Christ. Who, while remaining fully human and fully divine, has "ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty". But *where* is that actually? And how are we, today, to understand such an expression, "at the right hand of the Father?" As Davies relates, in various pre-modern contexts, the question of the identity of Jesus as the Christ, Son of the Father, was addressed not only dogmatically as 'what' He is, nor 'who' He was historically, but furthermore, the question of Jesus was answered cosmologically, or 'where' He is, as Lord. Davies writes, "The pre-modern world understood this in terms of his 'heavenly session'. The fact that the exalted Jesus was held to be present in heavenly space and time, at the very 'highest point of heaven'...meant that he still *lived in continuity with our own earthly life*."<sup>28</sup> This continuity thus characterized the materiality of the world in its sacramental character and thereby shaped various understandings of the world itself.<sup>29</sup> Whereas, by contrast, with the collapse of this pre-modern cosmology and theology's projection of 'Heaven into the heavens', in such a "[D]ismissal of heaven then, there was nowhere else for Christ to be, and so no point of contact between our space and time and his resurrected and exalted life."<sup>30</sup>

An important consequence of Davies' retrieval is his insistence on embodiment and the bodiliness of rationality itself. Analogous to Davies' theological axiom that "We cannot [...] separate our beliefs about who Jesus Christ is and our beliefs about the world,"<sup>31</sup> so too does our understanding of rationality and its praxis as mediating self and world come to "determine the ways in which we perceive and experience the world."<sup>32</sup> Thus, Davies' movement towards a renewed,

---

*Transformation Theology: Church in the World* (London, T&T Clark International, 2007), pg. 11-62.

<sup>27</sup> See Oliver Davies, "Return to the World: A Theological Journey" <http://www.transformationtheology.com/>, as accessed on May 4, 2011: In the wake of the collapse of the pre-modern, cosmological synthesis, "Theology had to find a different form of rationality therefore: one, or ones, which reflected not so much the way the world is but how we are [...] This meant that it was not so much the meaning of the *world* which offered a shape to theological rationality but rather our own powers of meaning-making. It was not so much the doctrine of the creation of the world that influenced how pre-modern Christians understood and experienced the world, but rather the world's *createdness*, or continuing relation with the Creator."

<sup>28</sup> Davies, "Return to the World", 6.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Oliver Davies, *Creativity of God*, 5.



theological cosmology has crucial importance in our own current critical retrieval of Ruusbroec and our hermeneutical engagement. This is explicitly so, as it draws attention to our inherited, modern categorical understandings of "religious" or "mystical experience" as conventionally understood as disembodied, extraordinary, and 'other worldly', all of which are reflective of more modern views increasingly incapable of understanding the createdness of world amid emerging, secular, scientific discourses. In the following, Davies summarizes a point that has significant consequences to the present retrieval of Ruusbroec and what precisely underlines our conceptions of "religious experience".

From the perspective of religion, and our communion with God, by far the most important consequence of this state of affairs is the disjunction between our sense of the divine and our ordinary perceptual experience. The vocabulary we use about ordinary perception and our knowledge of the world can be extraordinarily precise, but when we speak about knowing God, we refer to 'mysticism', 'spirituality' or 'religious experience', all of which are highly indeterminate [...] To some extent, of course, this is explicable as an acknowledgment that God is not an object and cannot be known as objects in the world are known. But it is indicative also of the deeper problematic which flows from the fact that the world is not known as *created* in our ordinary perceptions. Our knowledge of God is thereby not set in any kind of relation at all with our ordinary knowing, neither one of consummation nor of contradiction, despite the fact that according to the Christian doctrine of the creation, the world which we ordinarily know belongs to God and is of God's making. Here the contrast with a pre-modern world-view is helpful. Since the createdness of the world was visible in its nature as world, in the medieval synthesis, the human faculties which were ordered to that world retained an openness *from within* [my italics] to the knowledge of God the Creator. What we would today term 'religious experience' was understood in the pre-modern cosmos to be already implied in and intrinsic to ordinary cognition.<sup>33</sup>

Davies makes a very strong case in linking the increasingly modern retreat from the world as created and the epistemological issues consequent of such a retreat and how this development has conditioned our distinctly modern understanding of religious experience and "mysticism" as disembodied, privatized and inaccessible to "common", public rationalities as it is situated largely set apart from the world. However, he is equally and continuously assertive that in no way does his critical retrieval amount to a return to a pre-modern cosmology. Instead, the very critical dimensions of his retrieval are to distinguish that which is properly theological to the doctrine of the exalted Christ as distinct from its overlap with pre-modern Ptolemaic cosmology. Thus, he writes:

The change in cosmology did not and does not invalidate the doctrinal principle of a continuing and full Incarnation. Christian faith does not entail any kind of belief in a heaven that is 'beyond the stars'. But it does commit us to a belief that Jesus has risen from the dead that he lives and is still fully human. *And being fully human, as well as fully divine, Jesus must still in some sense have 'local' existence and thus be in continuity with our own space-time reality today* [my italics]. The alternative to this possibility is either that the Incarnation has ceased (Christ is no longer properly alive, or properly human) or that the humanity of Christ has been absorbed into his divinity: a possibility which the early church specifically rejected.<sup>34</sup>

Davies attempts to disassociate our metaphorical understanding of heaven as associated with 'height' and with it, its pre-modern Ptolemaic underpinnings, from the clearly theological

---

<sup>33</sup> Oliver Davies, *Creativity of God*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Oliver Davies, "The Interrupted Body", 39.

imperative of a traditional, Chalcedon Christology as well as His Incarnation as contemporaneous and perpetual. This is particularly the case, given the continual metaphorical usage of thinking "heaven" as well as God's transcendence in terms of "height" or that which is "above" material, human existence. Davies is particularly insightful in his reading of this pervasive metaphor of "[D]imensionality—in this case, height—[which] is not a metaphor like any other."<sup>35</sup> This is due to the fact that "Height is an indexical category, which means to say that it is a relational category which is predicated upon the human body."<sup>36</sup> Hence, the intrinsic relationality of this metaphor, in order for it to be meaningful, needs a center and place of reference, within spatiality and temporality, in order for the metaphor to have significant meaning. And yet the result of this metaphorization—in the instance of speaking of God as Creator and thus, radically other than the created order, thereby refusing to be conscripted within a fully immanent view as an object—Davies concludes that this metaphor precisely functions in leading one *away from the world*. "Whereas natural verticality for the pre-modern paradigm", given its established, cosmological continuity between the created, material order with that of the Christ's exalted humanity at the highest height of the created order as a "pointing to...[while] metaphorical verticality is only a pointing *from* (that is, from the world)."<sup>37</sup> And it is this metaphorical action of distancing one from the created world—of becoming "overly spiritual"—and the significant cultural and linguistic "internalization of such a metaphorical conceptual paradigm...[that] the Christian self is drawn to live under alienation *within* the real world," living but "poorly in the world [in terms of inauthentically, and not in terms of the evangelical counsels], and not at all in any other."<sup>38</sup>

Hence, Davies draws the distinction between that which "was being communicated *through* that cosmological system", while affirming that the "doctrinal content can in principle legitimately survive the former's [pre-modern cosmology] demise."<sup>39</sup> In this sense, in trying to revivify modern theology's *de facto* abandonment of the exalted Christ and His Ascension—seen as the 'cosmic nature of the Incarnation'—the axis of *continuity* with the "present reality of the incarnate Christ" is stressed as a fundamental engagement of what transformation theology often makes as its appeal. That is, not so much a change of theological method, yet its transformation, as well as its *re-orientation* as "[R]esolutely and uncompromisingly a *theology in the world*".<sup>40</sup> By this resolution, transformation theology claims that such a re-orientation amounts to an "attentiveness" within the "crowded spaces" of contemporary life, and a "[R]ediscovery of the real world of embodied sensible human experience in space and time as the ongoing and indispensable source of theological authority today."<sup>41</sup>

## B. RUUSBROEC'S MINNE, COSMOLOGY AND ITS AXIS OF CONTINUITY

---

<sup>35</sup> Davies, "The Interrupted Body", 42.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Davies, "The Interrupted Body", 43.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Oliver Davier, "Lost Heaven", 30.

<sup>40</sup> Davies, Janz and Sedmak, *Transformation Theology*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

Turning immediately now to Ruusbroec and his cosmological writings, the Brabantine contemplative fully develops his own unique, cosmological thematics explicitly in his last, though incomplete work, *The Twelve Beguines* [*Vanden XII Beghinen*] in the following passage:

In the beginning of the world and of the holy Scripture, the prophet Moses teaches us that God made heaven and earth, in order to serve us, so that we should serve Him here on earth in good works and in honorable conduct without [i.e., externally]; and in heaven in spiritual virtues, in holy life, in practices within; and in the highest heaven, in contemplative life, united to God in enjoyment and in love. This is why all things were made. This is what nature, example and types, and holy Scripture, and the eternal truth that is God Himself, witnesses to us.

Inden beghinne der werelt ende der heiligher scriftueren, soe leert ons die prophete Moyses, dat god maecte hemel ende eerde ons te dienen, op dat wij hem dienen souden hier opder eerden in goeden werken ende in eersamen <sedem> van buten; ende in die hemel in gheestelijcken duechden, in heilighen levene, in oefeninghen van binnen; ende in den oversten hemel in scouwende levene, gode gheenicht in ghebrukene ende in minnen. Ende hier omme sijn alle dinghe ghemaect. Ende dit tuyghet ons natuere, exemple ende figuren ende heilighe scriftuere ende die ewighe waerheit die god selve <es>.<sup>42</sup>

By this opening, Ruusbroec gives us a cosmological outline wherein order and reciprocity are utterly written into the very fabric of creation itself. For Ruusbroec, nature not only shows itself as *ordering* life, a "vestige"—perhaps what we are more familiar with today in certain, "creationist" arguments that seek to portray nature as a static artifact that evidences its Creator—yet more importantly, as a "rough likeness of God".<sup>43</sup> That is, a likeness that shows itself in the manner of a reciprocal demand, as creation serves humans so that we may, through our works, serve God. Such relationality, Ruusbroec attests along a more Franciscan-Bonaventurian line, as witnessed by both revelatory "books": the book of nature, as well as the Holy Scriptures.<sup>44</sup> This is clearly put forward by Ruusbroec in a later work, *The Little Book of Enlightenment* [*Boecksken der verclaringhe*], offering a concise, declarative summation of this cosmological angle within the overall entirety of his thought and work:

See, I have thus said that the contemplative lover [*minnere*] of God is united with God by intermediary, and again without intermediary, and thirdly without difference or distinction. And this I find in nature and in grace and also in glory. I have further stated that no creature can become or be so holy that it loses its own condition of creature and becomes God, not even the soul of our Lord Jesus Christ: it will remain eternally creature and other than God.

Siet, ic hebbe Aldus ghesehaghet: dat de scouwende minnere gods met gode vernecht es overmids middel, ende oec sonder middel, ende ten derden male sonder differentie ochte onderscheet. Ende dit vende ic in naturen ende in der gratien ende oec in der glorien. Ic hebbe voert gheseghet, dat en ghene creature en mach so heilech warden noch sijn, dat si hare gheschapenheit verliese ende god werde, noch oec die ziele ons heren Jhesu Cristi: die sal eweleke creature bliven ende een ander van gode.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, Opera Omnia VII-A, *Vanden XII beghinen Text and Apparatus*, 2b, ll. 1-9.

<sup>43</sup> Ruusbroec, *Rijcke*, ll. 174-5.

<sup>44</sup> For a concise analysis of both the historical, "harmony model" of pre-modern cosmology and its theological appropriation, as well as the more modern and contemporary dialogical possibilities within science and religion discourse, see Lieven Boeve "Narratives of Creation and Flood: A Contest between Science and Christian Faith?" in *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York, Continuum, 2007), pp. 111-135.

<sup>45</sup> Ruusbroec, Opera Omnia I, *Boecksken der verclaringhe*, ll. 34-41.

Hence, Ruusbroec places significant importance on the endurance and the redemptive value of what he "find[s] in nature" that enables one to respond to the central event of creation as arising *ex nihilo*, as well as the events of the history of salvation in the Incarnation, Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ by way of "overflowing" and gratuitously mediated works of virtue and charity towards others. In turn, as an "outward, sensible way", such an emphasis affirms what is for Ruusbroec, his understanding of *ratio* as embodied and thus affirmative of the overall life of the senses as synthetically linking a more fully fleshed account of the life of minne and how Ruusbroec understands life in union with God as both with and without images. By building upon Davies, such a concrete, relational worldly emphasis within Ruusbroec not only serves as a corrective to more distinctly modern accounts of disembodied forms of 'mysticism'—as wholly 'interior' and thus, without any real sense of engagement with the world. Furthermore, it advances an intriguing alternative to what often remains as our incomplete, bifurcated sense of stressing either kataphasis or apophasis at the expense of the other.<sup>46</sup> By noting such an "outward way" within Ruusbroec valuably contributes to a more fuller comprehension of another one of Ruusbroec's key ideas: that is the "common life" [*ghemeyne leven*]. For Ruusbroec, the world is "[C]reated and endowed for human needs, in order for a person to behold it, consider it, and be faithful to God, and serve and praise Him *for all and with all* (creatures) [*van alle ende met alle*]."<sup>47</sup>

For Ruusbroec, *ghemeyne leven*, in its cosmological expression and embeddness is even more pronounced when Ruusbroec makes distinctly clear the importance of cosmology in the first place. Ruusbroec writes:

Now understand and mark with earnestness: all creatures show and teach us how we shall live. The nature of the heavens and the ordinance God has given them are for us an exemplar and a true type, as to how we shall confess God above the elements in the heavens, by means of an inward hidden spiritual life that no one knows nor feels but the one who feels it, practices it, and is occupied with it.

Nu verstaet ende merct met ernste alle creatueren, die wisen ende leeren how wij leven zullen. Die nature der hemele end die ordinancie die hem god ghegheven heeft, dis sijn ons een exemplaer ende een warachtighe figuere how wij god belijen zullen boven [alle] die elemente <in> die hemele, overmids een inwindich verborghen gheestelijc leven, dat niemen en weet noch en ghevolet dan diet beleeft, diet oefent ende diet pleecht.<sup>48</sup>

By this, Ruusbroec affirms his view of the created world fundamentally in terms of mediated relations and virtuous activity, speaking of creatures as an "exemplar" and distinct from more modern accounts of viewing nature and world as a collection of distant, quantifiable, static objects. Hence, at first glance, we can affirm that Ruusbroec demonstrates a certain Franciscan based,<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> See Joseph Milne, "Mystical Aspects of Christian Cosmology" in *Medieval Mystical Theology* 20 (2011): 47-65. In this article, Milne argues that "Since the seventeenth century religion, especially its mystical aspect, has been consigned to the private domain of human subjectivity, while cosmology has been relegated to the empirical sciences." (47). From this, Milne argues that the religious subject, and mysticism in particular, has been "sduced by this internalisation of religion", while reminding us that such a lack of context, world or cosmological sensibility greatly limits our interpretation of certain texts and experiences, situating such a plea as "involv[ing] a transformed understanding of the created, not simply the addition of a transcendent creator." (48)

<sup>47</sup> Ruusbroec, *Rijcke*, ll.175-177.

<sup>48</sup> Ruusbroec, *Beghinen*, 2b, ll. 112-117.

<sup>49</sup> For a more exhaustive reading regarding Ruusbroec's Franciscan-leanings, see R. Van Nieuwenhove, "The Franciscan inspiration of Ruusbroec's mystical theology: Ruusbroec in dialogue with Bonaventure and Thomas

biblically-informed sense of creation, echoing, for example, Matthew's Gospel, a parable of Jesus' recounts the manner of living by the "birds of the air" and "lillies of the field" as clearly distinct to common sources of human anxiety.<sup>50</sup> However, Ruusbroec appears to differ noticeably from other more pronounced and sustained trends within various Neoplatonic and Scholastic ventures into cosmology, all of which aimed at accounting for and harmonizing creation accounts in Genesis with various positions found within natural philosophy.<sup>51</sup> By no means do we wish to imply that in a more general vein, Ruusbroec could not also be placed within such "harmonizing" tendencies. This is certainly not in question. Rather, when noting the more distinctive features of his cosmological thought, aims at harmonizing creation as a revealed datum of Christian faith with that of natural philosophy simply does not appear as a central concern to the Brabantine contemplative. And yet, Ruusbroec's cosmological reflections—while clearly not preoccupied with making sense of questions of the nature of movement in the heavens or attempting to make sense of Aristotle's fifth element—should not be easily discarded as naive or unsophisticated according to the scientific discourses at the time. For he clearly demonstrates his familiarity and certain awareness of these Scholastic discussions by venturing into one of the most contested areas of pre-modern cosmology: the material nature of the firmament and its relation to the Empyrean—God's primary dwelling place along with the angles and the saints. As the historian of science W.G. Randles points out in his work, *The Unmaking of the Medieval Christian Cosmos, 1500-1760*, he writes:

The prime difficulty faced by the early Christian commentators on the Book of Genesis was in positioning the second heaven of Firmament created by God on the Second Day...in relation to the First Heaven of the First Day....To this was added the further problem of defining the material nature of the barrier formed by the Firmament to 'divide the water which were below it from those that were above it.'<sup>52</sup>

For Ruusbroec, it is clear that he attempts to resolve such issues of distinctiveness, as well as the relation the Firmament possess towards the Empyrean—how earthly immanence relates to heavenly transcendence, and where precisely to situate the border between the two—in terms of mutual indwelling itself. As bookends to his written works, Ruusbroec explicitly treats this issue in both his first and last works, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven* and *Vanden XII beghinen*. In his first work, while the basis for mutual indwelling is clearly present in terms of the continuity between these two realms, Ruusbroec first describes the Firmament in largely physical and material terms as a "transparency" to a certain unmistakable, Neoplatonic language of "resplendence" or the light of the heavens:

The uppermost part of the firmament is shone upon by the resplendence of the uppermost heaven and is reflecting it back. He created the middle heaven, called the transparent, or aqueous, or crystalline heaven, not that it is of crystal, but on account of its resplendence. This heaven is an enrichment of the firmament; since it is transparent, it illuminates the

Ende dat overste des firmaments wert besceenen ende wederblickende van claeheiden des oversten hemels. Ende hi hevet ghescapen den middelsten hemel, die heedt der doerscineghe hemel ochte waterachtighen ochte crisstallen, niet dat hi crisstallen si maer overmids sine claetheit. Die hemel es eene cierheit des firmaments; want hi doerscinich

---

Aquinas," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 75 (2001): 102-115.

<sup>50</sup> See Mt. 6, 25-34.

<sup>51</sup> For a clear overview of this topic, see "The medieval foundations of the Christian Cosmos" in Randles, W.G.L. *The Unmaking of the Medieval Christian Cosmos, 1500-1760* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 1-31.

<sup>52</sup> Randles, *Unmaking of the Medieval Christian Cosmos*, 2.

uppermost part of the firmament with the light of the uppermost heaven.

es, so wet verclaert dat overste des firmaments met den lichte des oversten hemels.<sup>53</sup>

Ruusbroec returns to this issue again in *Beghinen* in language far more typical of his overall thought, and yet we can clearly see both the evident progression and maturation in his later work of ideas such as: "mutual indwelling" as well as his cosmological approach to the question of the Firmament as indicative of his thinking of mutual indwelling. Ruusbroec introduces this topic specifically in terms of the "natural inclination of our soul" towards God and that "nature always desires the good" in terms of an "inward spiritual firmament" [*een inwindich gheestelijc firmament*].<sup>54</sup> Now, as he explicitly and starkly declares elsewhere, such a characterization of nature's autonomy does not render it fundamentally good and complete in of itself, for apart from God, "nature without grace is a bastard".<sup>55</sup> However, nature's fundamental inclination and orientation are themselves good. Good, not in terms of its teleological ends, yet by virtue that such activity and working of creatures themselves, while wholly autonomous, nonetheless are a realm wherein God dwells. And it is such mutual indwelling that renders the inclination and the distinctiveness of human activity as fundamentally good, as Ruusbroec writes:

So, likewise, the good will in which God lives and reigns with all His gifts is very like the firmament of heaven, for it is always moved from above by the Holy Spirit, who is the prime motion of all holiness. And this firmament is transparent and clear from the indwelling of God, and also from the sun of Wisdom who lives therein. This is why this firmament is a spiritual intermediary that *divides and distinguishes* [*onderscheet*] between the waters of the heavens and the waters of the earth, that is: between virtues and works of virtue; between time and eternity; between an outward active life and an inward spiritual life; between grace and nature; between sign and truth; between works of the senses, which pass away, and spiritual works which are eternal, which are performed in grace.

Alsoe, ghelijcker wijs die goede wille, daer god in leeft ende regneert met alle sinen gaven, hi es wel ghelijc den firmamente des hemels, want hi wert altoes beweect van boven vanden heilighen gheest, die de eerste berueringe es alre heilicheit. Ende dit firmament es doerschijnich ende claer vander inwoninghen gods ende oec vander sonnen der wijsheit, die daer inne leeft. Ende hier om [dit] es dit firmament een gheestelijc middel, dat dielt ende onderscheet ghevet tusschen die wateren der hemele ende die watere der eerden, dat es: tusschen die doechde ende werke der duechde; tusschen tijt ende eewic-heit; tusschen een uutwindich werken ende [in]een inwindich gheestelijc leven; tusschen gracie ende natuere; tusschen teekene ende waerheit; tusschen senlijcke werke die vergaen ende gheestelijcke werke die eewich bliven, die in gracie sijn ghedaen.<sup>56</sup>

In short, while such a pre-modern cosmology is very far from contemporary rationalities and our worldview today, we can speak of Ruusbroec's thinking of the question of the Firmament as an attempt at articulating a "transparent", invisible barrier of otherness that makes real the immanent/Transcendent difference and distinction. A distinction, not in terms of distancing such transcendence by infinite degrees, yet by way of a model of continuity and a sacramental, relational world of inter-penetration. For Ruusbroec, this cosmological distinction is clear and necessary, and yet it is because of such a cosmological "outward way of the senses" and its insistence on virtuous, charitable works that he can better account for mutual indwelling as precisely upholding these

<sup>53</sup> Ruusbroec, *Rijcke*, ll. 197-203.

<sup>54</sup> Ruusbroec, *Beghinen* 2b, ll. 119-121.

<sup>55</sup> Ruusbroec, *Beghinen* 2b, ll. 480-481.

<sup>56</sup> Ruusbroec, *Beghinen* 2b, ll. 134-146.

differences amid the continuity and "transparency" between the orders of nature, grace and glory as a concrete, continuing, embodied reality.

By extension, with this distinct, cosmological sense in mind and our natural, fundamental inclination to God and virtuous works, it makes sense that Ruusbroec would use the metaphor of the "scales of love" to articulate such reciprocity as seen within creation, keeping well in mind its distinct, Augustinian heritage wherein the Latin Father speaks of his love as his "weight".<sup>57</sup> And yet, by emphasizing creation as having come *ex nihilo* whereby God's minne "outweighs everything" as "God made us from nothing and that He gave Himself to us and all that He had made," Ruusbroec opts not to speak of such a reciprocal love as teleologically seeking its final place of rest.<sup>58</sup> Instead, he deliberately uses the scale analogy to emphasize minne's cosmological movement as one of mutuality and balancing: "See, this is the scale of His love [*minne*] that He has given us, and demands of us to weigh evenly and alike, if our life is to please Him."<sup>59</sup>

### 1. Cosmology, Speculation and Minne as "above reason, but not without reason"

Cosmologically, wherein all created, material reality is both "encompassed" by and "hang[s] in a spiritual, uncreated resplendence", such an embodied, "life of the senses" in turn shows the foundational contours of Ruusbroec's view of rationality and understanding, attesting to minne's own embodied, speculative character as both "above reason, but not without reason" [*boven redene, maer niet sonder redene*]. The basis of this Augustinian view of the intuitive, "possessive" character of "understanding" [*verstaen*]<sup>60</sup>—which can be situated within the long legacy of *nous* and the participation theory of divine illumination—can be seen in the range that Ruusbroec accords to speculation, and is thus seen in the following:

What is below the firmament, a person can see and perceive by his outward senses. What is above the firmament, one can imagine and speculate (on) by one's inward senses and by rational discernment. Where the corporeal heavens end, there end all imagination and (use of) the senses, outwardly and inwardly; for where bodiliness ends, all the senses end; for no sense can comprehend God or angels or souls, for they are without form. This is the outward way of the senses, and it is the first.

Beneden <den> firmamente machment sien ende vernemen met den sinnen van buten, boven den firmamente machment imagineren ende speculeren met den sinnen van binnen ende met redeliken imagineren ende speculeren met den sinnen van binnen ende met redeliken merkene. Daer de lijflijke hemele inden, daer indet alle imaginacie ende sen uutwendich ende inwendich, want daer lijflicheit indet daer inden alle senne; want gode noch inghele noch sielen en mach gheen sin begripen, want dat es sonder ghedeente. Dit is de uutwendighe senleec wech ende es de ierste.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> See Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.9.10, as quoted from Jean-Luc Marion, "Resting, Moving, Loving: The Access to the Self according to Saint Augustine" in *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 91, number 1, January 2011: "The body makes every effort to push itself with all its weight towards its place. The weight does not only push down, but towards its place. Fire tends towards the upper, the stone toward the lower. They are [both] put into motion by their [respective] weight, [but] they seek their [own] places. The least ordered things remain without a place to come to rest: as soon as they recover their order, they come to rest. My weight, it is my love; wherever I take myself, it is my love that takes me there."

<sup>58</sup> Ruusbroec, *Beghinen* 2b, ll. 656; 661-662.

<sup>59</sup> Ruusbroec, *Beghinen* 2b, ll. 738-739.

<sup>60</sup> Ruusbroec, *Rijcke*, ll. 222-229.

In this sense, it is helpful to briefly clarify what Ruusbroec specifically means by "speculation". In *Vanden XII Beghinen*, he describes the mediated character of "*speculatio*" as a rational mode of conceptual knowing "in images, in forms, and in likenesses" as distinct from the simplicity, immediacy and gratuitous passivity of "*contemplatio*".

This mode is called *speculatio*, that is: to see in a mirror; for the intellect of a contemplative is a living mirror, in which the Father with the Son give Their Spirit of truth, so that the reason is illuminated and it can recognize all truth that can be understood in modes, in images, in forms, and in likenesses. But the mode in which a person sees the face of God, above reason and without reason, in bare intellect and in imageless mind, is something that neither consideration nor reason can attain....This is called *contemplatio*, that is: to contemplate God in a simple manner [...] By means of His light, the rational eye is enlightened so that it can recognize in forms, in images and in likeness, God and all creatures, insofar as God wills to show them.

Dese wise es gheheeten *speculatio*, dat es: in eenen spiegel sien. Want des scouwenden menschen verstandnisse es een levende spiegel, daer die vader met den sone ingheven haren gheest der waerheit, op dat die rede verclaert worde ende bekinne alle waerheit diemen verstaen mach in wisen, in beelden, in formen ende in ghelijcken. Maer die wise daermen dat aensichte gods in siet boven redene ende sonder redene, in bloeten verstande ende in onghebeelder ghedachten, dat en mach ghemerc noch reden niet ghereiken.... Ende dit heet *contemplatio*, dat es: gode scouwen eenvuldigherwijs [...] Ende overmids sijn licht soe es die redelijcke oghe verclaert, alsoe dat si bekinnen mach in formen, in beelden ende in gheliken gode ende allen creatueren, alsoe verre alst god vertoenen wilt.<sup>61</sup>

For Ruusbroec, the performance of rationality within *speculatio* clearly has an illuminative-participative character. And yet, unlike *contemplatio*, which is positioned as both "above and without reason" [*boven ende sonder redene*], speculation itself retains a more mediating sense of rationality as distinctly related to the body and the senses. Thus, by exploring this distinct sense of minne's rationality and the mediated, embodied, life of the senses as "above reason, but not without reason", such a cosmological axis of continuity further aids what is for Ruusbroec, minne's strong, univocal sense. Such univocality can be precisely identified as fundamentally linking God's minne and our minne,<sup>62</sup> beyond Creator/creaturely dissimilarity, as indeed one and the same minne and the same life of minne in terms of its various manners (gratuitous; reciprocal/demanding; mutual), its modes (affection [*liefde*]; charity [*karitas*]; desire, yearning [*begheren*]) as well as its modeless enjoyment and bliss. The strength of minne's appeal, especially for us today, are the linkages that Ruusbroec makes between seemingly disparate realms and substantiates them as founded within minne itself, as rendering an account of love's own inherent logic and rationale. This is seen in minne's various manners and modes of activity—both outwardly and inwardly—alongside its modeless enjoyment, or rest, within a dynamic of endless unity that is continuously active and desirous, as well as "without cease enjoyably suspended" in unity with the Other in "eternal blessedness".<sup>63</sup> While always affirmative of the abiding and irreproachable sense of alterity between lovers—both human and with the Trinity—an immediate consequence from Ruusbroec's theological reflections over minne is his affirmation of the particularity of human and divine Persons as seated and differentiated not in terms of identity [*differencie*], yet by the very distinction [*onderscheet*] and

<sup>61</sup> Ruusbroec, *Beghinen*, 1, ll. 466-474; 483-484; 487-489.

<sup>62</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Beghinen*, 1, ll. 569-570: "Everything that is born of God is God and spirit; it is God with God, one love [*minne*] and one life in His eternal image."

<sup>63</sup> Ruusbroec, *Rijcke*, ll. 1975-6.



modality of one's (loving) works itself. Hence, while the unity and ultimate signification of minne is regarded as fundamentally and universally the same intra-Trinitarian wise, amongst creatures, and finally, between creatures and their Creator, nevertheless *the way and manner* in which we love—the activity and work of our loving—is unsubstitutable. While their love may be called the same, no two lovers love alike. This critical insight will be further elaborated upon in our discussion over the Ruusbroec's speculations concerning Christ's distinctly humane, glorified body and our glorious beholding of him. However, before we can explore this thematic directly, its cosmological background and its overall implications for critically retrieving minne, first, we must lastly give attention to what is specifically meant by the term "mutual indwelling" and its anthropological register.

### C. MUTUAL INDWELLING AND RUUSBROEC'S MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

As a uniquely Trinitarian, "interpersonal"<sup>64</sup> *imago Dei* anthropology, Ruusbroec stresses mutual indwelling as an intrinsic relationality of radical alterity within immanence wherein both eternal and historical modalities converge in this natural union of the human person and God.

In this Image God knew us before we were created, in Himself, and now, created in time, unto Himself. This image is essentially [*weselec*] and personally in all people, and every person has it whole and entire, undivided [...] And thus we are all one, united in our eternal image, that is God's image and the origin of us all: of our life and our becoming [*ghewerdens*]; wherein our created being and our life hang [*in hangt*] without intermediary as in its eternal cause. Yet our createdness does not become God, nor the image of God (become) creature; for we are created unto the image, that is: to receive the image of God. And that image is uncreated, eternal: the Son of God

In desen beelde bekinde ons god, eer wi gheschapen waren, in hem selven, ende nu in der tijd gheschapen, toe hem selven. Dit beelde es weselec ende persoonlec in alle menschen ende ieghewelc mensche heevet al te male gheheel, onghedeilt [...] Ende aldus sijn wil alle een, vereenecht in onsen eeweghen beelde, dat gods beelde es ende onser alre orsprong, ons levens ende ons ghewerdens, daer onse ghescapene wesen ende onse leven sonder middel in hangt alsoe in sine eeweghe sake. Nochtan en wert onse gheschapenheit niet god noch dat beelde gods creatuere. Want wi sijn gheschapen toe den beelde, dat es: dat beelde gods to ontfane. Ende dat beelde es onghescapen, eewegh: de sone gods.<sup>65</sup>

An important stress for Ruusbroec shown here is his reappropriation of the traditional, biblical *imago Dei* anthropology of "image" and "likeness"<sup>66</sup> as mutually supporting, yet functioning as distinct domains on several different accounts. By "in the image", Ruusbroec will speak of as denoting an eternal realm: "And thus this image, which is the Son of God, is eternal, before all createdness."<sup>67</sup> By contrast, our reception of this image—the Son of God, as well as all of creation, in whom we have been created—can be clearly seen as accenting both the historical as well as that of minne and the order of grace as our growing in union with and likeness unto this image. Such an accent of distinction [*onderscheet*] thereby emphatically stresses the perdurance of alterity between creatures

<sup>64</sup> See Bernard McGinn's typology of the differing schools of *imago Dei* anthropology: "intellectual, volitional, and the interpersonal", "*Humans as Imago Dei*" in E. Howells and P. Tyler (eds.) *Sources of Transformation: Revitalising Christian Spirituality*, (London: Continuum, 2010), p.19-40, esp. 24-25.

<sup>65</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, Opera Omnia VIII, *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, ll. 910-913, 914-920.

<sup>66</sup> See Gn 1, 26: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'".

<sup>67</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spiegel*, ll. 903-4.

and Creator, as actively mirroring an image is fundamentally other—no matter the degree of its (un)likeness—than the image itself. In another context in *The Spiritual Espousals* wherein he specifically treats of mutual indwelling via our reception *unto the Image* in its historical incarnation, Ruusbroec writes:

[F]lowing into the unity of God and into the unity of the mind, so that the rational creature may supernaturally obtain and possess the lofty union of God. This is why God created heaven and earth and everything; this is why He became man and taught us and lived for us, and He Himself was the way into unity. And He died in the bond of love [*in bande van minnen*], and ascended, and unlocked for us the same unity in which we can possess eternal blessedness.

[I]nvlietende in die eenicheit gods ende in die eenicheit ger ghedachten, op dat die redelijcke creatuere die hoghe eenicheit gods vercrighen ende besitten moge overnatuerlijcke. Daer omme hevet god hemel ende eerde ghescapen ende alle dinc, ende daer omme is hi mensche worden, ende hevet ons gheleert ende ghelevet, ende self die wech gheweset in die eenicheit. Ende hi is ghestorven in bande van minne, ende opgeheven, ende hevet ons ontsloten die selve enicheit daer wij inne moghen besitten die eewighe zalicheit.<sup>68</sup>

This above quotation establishes the Christological and Soteriological context in which Ruusbroec's early-humanist claims are expressed. Namely, that loving union with Christ is itself not only the way to living into loving unity with God, but the further claim that Christ's life and death equally 'unlock[s] for us the same unity' and thus gives us access to a greater depth of the significance of our humanity itself. This soteriological prologue is therefore critical in beginning with Ruusbroec's understanding of mutual indwelling, for it directly links his theological anthropology with the very salvific unity that we come to share in and possess with Christ—"becoming partakers of the divine nature"<sup>69</sup>—through living a life of minne with God and with others. And for Ruusbroec, the language of deification is indeed, beyond analogical distance and creaturely dissimilarity, an immediate sharing in the "enjoyable unity of the Godhead" [*in ghebrukelijcker eenicheit der godheit*].<sup>70</sup> Here, Ruusbroec's usage of "unity" [*eenicheit*] is deliberate, in its articulation of immediacy, as terminologically distinct from the connotation of differentiation and distance that the language of "union" [*eenich*] entails.

In this case, loving unity with God in and through living in union with Christ, *imitatio Christi*, is not to be confused solely with the moral perfection of the human person, as *telos*, yet formally extrinsic to the human person. Rather, it is in this gratuitous, yet particular relationality that Ruusbroec begins with, only then to move to a more generalized theological anthropology, with the clear implication that the depths of the human person are themselves inconceivable and unknowable outside of its lived relation. Again, union with God is not something additional to our very humanity, yet it comprises the very ground or *wesen* of the person. And yet at the same time, mutual indwelling neither deprives nor confuses its mystical anthropology with the order of grace and that of minne, as Ruusbroec repeatedly emphasizes.<sup>71</sup>

Such an anthropology in its distinctly Christological character, for Ruusbroec is equally Trinitarian as it builds from its Augustinian heritage in conceiving of the higher faculties of the

<sup>68</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia III, Die Gheestelike Brulocht*, b, ll. 32-40.

<sup>69</sup> 2 Pt, 1, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Ruusbroec, *Brulocht*, b, ll. 22-3.

<sup>71</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Brulocht*, b, ll. 41-49.

human person—memory, understanding, will—in a strong, participatory sense, wherein the "living ground" of the higher faculties is an "eternal living mirror of God, always without cessation receiving the eternal birth of the Son, the image of the Holy Trinity, in which God knows Himself".<sup>72</sup> And yet, grounding the *wesen* of the human person upon union with and relation to the radical alterity of God is itself a move that affirms a groundless-ground, a unique depiction of a non-foundationalist anthropology. Depicting the human person, as creature, sustained by and suspended in or hanging [*in hangen*] in the "fathomless abyss"<sup>73</sup> [*grondelos abis*] of God, Ruusbroec characteristically writes that one "[M]ust feel that the foundation of his being [*wesen*] is unfathomable, and as such he must possess it."<sup>74</sup> *Possession*, in all of minne's erotic fullness, can be said to function here as the "bliss" of one's loving immersion into an "unknown knowing"<sup>75</sup> [*ombecande becantheit*]<sup>75</sup>—both in discursive reason's act of knowing, regarded as "unknown", as well as the immediacy of 'knowing' within the higher faculty of 'understanding'. Thus, while strongly affirming the primacy of minne in terms of our deepening union with God and others, Ruusbroec upholds the various modalities of union with God as possessing both a "living knowledge and an active loving in us, for without our knowledge we cannot possess God, and without our practice of loving we cannot be united with God, nor remain united with him. For if we could find bliss without knowing, a stone, which has no knowing, could also find bliss."<sup>76</sup>

By better coming to understand the distinctiveness of mutual indwelling for Ruusbroec, we can thus see it as supporting a continuum of mutual relations between the radical alterity of the Trinitarian God within the immanence of world and the human person as *creation*. While at the same time, such a continuum of world and relations as *created*, also reinforces the greater dissimilarity of creation and the human person with that of the Creator. Thereby conceiving such a radical dependence, intimate bond and relational continuity with the nonetheless distinct and autonomous orders of the creaturely to that of the Creator renders sensible and consistent what Ruusbroec says of minne's distinct sense of knowing and knowability—recalling the tradition of Gregory the Great's *amor ipse notitia est* [love itself is knowledge]—as "above reason, but not without reason". For such a relationality is itself a relation of minne, from which Ruusbroec's anthropology can be seen as supporting the four fundamental movements or manners of minne itself: facilitating a continual, dialectical tension of first charitably "going out" in mediated works that lovingly affirms alterity by way of its "overflowing", gratuitous activity; pivoting in its turn towards an interiority of immediacy and marked by an erotic and insatiable yearning in its reciprocal demand for the other; yielding thus and "over-formed" [*overforminghe*] in an immersion of minne and resting enjoyment in unity "without difference or distinction" [*sonder differentie ochte onderscheet*]; only to lastly reaffirm our created particularity in distinction and otherness with God and others as the full-flowering of Ruusbroec's the "common life" [*ghemeyne leven*]. Here, as seen from the vantage of minne, *ghemeyne leven*'s reaffirmation of particularity in distinction and otherness is concretized as a creaturely life of eternal, "restlessness of loving" [*ongheduer van minnen*]. That is, an insatiability that is modeless and "beyond reason and beyond manner, for minne desires what remains

---

<sup>72</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spieghel*, ll. 932-4.

<sup>73</sup> See eg. Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia X, The Sparkling Stone*, ll.686.

<sup>74</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *The Sparkling Stone*, ll. 70-72.

<sup>75</sup> See eg. Ruusbroec, *The Sparkling Stone*, ll. 81.

<sup>76</sup> Ruusbroec, *The Sparkling Stone*, ll. 629-634. See infra Chapter VIII and the discussion of Ruusbroec's *ghevoelen* in terms of "connatural knowledge".

impossible for it and reason bears witness that minne is right but it can neither advise minne in this case nor forbid it."<sup>77</sup>

Again, the various modes and modelessness of minne are anchored in this primary relationality in which mutual indwelling facilitates, wherein Ruusbroec states that:

[W]e live completely in God, where we possess our bliss, and completely in ourselves where we practice our love towards God. And even if we live completely in God and completely in ourselves, yet it is only one life. But it is contrary and twofold according to feeling, for poor and rich, hungry and replete, working and at rest, those are contraries indeed. Yet in them resides our highest nobility, now and forever. For we cannot become God at all and lose our createdness: that is impossible. And if we remained in ourselves completely, separated from God, we would be wretched and beyond bliss. And therefore we should feel ourselves completely in God and completely in ourselves.

Ende aldus [aldus] leven wij gheheel in gode, daer wij onse salicheit besitten; ende wij leven gheheel in ons selven, daer wij ons in minnen te gode oefenen. Ende al eest dat wij gheheel in god leven ende gheheel in ons selven, dit en es doch maer een leven. Maer het es contrarie ende tweevuldich van ghevoelne: want arm ende rijcke, hongherich ende sat, werkende ende ledich, dese dinghe sijn te male contrarie. Nochtan gheleghet hier inne onse hoochste edelheit, nu ende eewelijc. Want wij en moghen te male niet god werden ende onse ghescapenheit verliesen; dat es ommoghelijc. Blevē wij oec te male in ons selven ghesondert van gode, soe moesten wij sijn elendich ende onsalich. Ende hier omme selen wij ons gheheel in god ghevoelen ende gheheel in ons selven.<sup>78</sup>

The rhythm of minne concretely images the relationality between the human person as growing *unto* the uncreated Image in whom we have been created as highly dynamic in mutual suspension in the Other. Juxtaposing autonomy, relationality and alterity, such rhythm portrays both mystical union and salvation in Christ in terms of deification and the radical language of union with God.

As it was earlier introduced, Ruusbroec's synthesis of minne grounds an opening towards a distinct mystical theological conceptuality, while equally showing a sensitivity and firm attention to issues of praxis. Subsequently, as we have argued that the founding presupposition to minne's synthesis can be seen in mutual indwelling, it is sensible that mutual indwelling too would evidence a similar predilection. Hence, retrieval of Ruusbroec's understanding of minne and its presupposition of mutual indwelling must ultimately contend with such a presupposition in both its cosmological and anthropological sense, which Ruusbroec explicitly indicates in the following:

See, this is the highest mode of living that a person can express about God. By it, He lives in the highest nature of heaven, and with respect to our mode, (He lives) nearer and more nobly in the apex of our createdness. He has called and chosen us: if we seek Him, we shall find Him in ourselves, and above ourselves, where He occupies Himself in His glory, with His chosen ones, contemplating, knowing, loving, enjoying and perfusing everything with eternal blessedness.

Siet, dit es de hoochste levende wise die men ghewaerden mach van gode. Ende hier mede levet hi in die overste natuere der hemele, ende na onser wijs naerre ende edelre in dat overste onse <r>ghescapenheit. Ende hi hevet ons gheroepen ende vercoren; eest dat wine soeken, wi selenen vinden in ons selven ende boven ons selven, daer hi sijns selfs pleecht in sijnre glorien met sinen uutvercornen, scouwende, kinnende, minnende, ghebrukende ende al doervloeiende met ewigher salicheit.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Ruusbroec, *The Sparkling Stone*, ll. 721-723.

<sup>78</sup> Ruusbroec, *The Sparkling Stone*, ll. 579-589.

<sup>79</sup> Ruusbroec, *Beghinen* 2b, ll. 57-64.

Hence, as we shall now see, these convergences are made specific in the Brabantine contemplative's speculations on the glorified body and its very humane, sensuous beholding of the exalted humanity of Christ. Such a thematic instantiates a generalized presumption of minne's embodied, speculative reason in facilitating a greater continuity between the orders of grace and glory. A continuity, which (to emphasize once again) at the same time mirrors its more overarching, early-humanist claim that progressively deepening in loving union with God's alterity affirms one's own created particularity.

#### D. EMBODIMENT, IDENTITY AND RUUSBROEC'S SPECULATIONS OVER THE GLORIFIED BODY

Having undergone this significant detour of examining Ruusbroec's understanding of minne as guided by his founding presumption of mutual indwelling—a presumption which in turn has been shown to consist of both cosmological and anthropological realms—we can now return to our initial focus. Namely, Ruusbroec's speculations surrounding the life of glory made in *Vanden Kerstenen Ghelove*. Following our text-focused approach, it was initially introduced that the basis and license that allowed for Ruusbroec to speculate on the life of glory was not to be found in some form of mystical experience of private revelation. Rather, his speculations stem from his repeated theological emphasis placed upon the Church's confession of the "general resurrection of all bodies". An emphasis supported in part by minne's own embodied sense and the enduring importance placed upon the body and its works as creaturely. Hence, Ruusbroec's speculations on eternal life and its embodied reality are based upon a sense of continuity between the orders of nature, grace and glory and the founding basis for this view has been situated in terms of mutual indwelling. However, it has been argued that Ruusbroec's distinct, "interpersonal" *imago dei* doctrine of mutual indwelling is not solely an anthropological doctrine, yet it shows similar instances of the creature's "hanging in" [inhangen] or being "suspended-in" the Other within Ruusbroec's cosmological writings as well.

This cosmological perspective is analogous to Ruusbroec's more well-developed anthropology that contrasts certain exemplarist leanings—of eternally being begotten in the Son, in the Image—with the firm instance that we are also created unto the image in our historical reception and growing in likeness to Christ through a life of grace and virtuous living. By employing and interplaying such a dynamic exchange of perpetual distinction and otherness, Ruusbroec goes to great lengths to think the naturalness of union with God as the relational foundation to the creature itself, without however distorting or confusing the orders of Creator and creature and running the risk of pantheism. Such is also the case for Ruusbroec's cosmological writings, and in particular the question of the *firmament*, conceived as a resplendent transparency that both mirrors the "resplendence of the uppermost heaven [i.e. the Empyrean] and is reflecting it back"<sup>80</sup> while at the same time, "...divides and distinguishes [*onderscheet*] between the waters of the heavens and the waters of the earth". A cosmological division, which Ruusbroec then goes on to metaphysically liken to the foundational border "between time and eternity; between an outward active life and an inward spiritual life; between grace and nature".<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Rijcke*, ll. 197-199.

<sup>81</sup> See supra note 56.

By drawing sufficient attention to Ruusbroec's cosmology, such a reading further attests to the compelling nature of his synthetic thought, as he considers the broad sweep of the intrinsic logic of what the life of minne fully entails. By both drawing inwards within the Trinity as well as spilling out and "overflowing" throughout the very fruitfulness and activity of creation, minne's linkages in these cosmological movements are affirmed as bearing a "rough likeness" to the gratuitous, fruitful nature of the Father. Furthermore, as an "outward way of the senses", attention to Ruusbroec's cosmology highlights the enduring and extraordinary importance that he places upon the body as the seat of embodied rationality and the praxis of outward works within the common life [*ghemeyne leven*] and his overall mystical theology. However, when speaking of a glorified body, what type of body is Ruusbroec referring to and can we earnestly speak of such a glorified body in continuity with our own present, lived embodiment in the world?

Briefly returning to Randles' *Unmaking of the Christian Cosmos*, it is helpful to see the manner in which certain Patristic and Scholastic theologians have speculated upon the glorified body, especially when largely accenting the body's strong degree of discontinuity from our present lived embodiment, as well as the (unforeseen) consequences of such speculative thought. Such accents are particularly noticeable in Albertus Magnus, when he first "[R]ealized, in his Commentary on the Sentences, that the Almighty could not be contained within the Empyrean," as the manner of conceiving of the Empyrean was now being viewed as a definite place along the lines of an "Aristotelian 'body (corpus)'."<sup>82</sup> The profound significance of this point is in part two fold. First, by the full admission of Aristotelian terms and categories and in particular, Aristotle's conception of the body as *corpus*—as materially extended in the world and thus requiring spatiality, or a place for its extension—such an understanding of *corpus* no longer made it possible to conceive of the Trinity as dwelling within and in effect, being contained by the Empyrean itself. Hence, out of deference to God's transcendence, the immediate move of Albert and his noted pupil, Aquinas, (amongst others) was to propose a new, outermost "eleventh heaven", whereby such a heaven was no longer conceived of as a *corpus* and "God alone was held to occupy an infinite imaginary space."<sup>83</sup>

Similarly, such distancing moves were duplicated when it came to speculating upon the glorified body and its life of the senses, in that according to Aristotle's positing of the "fifth essence" as filling what the Scholastics would assign to the Empyrean, such an essence could neither be divided nor distinguished, thus remaining unchanged and foregoing decay. This Aristotelian essence would thus prove problematic for the Dominican scholastics, as the question of the voice provided a significant challenge in affirming its glorified existence. This is so, since the voice "[C]annot be produced without what Albert called in Aristotelian terms 'the breaking of air (*fractu aeris*)', [since] there would be no air capable of being divided [...] Thus there will be 'neither voice nor sound'.<sup>84</sup> Despite his dissatisfaction with such a conclusion, Randles notes that the famous pupil furthered his teacher's position on this point, such that: "On the transmission of sound in the Empyrean, where there would be no breathing and without breathing there can be no voice, Aquinas notes that some had said that praise of God there [in the Empyrean] might only be 'in the mind (*mentalem*)'.<sup>85</sup> The

---

<sup>82</sup>Randles, *Unmaking of the Medieval Christian Cosmos*, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Randles, *Unmaking of the Medieval Christian Cosmos*, 14-15.

<sup>84</sup> Randles, *Unmaking of the Medieval Christian Cosmos*, 16.

<sup>85</sup> Randles, *Unmaking of the Medieval Christian Cosmos*, 23.

same can be said for taste, for example, where Albert acknowledges that "taste implied the ingestion of something but bodies in the state of glory ingest nothing, therefore they would not be able to taste anything."<sup>86</sup> By this, we can already see a strong contrast with Ruusbroec's conception of the life of glory, recalling an earlier quoted passage: "And we shall taste the goodness of God [...] And it shall feed us and go through our souls and our bodies and we shall be hungry and thirsty for it always, and through that hunger and thirst both our tasting and our being fed shall remain always and be made new: and that is eternal life."<sup>87</sup>

In short, what Randles excellent scholarship in part unveils is how *spiritualized* the glorified body was becoming, as challenging attempts to reconcile and harmonize this "problematic" creedal tenet with natural philosophy increasingly amounted to hermeneutical strategies that stressed the glorified body's utter discontinuity with our present, lived embodiment. The glorified body was quickly becoming envisioned as far more disembodied. While along strictly cosmological lines, any sense for the continuity and interpenetration between the waters' above from those below was increasingly becoming rarefied, well before the collapse of the pre-modern cosmological synthesis itself. In turn, just as Oliver Davies has drawn attention to the Ptolemaic cosmos and its thinking of "heaven in the heavens" by the metaphorical logic of 'height', so too we can see in Albert's proposal of an outermost, "eleventh heaven" the instinctually metaphorical thinking of "distance". With such "distance", as set apart from creaturely immanence, Albert's metaphorical action of distancing God is illustrative of an increasingly familiar instinct that, in more general terms, Nominalism would later take on with full force as *the* manner in which to think, affirm and ultimately protect God's transcendence, especially when philosophic categories and modes of thought appear to impinge upon such transcendence.

As a thinking pattern and on purely metaphorical lines, by recognizing the relational foundations of mutual indwelling and its centrality for Ruusbroec, we see the opposite tendency for the Brabantine contemplative. That is, minne's erotic affirmation of God's greater alterity is always a matter of both flowing outwards with and for others in virtuous works, which then in turn pivots by way of desirously drawing inwards and inclining towards what remains an unsurpassable and founding alterity.<sup>88</sup> In short, it is only by drawing relationally closer and more proximate to God, in minne, that thus reaffirms His otherness. Hence, there is an apt parallel between what we have earlier encountered with the relational affirmation of particularity amid union with God in His greater alterity and that of the glorified body. Namely, just as for Ruusbroec, deeping in likeness and union with God renders the creature more creaturely, more particular, so too is the greater

---

<sup>86</sup> Randles, *Unmaking of the Medieval Christian Cosmos*, 18.

<sup>87</sup> See supra note 13.

<sup>88</sup> For an example of this metaphorical action of affirming God's greater alterity within a move towards immanence and proximity can be seen in the following citation, see Ruusbroec, *Boecksen der verclaringhe*, II. 24-28 (My translation): "Some of my friends desire, and have prayed me to show and explain in a few words, to the best of my ability, the nearest and the clearest truth [die naeste ende die claeerste waerheit] that I understand and feel from all of the highest doctrine that I have written, so that my words may not mislead anyone but may serve to improve each one;" "Selke van minnen vriended begheren ende hebben mi ghebeden, dat ic met corten waerden tonen ende verclaren soude, na mijn vermoghen, die naeste ende die claeerste waerheit die ic versta ende ghevoele van alle der hoechster leren die ic ghescreven hebbe, op dat minjre waerde niemen vererghert en werde maer ieghewelc ghebetert."

particularity and distinctiveness of our lived embodiment to be affirmed, not presently, yet when gloriously beholding "God with the eyes of our body".

### 1. "With the eyes of our body"

With this, we can now turn directly to Ruusbroec's *Kerstenen Ghelove* and his treatment of the last two articles of the Nicene Creed. In introducing the eleventh article of the "general resurrection of all bodies", Ruusbroec immediately clarifies this by first stating that "Each soul shall be given its own body again, which it wore and lived in on earth."<sup>89</sup> For Ruusbroec, the basis and theological rationale for this article of faith is none other than the founding reciprocal dimensions of *minne* itself, which includes the enduring efficacy and value that he places upon the person's outward, charitably virtuous works. This is seen as Ruusbroec writes that "God has considered from all eternity that it is fitting and proper that good people should be rewarded in soul and body, since they have loved God and served Him with soul and body."<sup>90</sup> Therefore, as it is generally consistent with his entire oeuvre, Ruusbroec's understanding of *minne* in this instance can be affirmed as guiding his mystical theological approach and speculative reflections upon the life of glory itself.<sup>91</sup> Employing *minne*'s distinct rationale can further be seen in what amounts to a curious turn that Ruusbroec later makes concerning the resurrected body, this time as it is envisioned at the last Judgment.

And through His power and His commandment all bodies of all people shall be made new and rise at the same moment; they shall not be the same in rank or reward, but they shall all be of one and the same age, that is the age at which our Lord Jesus Christ died for our sake. For a man of a hundred years and a child of one night shall be of the same physical size. And even if good people can be crippled on earth, lame or blind, they shall rise perfect, with all their limbs unstained and unblemished, glorious as the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ende overmids sine macht ende sijn gebot so selen alle lichamen der menschen weder gemaect sijn ende op verstaen in enen ogen blicke, niet gelijc van ordinen noch van loene, maer al gelijc van enen tyde der ouder, dat es van den selven tide dat ons here Jhesus Cristus was, doe hi starf omme onsen wille. Want een mensche van hondert jaren ende een kint van eere nacht die selen ghelijc groet van lichamen sijn. Ende al sijn die goede menschen hier cropel, lam ende blent, si selen op verstaen volcomen, met allen leden, sonder vleckende ende sonder smette, glorioes alsoe die lichame ons heren Jhesu Cristi.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 152-154: "[...] dat es dat iegewelke ziele sal weder ontfaen haren properen eigenen lichame dien si droech ende dair sijn inne leefde op erterike."

<sup>90</sup> See supra note 2.

<sup>91</sup> For a similar account, see Ruusbroec, *Boecksken*, ll. 56-67, 70-74: "'Father, I will that where I am My servant shall also be, that he may see the glory which Thou hast given Me.' And in another place He says that His servants will sit at the feast, that is, in the richness and fullness of their virtues which they have wrought. And He shall pass before them and serve them with His glory which He has merited. This He will give generously and shall reveal it to all His beloved and to some more, and to some less, to each individually according to his merit and his understanding of the majesty of His glory and honor that He Himself alone has earned through His life and through His death. Thus all the saints shall be forever with Christ and each in his own order and in that degree of glory which he has merited through his works by means of the help of God....See, thus you may marl that we are united with God by means of an intermediary, both here in grace and in glory. And in this intermediary there is a great distinction [onderscheet] and otherness [anderheit] as much in life as in reward, as I have told you."

<sup>92</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 172-181.



Here, Ruusbroec employs minne's familiar semantic categories of "difference" [*differencie*] and "distinction" [*onderscheet*] when describing the Last Judgment. In terms of *onderscheet*—which entails the question of the activity of minne and the life of grace as a growing in likeness unto the Image, the Son, 2nd Person of the Trinity, in whom we historically receive as created—for the life of glory, Ruusbroec consistently affirms that their will remain distinction and otherness in both "rank...[and] reward". Not only is this stress consistent with his overall understanding of minne and union with God as admitting of distinction and otherness, but furthermore, it is a historically important point, as the ideas surrounding the Free Spirit Heresy and Ruusbroec's depiction of it had directly challenged this point of distinction, opting instead to envision such a glorious union with God as an eschatological merging and an inactive dissolution of any and all otherness.<sup>93</sup> For Ruusbroec, such ideas not only easily merge into forms of autotheism that compromise the essential difference between Creator and creature, but they also contradict fundamental tenets and thinking patterns of minne itself as a praxis of loving that can never extract itself from its more active modes of desiring and virtuous living. Nevertheless, while affirming the enduring *onderscheet* in the life of glory, Ruusbroec also affirms—in a consistent, yet albeit curious manner—that at the moment of Judgment, "all bodies...shall all be of one and the same age, that is the age at which our Lord Jesus Christ died for our sake." Hence, as Ruusbroec speculates that no matter our length of years while living in the orders of nature and grace, we shall all come to judgment at the age of thirty-three, the age when "Christ died for our sake." It is a curious and perhaps at first glance, a somewhat bizarre insistence, and yet what Ruusbroec aims at conveying in this passage is that there will be no fundamental difference both amongst everyone in coming to receive the judgment of Christ, as well as our common [*ghemeyne*], full mutuality with the humanity of Christ in which he died for us on the Cross. By maintaining both full mutuality and the absence of any fundamental difference, along with the remaining distinction of our works and rewards, Ruusbroec's understanding of minne once more allows for him to affirm his understanding of relationality and radical union that distinctly avoids the problematics of the Free Spirit's heretical views of glory as an ultimate merging with and becoming God.

However, concerning issues of embodiment and Ruusbroec's thinking of the glorified body, how does his embodied speculations of the "man of a hundred years and a child of one night" as without difference make sense with his earlier insistence that "Each soul shall be given its own body again, which it wore and lived in on earth."<sup>94</sup> Barring any easy reading solutions that would simply assert that Ruusbroec has clearly contradicted himself in this instance, instead, I would like to put forward the alternative reading that there is no immediate conflict here for Ruusbroec and that such an insistence is well in keeping with what he have seen previously in Ruusbroec's founding presumption of mutual indwelling. Namely, Ruusbroec's understanding of mutual indwelling articulates a foundational relationality of the human person in union with God as inherent and prior

---

<sup>93</sup> See Ruusbroec, Boecksen, II. 84-90, 97-102: "Yes, and some are so insane as to state that the Persons will disappear in the Divinity and that, there, nothing else will remain in eternity but the essential substance of Divinity; and that all the blessed spirits with God will have returned to the essential [*weseleke*] beatitude, so simply that, beyond this, nothing else will remain, neither will nor activity nor distinct knowledge of any creature....This absolute simplicity which they possess they regard as being God because there they find a natural repose. This is why they consider themselves as being God in the ground of their simplicity, for they lack real faith, hope and love. By means of the bare emptiness which they feel and possess they are, so they say, without knowledge, loveless, and quit of all virtues."

<sup>94</sup> See supra note 88.

to any forms of 'identity'—with what we more commonly associate with modernity's "turn to the subject"—as the latter would insist upon (in keeping with Ruusbroec's idiom) 'difference' and not 'distinction' as founding the creature's inherent alterity amongst both others as well as with God. Rather, by minding Ruusbroec's paradoxical insistence that the Final Judgment will entail a common embodiment as both without difference as well as unquestionably particular, the paradox that Ruusbroec's speculations employ are similarly echoed by the traditional, biblical affirmation of where the seat of identity is located. That is, a "tree is known by its own fruit".<sup>95</sup>

Nevertheless, why does Ruusbroec envision our entry into the life of glory at the seat of Christ's Judgment in such an admittedly bizarre manner? Despite its odd insistence, Ruusbroec displays the consummation of its logic in a unique, fascinating passage:

Look, in this way every soul shall put on its own body, and (people) shall come to judgment with soul and body. And as Job says, the holy man, we shall see God with the eyes of our body that means we shall see our Lord Jesus Christ in his human nature. For He shall show himself to all people in the same form and the same shape in which he lived and died for our sake. The good shall see joy and glory on his face. But to those who are evil he shall show himself in terror, with great contempt and great anger. And every man shall receive just sentence on his words and works and all he has done, through the justice and wisdom of God who knows all things clearly.

Siet, aldus sal iegewelke ziele haren eigenen lichame ane doen ende sal comen ten ordele gods met zielen ende met live. Ende alsoe alsoe Job spreect, die heilige man, so selen wi met onsen vleeschliken ogen gode sijn, dat es te verstane onsen here Jhesum Cristum na sier mensceit. Want hi sal heme vertoenen allen menschen inder selver vormen ende gedaenten daer hi <omme onsen wille> in leefde ende starf. Die goede menschen selen sien sijn aenscien blide ende glorioes. Maer hi sal heme vertoenen den quanden in gruwele, met groter onwerden ende sere vertorent. Ende overmids die gerechteheit ende die wijsheit gods, die alle dinc claerlec bekint, so sal iegewelc mensce recht ordeel ontfanen van waerden ende van werken ende van alle dien dat hi iegedede.<sup>96</sup>

In this passage, Ruusbroec begins by emphasizing once more that we shall come to judgment, *coram deo*, with both our own soul and body. And while *onderscheet* remains in terms of our reception of Christ, the basis for our lack of embodied difference is clarified by Ruusbroec in an interesting move wherein he speculates that everyone shall be of the same "form and [...] shape" of Christ, "in which He lived and died for our sake." This point can be seen as a development of his earlier cosmological writings in *Rijcke*, wherein he states that "[W]here bodiliness ends, all the senses ends; for no sense can comprehend God or angels or souls, for they are without form/shape [*sonder ghedeente*]."<sup>97</sup> Of course, Ruusbroec does not contradict this early position. Rather, in *Kerstenen Ghelove* he further develops and nuances it, by reasserting a distinct, Christological perspective (and later on, a Mariological assertion<sup>98</sup>) of Christ's glorified humanity in which we shall behold at judgment.<sup>99</sup> Such a dogmatic theological perspective then in turn makes way for the uniqueness of Ruusbroec thought, first and foremost, as a mystical theologian, whereby he then situates our common beholding of Christ at the seat of judgment as none other than sharing the full, embodied reality of the Cross—"in

<sup>95</sup> See Luke 6, 43-45.

<sup>96</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, II. 182-192.

<sup>97</sup> See supra note 60.

<sup>98</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, II. 249-252.

<sup>99</sup> See supra note 35, which recalls Davies' stress upon the embodied glorified Christ, in continuity with our own spatial and temporal existence, as a perspective that reaffirms Chalcedon Christology, as the glorified body preserves Christ as both fully human, fully divine.

the same form and shape in which he lived and died for our sake." Such is why he stresses that while we shall receive once more our own particular bodies, as our bodies shall be of no difference—of the same physical size and age of Christ—in commonly baring his embodied outpouring of love beneath the *weight of the Cross*. Furthermore, Ruusbroec speculates that there shall be no difference amongst all as we equally behold the external loving work of Christ, giving Himself to all as "He shall show himself to all people in the same form and the same shape [...]"

For Ruusbroec, as we have consistently seen earlier in his cosmological reflections, it is crucial that he emphasizes this point that at the Cross, all people shall commonly "see God with the eyes of our body". For such an embodied emphasis displays, what is for Ruusbroec, the body and its senses as the mediating forum and gateway for both knowing that which is "above reason, but not without reason" and in turn—through the specificity of one's works as the seat of personal identity—being known. According to the logic and rationale of *minne* and its embodied form of knowing, to come to fully know the other is to affirm union with the other, without difference. Or, in this case, to become the "same form and shape" with the other's embodied life. And yet, the mutuality and relationality of *minne* places an equal (if not greater) emphasis upon how we are to be *known* in such an embrace, as "We shall embrace love with love and we shall be by love comprehended."<sup>100</sup> Such is where the uniqueness and particularity of our bodies and their loving works, of the order of *onderscheet*, is to be affirmed. For its how we shall receive Christ—and receive Him, joined with Him on the Cross—which shall ultimately come to reflect ourselves and our (un)likeness to Christ. Whether we mirror and reflect Him, both in our shared embrace, without difference, with his humanity, and whether we are also to see the "glory and joy on his face" as *imaging* His divinity. Which is to say, while fully joined with Him in His suffering humanity, do our lives, through such works, equally bear witness to the divinity of Christ as inescapably Other. Or, as is often the case when it comes to physical and/or emotional suffering, does such a relationality and its abiding otherness ultimately collapse while enduring such suffering. Thereby growing in greater dissimilarity and unlikeness to Christ—fully human, fully divine—and in turn, mirroring more our own selves and the absence of such a redeeming relationality, seeing ourselves in Him that collapses such otherness, such that Christ "show[s] himself in terror, with great contempt and great anger."

## 2. "Go into the joy of thy Lord"

Ruusbroec builds from this depiction of Christ's Final Judgment and in turn, envisions the glorious life not as a static beholding, yet as a redeemed, fully human embodied life that participates within the Trinitarian life—without difference, with distinction—as a dynamic life of *minne* itself, wherein "God Himself is our essential [*wezeleken*] reward."<sup>101</sup> Thus, unlike what we have briefly seen by the Dominican Scholastics such as Albertus Magnus and Aquinas, speculation about the life of glory does not encounter God as still fundamentally removed, continuously mediated and set apart from the blessed, as evidenced in what we have seen in the cosmological proposals that would create a further, separated 'eleventh heaven'—a space fundamentally set apart, and in discontinuity

---

<sup>100</sup> See note 13.

<sup>101</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, II. 204.

with the created world wherein God alone could dwell.<sup>102</sup> As we have seen throughout this reflection, what allows Ruusbroec to articulate a fundamentally different depiction of the life of glory rests primarily in his presumption of mutual indwelling. As mutual indwelling presumes the very naturalness of union with God—fully dwelling in God, and God fully dwelling in His creatures—which in turn, through an active, virtuous life and by God’s grace is brought to likeness and distinction [*onderscheet*] in further imaging the Son and its perfection in glory. The dynamism of this union, introduced by Ruusbroec's biblical reference to the Matthean Gospel account of "Go into the joy of the Lord"<sup>103</sup> is seen in the interplay between minne's *wezeleke* rest in enjoyment, as well as its continual activity and praxis:

[W]e shall go into the joy of our Lord which is measureless and fathomless. And we shall lose ourselves in it and remain there essentially [*wezeleke bliven*] in an eternal enjoyment. And we shall stand in ourselves, each in his state and his order.

[D]an selen wi ingaen in die vroude ons heren, die sonder <mate ende sonder> gront es. Ende daerinne zelen wi ons verliezen ende wezeleke bliven in een ewech ghebruken. Ende wi zelen in ons selven staen, iegewelc in sinen staet ende in sine ordine.<sup>104</sup>

Consistent with other accounts, Ruusbroec depicts minne in its glorified state as both one of restful, ‘essential [*wezeleke*] [...] eternal enjoyment’, as well as its continuously active, virtuous and charitable sense, as seen in the full-flourishing of the creature’s autonomy as distinctly particular. By this, Ruusbroec summarizes the distinctly anthropological dimensions of mutual indwelling, such that a permanent dynamism and an axis of dissimilarity are maintained between the ‘greater dissimilarity’ of Creator and creature, by its contrasting of ‘essential rest’ in God and minne’s eternal activity wherein we shall “stand in ourselves” according to the distinction of our works, “each in his order and state”. Likewise, Ruusbroec also gives mention to mutual indwelling’s more cosmological dimensions of continuity wherein he states:

And we shall be raised up towards our heavenly Father in Christ Jesus with honor and praise eternal. We shall have the beauty of heaven and earth under us, and of all the elements in the splendor they shall have after the last day [...] And our bodies shall be seven times brighter than the sun and transparent like crystal or glass [...]

Ende in Cristo Jhesu zelen wi op gerecht sijn tote onsen hemelscen vader met eweegher eeren ende met eweghen love. Onder ons zelen wi hebben scoenheit des hemels ende der erden ende alle der elemente, die geciert zelen sijn na den lesten dach [...] Ende onse lichamen zelen sijn zevenvout clare dan die zonne ende dorscinech alse cristael ochte een gelaes [...]<sup>105</sup>

In such a glorious state and from a cosmological perspective, Ruusbroec speculates upon our union with God in greater continuity with the world as created. Just as we shall receive once more our own body, so too is the blessed Empyrean envisioned in continuation with the 'beauty of heaven and earth under us'. By this, the Empyrean is envisioned by Ruusbroec as a specific, soteriological

---

<sup>102</sup> While it extends beyond the immediate scope of this research, as a hypothesis, I would like to suggest that these cosmological developments within Scholastic thought can in turn be accompanied by the appearance of the Eucharist seen in its explicit eschatological dimensions as a "pledge of future glory" [*futurae gloriae pignus*], as reflected in Aquinas' *O Sacrum Convivium*, of which the Church honors by incorporating it in her liturgical life on the feast of Corpus Christi. See also *SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM*, n. 47.

<sup>103</sup> See Mt. 25, 21, as quoted in Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 230-231.

<sup>104</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 232-235.

<sup>105</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 236-239; 242-243.

place: as the perfection of creation itself. Which in turn, by virtue of mutual indwelling, the created world is thus viewed as neither absorbed in glory, nor diminished. Instead, just as we had previously seen the question of the firmament and its "transparency" cosmologically functioning for Ruusbroec as a "spiritual intermediary that *divides* and *distinguishes* [onderscheet]"<sup>106</sup> God from the created world; so too in glory, it is the glorified body itself, "transparent like crystal or glass" that is upheld as the source of mediation—distinguishing and preserving God's relational alterity, while equally affirming our union with God as distinctly and necessarily embodied. Thus, as Ruusbroec's understanding of mutual indwelling synthesizes both its anthropological and cosmological dimensions—such that "if we seek Him, we shall find Him in ourselves, and above ourselves, where He occupies Himself in His glory,"<sup>107</sup>—these modalities converge in Ruusbroec's speculation about our sensuous, embodied beholding of God's glory with our "interior" and "exterior" senses:

With the eyes of our body we shall behold our Lord Jesus Christ and his glorious mother with all the saints and all the physical beauty I told you of before. With our inner eyes we shall see the mirror of the Wisdom of God in which all things that have ever been made and can bring us joy shall glitter and shine. And with our outer ears we shall hear the melody and the sweet song of the angels and the saints who shall praise God forever. And with our inner ears we shall hear the inborn Word of God the Father, and in that Word we shall be given all knowledge and all truth. And the noble odor of the Holy Spirit shall pass by us, sweeter than all balsam and all the most expensive herbs that have ever been grown. And this odor will draw us out of ourselves into the eternal love of God. And we shall taste the goodness of God, which is sweet beyond all honey. And it shall feed us and go through our souls and our bodies and we shall be hungry and thirsty for it always and through that hunger and thirst both our tasting and our being fed shall remain always and be made new: and that is eternal life.

Wi zelen met onsen lijfleken ogen ane sien onsen here Jhesum Cristum ende sijn gloriose moeder met allen heileghen, ende alle die lijfleke scoenheit die ic u vore genoemt hebbe. Wi selen met onsen inwendegen ogen aensien den spighel der wijsheit gods, daer alle die dinghe inne blicken ende lichte<n> selen die yege worden, die ons verblinden mogen. Ende wi zelen horen met onsen uutwendegen oren die melody ende den zoeten sanc der ingelen ende der heilegen, die gode zelen loven ewelec. Ende met onse inwendege oren zelen wi horen dat ingebornne woert gods des vaders. Ende in dien woerde zelen wij ontfaen alle const ende alle waerheit. Ende die edele goere des heilechts geests sal vore ons liden, die zoetere es dan alle die balseme ende alle die dierbare crude die yegheworden. Ende die goere sal ons trecken ute ons selven in die ewege minne gods. Ende wi zelen gesmaken die goetheit gods, die zoete es boven al honech. Ende die sal ons voeden ende dore gaen ziele ende lijf. Ende dair na sal ons altoes hngeren ende dorsten; ende overmids honger ende dorst so sal smaken ende voeden altoes bliven ende vernuwen: ende dat es ewech leven.<sup>108</sup>

Immediately apparent in this section is the very Trinitarian structure of our embodied beholding of God in glory. In this way, this passage bears a distinct resemblance to his description of the "five voices" that mark human interiority, as presented in *Four Temptations* [*Vier Becoringhen*].<sup>109</sup> However, unlike the 'Five Voices', and our previous analysis of the Trinity and human interiority, as beginning with the Son of God distinctly regarded in His divinity; in this current passage re our embodied beholding of God in glory, Ruusbroec reemphasizes the basis of this beholding in view of Christ's exalted, embodied state, joined with his 'glorious mother' and 'all the saints' at the right hand of God. This distinct starting point is significant in that it highlights the role of

---

<sup>106</sup> See note 56.

<sup>107</sup> See note 78.

<sup>108</sup> Ruusbroec, *Kerstenen Ghelove*, ll. 249-265.

<sup>109</sup> See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia X, Vier Becoringhe*, ll.250-287. See also my analysis of this passage in Chapter 2, "Possessing the Unfathomable. Approaching Jan van Ruusbroec's Mystical Anthropology as Responsive to the Primacy and Praxis of Minne."

Christ's exalted embodiment and our union with Christ by way of our own glorified bodies as continuously mediating our beholding of the Trinity. Thus, such a portrait of an embodied life of glory and its eternal hungering and thirsting for God's goodness stands as a preeminent example within Ruusbroec's oeuvre that demonstrates what we have earlier indicated as Ruusbroec's distinct, early-Humanist stress upon union with God in his 'greater dissimilarity' as a further redeeming of the intrinsic goodness of creation as well as our own goodness in all of its distinct, embodied particularity.

### §3. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In our analysis, it has been shown, by way of mutual indwelling and its distinct, cosmological register that Ruusbroec depicts the various modalities of union with God along an axis of greater continuity that attempts to seamlessly thread, 'transparently', yet without confusion, the orders of nature, grace and glory. Such a reflection hopefully has left little doubt as to the enduring importance Ruusbroec accords both to the body itself and its outwards works of virtue and charitable love within his own mystical theology. For Ruusbroec, issues of embodiment and particularity are approached, *not according to the basis of identity*, but relationally thought, as extending from the *uniqueness of our works and the uniqueness of our loving*. Seating the particularity of the embodied individual, by way of the uniqueness of their works, the uniqueness of their loving, thus challenges our more modern presumptions that particularity is assigned and preserved by way of autonomy and 'difference'. Rather, it may come as a surprise to see—amid thinking such strong continuity—that not only does Ruusbroec equally insist upon the creature's own distinct form of autonomy, as created and in the world. But moreso that Ruusbroec maintains such an insistence in his speculations on our embodied specifically in terms of our life in glory. By way of its unyielding, erotic insistence, Ruusbroec's embodied speculations of our life in glory illustrate minne's own continual dynamism as a sensuous beholding, tasting and thirsting after the goodness of the Trinitarian God. And it is this unyielding dynamism, which Ruusbroec thus emphatically calls 'eternal life'. Hence, by such an eschatological view, for Ruusbroec, union with God necessitates forms of mediation, such that the perdurance of the body in glory effectively mitigates against Free Spirit heretical claims of autotheism ('becoming God') or pantheistic versions of union with God as a full merging, envisioned as completely 'imageless' and 'idle' [*ledicheit*].

In turn, the issue for us all along has not to become overly burdened by pre-modern cosmologies as such, yet to see how Ruusbroec thinks of such sensuous embodiment and his speculations over our glorious beholding of Christ's very humane, glorified body. That is, in seeing God "with the eyes of our body" and its specific relevance to issues of particularity, universality and alterity. Thus, we have set out to investigate how minne contends with these competing claims, via *ghemeyne leven* as dual cosmological and anthropological imperatives, in all their continuity and discontinuity. An imperative to seek God both "in ourselves, and above ourselves", and how such an unceasing rhythm is dynamically secured through a more comprehensive understanding of mutual indwelling itself.

From this analysis, we have analyzed the synthetic breadth and sweep of minne, by way of viewing Ruusbroec's thinking of mutual indwelling in both its anthropological and cosmological domains. The compelling, retrievable nature of Ruusbroec's view of minne has in turn been asserted in terms of the various linkages that it frequently maintains, both in assuring the foundational relations and alterity between Creator and creature, as well as the various modes and modelessness of minne itself. Not only does Ruusbroec link, what is largely for us today a more divided view of love in terms of *caritas, eros and agape*, yet he does so precisely by thinking their mutual implication and involvement, without collapsing one against the other. Again, I contend that minne's appeal is attested in the various linkages that Ruusbroec makes between seemingly disparate realms and modes of loving, founding such disparities within the very dynamism of minne itself. A dynamism that images and renders intelligible love's own inherent logic and rationale. And it is precisely here that the enduring significance of the body and Ruusbroec's glorified speculations upon its continuing embodiment show itself to be of founding importance in coming to a fuller account of minne's dynamic synthesis. For just as mutual indwelling's anthropological domain stresses the creature's relationality with God as "suspended" and "hanging- in" [*inhanghen*] the other—hence, a relationship of foundational *immediacy*; conversely, Ruusbroec's cosmological and embodied reflections on the "outward way of the senses" and the charitably virtuous aspects of *ghemeyne leven* ultimately secure the equally enduring status of minne's active, *mediated* character. The perdurance of the body in the life of glory is thus fully consistent in demonstrating minne's ongoing, dynamic character that maintains and upholds minne's various modes and modelessness. Contrary to the Free Spirit's thinking of charitable, virtuous acts as preliminary and provisional, Ruusbroec's insistence on a very real, continuous and particular embodied life in glory is thus set in strong contrast to this view, as such an active life, like the body itself and its loving works, is partially constitutive of minne itself and hence, refuses to be left behind. For Ruusbroec, such an insistence on the body attests to his overall strong sense what we may call his *embodied realism*. For it is the same, continuous body: whether that be the Eucharistic body or the Glorified body, as opening onto *ghemeyne leven*, as indeed the same sensuous, concrete, human body is seen in stark contrast away from a spiritualized, universal and overly-transcendent body removed from immanence and all traces of human particularity. For in closing as Ruusbroec writes in describing the "first scale" of minne "that was ever practiced", he eloquently describes what it is in fact that he "finds in nature", a cosmological perspective that affirms not the world, in of itself, but the very manner in which world has been given and how we are to live and respond to God and others within such a world, as *created*, amid the ongoing activity and fruitfulness that nature shows us—a view, eminently retrievable for us today.

It teaches us that God made us from nothing and that He gave Himself to us and all that He had made. This love that is God is common to us all and to each one in particular and (belongs) totally to those who love. This love is one, above all enumeration and without enumeration. And it is eternal above time and without time, above measure and without measure. And it is a pure spirit, without place. See, this is the noble scale of love, which God has given us and it is all that He can give. And this is why we must leave all things and

Die leert ons dat ons god van nieuwe maecht, ende dat <hi ons> hem selven gaf ende al dat hi ghemaect hadde. [Dat] Dese minne, die god es, die es onser alder ghemeyne ende yeghewelcs sonderlinghe, ende al <ghe> heel die mint. Dese minne es een boven alle ghetale, sonder ghetal. Ende si es eewich boven tijt ende sonder tijt, boven mate ende sonder mate. Ende si es een puer gheest, al sonder stat. Siet diet es die eedele waghe der minnen, die ons god ghegheven hevet ende al dat he vermach. Ende hier omme moeten wij alle dinc laten ende begheven, selen wy

*Chapter III. We Shall See God with the Eyes of our Body*

give them up, if we are going to satisfy the scale of highest love. die waghe der hoogster minnen pleghen.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Ruusbroec, *Beghinen* 2b, ll. 660-669.



## CHAPTER IV

### FRANS JOZEF VAN BEECK, NATIVE ATTUNEMENT AND THE "ADMIRABILE COMMERCIIUM"

#### §1. INTRODUCTION

The following reflections will consider at large the late Dutch Jesuit systematic theologian, Frans Jozef van Beeck (1930-2011) as innovating and expanding upon my general critique of the reception of mysticism within modernity. It will then be shown how van Beeck supplants this critique with his own distinct theological treatment of mysticism as an integral feature within his theological synthesis. A synthesis, which, for van Beeck, reflects a profound sense of unity, both between the various theological disciplines in relation to the "Great Tradition", as well as the equally profound cosmological-anthropological-theological unity underlying his work. For van Beeck, this overarching unity innovates the premodern anthropological trichotomy of body-soul-spirit in a variety of formulations, such as: heteronomy-autonomy-theonomy as well as the post-Vatican II distinct faith identities, which he identifies as Pistic, Charismatic and Mystic.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of the study of mysticism, van Beeck's trichotomy is a helpful hermeneutic when approaching the distinctly modern, psychological/universalist legacy within mysticism and its founding support in "mystical experience" (religious, or otherwise). Wherein, such understandings of mysticism are upheld within the tradition of the Enlightenment in terms solely of the autonomous subject. It is argued [See Introduction §3] that modern approaches to the practice and study of mysticism are paradoxically indebted and owe a strong sense of continuity with the manual approach to mysticism. In such an approach, the relation between asceticism and mysticism were increasingly being divided, such that mysticism—as 'infused contemplation—was seen as largely extraordinary to the revealed faith of the Church. Hence, any attempts at trying to maintain the linkage between asceticism and mysticism concentrated on the relation between 'acquired contemplation' as mediating moral theology with that of the extraordinary phenomenon of passive and immediate 'mystical experience'. Furthermore, from a historical-contextual perspective, mysticism by its association and renewal with figures of the Modernist crisis, substantially developed the reputation that it was at odds with speculative and dogmatic theology and a red flag for heterodox views—that "false mysticism [...] in its attempt to eliminate the immovable frontier that separates creatures from their Creator".<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J., *Catholic Identity After Vatican II: Three Types of Faith in the One Church* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985). See also Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J. *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology, Volume 1: Understanding the Christian Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989). See also Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J. *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology, Volumes II/I-II/IVB* (Collegeville, MN.: The Liturgical Press, 1993-2001); henceforth: *GE*.

<sup>2</sup> See Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, 9.

While these discussions have certainly waned, their historical relevance is that within a greater purview of theology as a whole, the defense and legitimacy of mysticism had become dramatically reduced, thus occupying a highly narrow, individualized sphere of relevance. In a word, mysticism itself, along with 'mystical experience', had itself become *extraordinary*, interventionist and wholly extrinsicist. In reaction to this sustained development, we find opposite pleas for the more *ordinary, everyday*, and immanently active forms of mysticism, in works from Jesuits such as Karl Rahner and Michel De Certeau. And yet, while this was certainly a necessary corrective, such appeals were nonetheless largely based equally upon the experiential basis of mysticism as largely distinct from the praxis and content of theological reflection itself.

Here, amid these unfortunate, though historically undeniable developments, we in turn can add the separation between mysticism—construed in its modern sense as highly individualized and autonomous—as entirely distinct with advances in the liturgical movement, as well as liturgical theology as necessarily communal and social. In van Beeck's writings, not only is such a false dichotomy both historically, as well as fundamentally challenged. But furthermore, by resituating the unspecified "hierarchy of truth"<sup>3</sup> to *Dei Verbum's* teaching, life, worship, van Beeck repeatedly argues that "doctrines arise in worship and witness, and must never be allowed to belie their pedigree; their key function is and remains to ensure worship and to enable witness."<sup>4</sup> Hence, by challenging the false distinction between liturgical and mystical theology, we can further speculate that by securing the distinct, theological credibility of these distinct disciplines, the legacy of van Beeck's work invites us to consider in what ways each of these disciplines can further engage, in a constructive manner, with systematic theology. Such that "*pia veritas* amounts to *vera pietas*. [For] at heart, the practice of theology is intellectual worship, not only on account of its divine subject matter, but also on account of the God-given thirst for understanding with which the subject matter is pursued."<sup>5</sup> For it is this thirst—an unrelenting and inexhaustible *eros* for the "admirable exchange" at the heart of Christian life and enshrined by liturgy itself—which, in response to Christ having

---

<sup>3</sup> See Lumen Gentium 10

<sup>4</sup> Frans Jozef van Beeck S.J., "Trinitarian Theology as Participation", in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall S.J., Gerald O'Collins S.J. (eds.) *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: University Press, 1999), 295-325, 313.

<sup>5</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §8, 8, 26. Van Beeck goes on to further exemplify the constructive relevance and interchange that he sees between liturgical and mystical theology in this illustrative, pastoral reflection. "Let me sing an old song. I have long felt that Christians who leave the church nowadays do so to a significant extent out of boredom. In church, you can count on finding some pretty good people and *ditto* fellowship, and some fine initiatives on behalf of the growing multitude of the disadvantaged, but no amplitude of purview, no ecstasy, no *theōria*—in sum, no sense of *participation in God, no mysticism*. The inner affinity with the Mystery *in whom we are alive and move and have being*—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—can grow on us only in the experience of God as 'the All': the God of each of us at the expense of none of us, the God who never comes alone but always with the entire cosmos and all of humanity. This experience is the heart of *common worship*, with its cosmic and universalistic dimensions, its significant silence and significant speech, its significant gesture and significant motionlessness, its interplay of the seen and the unseen—in sum, its *doxology made tangible*. Prayerlessness and presencelessness are the bane of Christian churches today, it seems to me; 'praying-for-this-that-and-the-other', professions of the human need for 'salvation', and homilizing disguised as prayer have largely eclipsed praise and thanksgiving. Among theologians, overconcern with soteriological and ethical themes has bred, by default, a lack of taste for the mystagogical, liturgical, and mystical traditions as major *loci theologici*. It is crypto-Pelagian to be too ethical in Church. End of song." See van Beeck, "Trinitarian Theology as Participation", 318.

"lavished upon us his divinity", we can thus understand "Christian worship...[as] the act by which it most closely participates in the divine nature."<sup>6</sup>

A. THE BASIS FOR A NEW THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS. TRICHOTOMY: COSMOLOGY – ANTHROPOLOGY – THEOLOGY

A helpful entry point into the theological synthesis of the Dutch Jesuit Franz Jozef van Beeck is to gauge his specific, theological anthropology as a dynamic, "native attunement to God". The primary way in which he situates and expands upon such a theological anthropology, always from within the "Great Tradition" and with an eye towards the contemporary world, van Beeck does so by reinterpreting the premodern traditional trichotomy of body-soul-spirit in terms of cosmology (body), anthropology (soul) and theology (spirit). Clarifying this central importance of this reinterpretation, van Beeck states:

It has been repeated again and again in this systematic theology that humanity is ultimately what it is by virtue of the *dynamic orientation to God* that lies at the core of its being—that is to say, by virtue of *final causality*. It is true, of course, that humanity remains essentially marked by cosmic heteronomy and by anthropological—that is, distinctively spiritual—autonomy. Yet in the last analysis humanity is essentially and decisively marked by *theonomy*. Created and sustained by God in everything we are and have and do, we are natively aimed at God.<sup>7</sup>

Van Beeck diversely employs this trichotomy in various parts of his work, such that, for example, he interprets Aquinas famous five proofs along such cosmological, anthropological and theological lines.<sup>8</sup> Primarily, however, van Beeck employs this trichotomy in order to account for the very dynamism of humanity's *potentia obedientialis*<sup>9</sup> and desirous, thenomous attunement to God. Which in turn, as natively attuned, van Beeck's approach to Revelation shows forth a dynamic, "anthropological infrastructure", especially evident in the "mystical form of faith" wherein the

---

<sup>6</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §67, 1, 79.

<sup>7</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §141, 5, 8.

<sup>8</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §102, 1-10, 68-85, 85: "[T]he human spirit's dynamic attunement to God, left implicit in the argument [Aquinas' "five ways"] serves to detect that cosmic realities are similarly attuned to God. Thus, in a real sense, the progression of the *quinque viae* as a whole is an ascent: *cosmology* → *anthropology* → *theology*. And the one motor force that drives the ascent is the attraction universally exercised by the transcendent God, who accounts for the dynamisms of both cosmos and humanity, as well as for their natural affinity with, and mutual attunement to, each other."

<sup>9</sup> As one of the rare lights in 19th Century dogmatic thought, the "chief theologian of the supernatural order", Scheeben writes of the *potentia obedientialis*, with reference to Aquinas, as the "transformation" of the natural into the supernatural whereby the "essence of nature remains, it is only elevated and transformed. Therefore it must have a capacity for such elevation and transformation", see Matthias Scheeben, *Nature and Grace* trans. Cyril Vollert S.J. (St. Louis, MO: Herder Book Co., 1954), 39-40. Scheeben goes on, arguing that: "This is the reason why supernature is not contrary to nature (and hence unnatural) but is quite in harmony with nature, and can even be called natural, in the sense that it is conformable with nature and is not unnatural [....] In a word, the supernatural may be called natural to the extent that it is not unnatural. And it is not unnatural, first, because nature, while not aspiring to the supernatural by its own forces, is capable of reaching the supernatural through the influence and operation of another, higher nature. This is *obediential potency*, which is actuated under the guidance of a higher being to which unreserved obedience is given [....] Therefore, although the two orders [natural/supernatural] are not so connected that the lower encloses the higher, they are united in such a way that the higher encompasses the lower and presupposes it as its substructure and prerequisite condition."

transition from nature to grace “meet in perfect harmony, as humanity truly comes into its own, on the strength of total dependence of God.”<sup>10</sup> Hence, theonomy is of a fundamental, natural orientation, one that shows “a new relational self [...] their deepest identity, filled to overflowing, [which] turns out to have an ability that they barely, if at all suspected: the capacity for total abandon of self.”<sup>11</sup> And it is this capacity for ecstasy, or de-centering, which van Baeck interprets as our *potentia obedientialis* to God. An *immanence* of Christ as one's center, *intimior intimo meo*, the “person's deepest identity”, which in a participative encounter, van Baeck will himself define itself as “mysticism”.<sup>12</sup> Mysticism, in this sense, is itself “natively” rooted in a fundamental, theological anthropology, which in turn, by way of the tradition of Christian humanism, is nourished by a continual vision of man as fundamentally relational, showing human integrity, fulfillment and solidarity with others in the world by way of furthering our union with God.

#### B. AUTONOMY, HETERONOMY AND THE QUESTION OF “RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE”

It is crucial to understand the dynamic, theological anthropology at root in van Baeck's theological synthesis and how it furnishes a dynamic sense of unity between religious faith and contemporary culture amid the dialectics of cosmological heteronomy, anthropological autonomy and theological theonomy. For such a unity and “*integrated account of the cosmos, humanity, and God*,” van Baeck argues, has animated the Great Tradition of the undivided Church.”<sup>13</sup> Concerning the task of systematic theology, van Baeck portrays this unity as something that seeks to be achieved anew, and yet it stems from the very givenness of creation itself. Thus, while he is at times realistic and openly recognizes that such claims of unity are clearly “disputable”, however, the proposed synthesis that van Baeck proposes avoids any justifiable charge of simply being Romantic or “optimistic”. For the validity of such a critique would instead be rightfully addressed to the tradition of the Enlightenment, one that “holds that the *autonomy* of the truly emancipated human individual is the privileged norm of authentic religion. That autonomy is found by a *return to nature in its purity*,” which shows no signs of “*heteronomy*”.<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly enough, it is here, in this isolated view of anthropological autonomy as *immanent* do we see a view of “mysticism” tied with the “religious experience” of such autonomous, emancipated individuals. By stressing a dynamic, theological anthropology, van Baeck's thickly aesthetic, participative hermeneutics of the Great Tradition steers mystical theology away from its modern association with “religious experience” as its sole justification. In an interesting footnote, van Baeck elaborates on these perspectives when noting:

Here also lies the root of the modern identification, so widespread in North America, of faith in God with ‘religious experience’. This experience tends to be viewed as a completely inner event—that is, an event to be interpreted entirely on its own terms. Thus religion (and presumably, faith in God) is turned into an individual claim, whose sole verification is the authenticity of the individual who makes it. (Needless to say, this idea has profoundly affected

---

<sup>10</sup> van Baeck, *GE*, §84, 1, b, 198-9.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> van Baeck, “Trinitarian Theology as Participation”, 307.

<sup>14</sup> See van Baeck, *GE*, §84,1, 196.

the discipline usually referred to as 'psychology of religion;') In this construction, faith in God, along with whatever interpretative knowledge of God goes with it, is radically divorced, in Cartesian fashion, from the shared human understanding of humanity and the world.<sup>15</sup>

Instead of situating such claims of religious experience within the wholly modern category of anthropological autonomy, van Beeck instead, time and time again throughout his work, gives a more thick, hermeneutical account of various figures of the Great Tradition, and the unity in which it attests that "*knowledge of God* is (1) a matter of ecstatic de-centering, *theōria* (i.e. contemplative self-abandon), and (2) that it is, paradoxically, *both entirely natural and entirely God-given*."<sup>16</sup>

As an alternative to such systematic impulses and their frequent extremes, for van Beeck, a reoccurring, corrective source within the Great Tradition is none other than the Christian humanism of Jan van Ruusbroec, who, van Beeck correctly identifies as combining a rigorous, "fully apophatic account" of contemplation and union with God, while equally drawing attention to Ruusbroec's "fully Trinitarian (and thus, wholly dynamic) interpretation of contemplative prayer."<sup>17</sup> Thus, van Beeck draws attention to Ruusbroec's dynamic *exemplarism* of being created *in the Image*, while equally noting the historical, soteriological and erotic—hence never-ending—dimensions of the creature's graced action of deepening in *likeness* with such an Image (the Son, 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity) in whom one is naturally united.

## §2. NATIVE ATTUNEMENT

As a privileged interlocutor within van Beeck's richly resourced series *God Encountered*, Ruusbroec's influence upon the Dutch Jesuit is considerable. This is most evidently the case in exploring the dynamism of van Beeck's 'native attunement'—holding together, in an unceasing, unity of tension, that which is both 'entirely natural and entirely God-given'. Namely, humanity's *desiderium naturale visionis beatificae*. However, retrieval of Ruusbroec's theo-anthropology within van Beeck's decidedly *contemporary* systematic theology is not performed unaware of questions of historicity, contextuality nor modernity's 'turn to the subject' [*die Wende zum Subjekt*]. Rather, in an attempt at continuing to hold together such an erotic unity of tension, van Beeck adroitly turns to Maurice Blondel<sup>18</sup> as emblematic in his own "forthright insistence *both* on authentic immanence and on the truly supernatural", all the while pivoting "humanity as the decisive locus of their encounter."<sup>19</sup>

### A. BLONDELIAN IMMANENCE

---

<sup>15</sup> Van Beeck, *GE*, §84, 1, footnote [p].

<sup>16</sup> van Beeck, "Trinitarian Theology as Participation", 311.

<sup>17</sup> van Beeck, "Trinitarian Theology as Participation", 312.

<sup>18</sup> See generally Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. Oliva Blanchette (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); *The Letter on Apologetics & History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Illtyd Trethowan (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §87, 1, 231 (my emphasis).

Akin to the various strands of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic Theology<sup>20</sup>, the theological implications of Blondel's philosophical plea for "immanence": "nothing can enter into a man's mind which does not come out of him"<sup>21</sup> is a fundamental hermeneutic for the Dutch Jesuit. For van Beeck, Blondel's turn towards immanence creates an opening for a renewed theological anthropology and human authenticity as cooperative in its view of the intrinsic, native dimension of God's grace.

*Contra* the then singular focus neo-scholastics frequently made upon "miracles and prophecy" in chapter 3 of *Dei Filius*, van Beeck argues that "Vatican I had never declared that unaided natural reason was necessary, let alone sufficient, to establish, beyond a reasonable or respectable doubt, the credibility of the Catholic faith on miracles and prophecies."<sup>22</sup> Rather, such a "purely rationalist-historicist apologetics"—despite varying differences amongst the orders<sup>23</sup>—was nonetheless the standard of seminary education. Such an outdated apologetic—appealing here to Blondel's critique—in failing to take serious the Enlightenment and its 'turn to the subject' as modernity's condition of human authenticity<sup>24</sup> both "misreads the cultural situation we are in, and in doing so, it is making a *theological* mistake".<sup>25</sup> That is, such an approach leads to the warped, rationalist conclusion of the Catholic faith as a "closed system", dependent upon a rationally autonomous *praeambula fidei*, all the while ensuring the particularity of Catholic faith to be "credible without appealing to anything in themselves".<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, for those figures positioned contrary to Neo-Scholastic extrincism (see below my treatment of George Tyrrell), equal appeal was made to the authority of Vatican I's defense of faith. Which, it must be said, made pronouncements not only against fideism, yet also against over-rationalization. This latter stress is emphasized when highlighting the *capacity* and understanding of "reason illumined by faith", and its "fruitful insight into the mysteries" to be set within view of the "connection of the mysteries among themselves and with the last end of man."<sup>27</sup> Thus, Blondel's "method of immanence" acts as a corrective to the exclusivity of extrinsicist appeals to 'miracles and prophecy' in its insistence that "God's revelation and the possibility of supernatural life correspond to our deepest longings[....]They [i.e. the 'interior fact' of our natural desire for God] are not imposed from without by any external authority."<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> For a compelling introduction to Blondel's works, viewed in historical and theological continuity with Henri de Lubac, See William L. Portier, "Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel", *Communio*, vol. XXXVIII, n. 1, Spring 2011, 103-137.

<sup>21</sup> See Blondel, *Letter on Apologetics*, 152.

<sup>22</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §86, 4, a, 218.

<sup>23</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §86, 3, 214: "Contrary to currently prevailing stereotypes, late nineteenth and early twentieth century Catholic seminary philosophy and theology of the (broadly) Thomistic variety was *not* a completely uniform, standardized system. It was, rather, a sprawling aggregate of various schools of neo-scholastic thought."

<sup>24</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §85, 5, 208.

<sup>25</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §85, 4, 208.

<sup>26</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §86, 5, 219.

<sup>27</sup> See Denz. 3016 See also Portier ""Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel", 116 and his focus upon the Belgian Cardinal Victor Dechamps' "method of Providence" and his "interventions at Vatican I were largely responsible for the appeal to the Church and its holiness as a motive of faith in Chapter 3 of *Dei Filius*."

<sup>28</sup> Portier, "Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel", 113.

### 1. Immanence opening onto the Political

Nevertheless, by avoiding a fideistic tract, attention to Blondel's philosophical insistence upon immanence as the "very condition of philosophizing", in a historical-contextual view, initiates a more fundamental openness to human integrity and culture within philosophical reflection. In a modern context, what would arguably only be fully heeded in the Second Vatican Council (i.e. *Gaudium et spes*), in turn equally recalls a primary "conviction" that is "integral to the Great Tradition of Christian faith and theology: *both nature and reason can be trusted*."<sup>29</sup> More fundamentally, Blondel's position of authentic immanence at the same time opens onto an authentically *theological immanence*.<sup>30</sup> Amid Blondel's heavy philosophic and theological critique against, in part—substantially Neo-Scholastic 'extrincism', as well as the institutional Church's Ultramontane character at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, van Beeck argues that in Blondel, "we catch the Great Tradition of Catholic Faith and theology astir once again, in the act of renewing itself."<sup>31</sup> Hence, Blondel's deeply contextual rethinking of Tradition and its dynamism—*contra* both liberal Modernists as well as the integralism of political Catholicism in France and the *Action française* at the threshold of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century—emerges as a compelling portrait once more of human integrity as viewed in its *intrinsic* relation to the supernatural. A philosophical approach, upon the "threshold" that witnesses a view of the *mutuality* or the intertwined character of nature and grace, like "two currents, flowing from different sources, mingl[ing] their waters without losing their identities."<sup>32</sup>

For Blondel's opponents such as the well-known Dominican Neo-Scholastic Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, such appeals to immanence are rigorously countered on the basis of gratuitousness. As the predominant Neo-Scholastic argument goes, such an immanent orientation to the supernatural—humanity's *desiderium naturale*—renders the gift of God's grace as *necessary*. Which in turn, results in a certain natural "possession" or claim upon the beatific vision as owed to the creature, due to the lack of such gratuitousness.<sup>33</sup> Herein, the dynamic unity, "unit[ing] in order to distinguish the better"<sup>34</sup> between mutuality (nature) and the asymmetrical (grace) is challenged because of the lack of utter gratuitousness of grace, regarded as *pure* and in a sense, without interior demands.

In view of 20<sup>th</sup> Century grace-nature debates within Catholic thought and against extrinsicist tendencies, William Portier convincingly argues that Blondelian immanence is first and foremost to

---

<sup>29</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §87, 1, 230.

<sup>30</sup> See *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (DS 3487): "Concerning immanence it is not easy to determine what Modernists mean by it, for their own opinions on the subject vary. Some understand it in the sense that God working in man is more intimately present in him than man is in even himself, and this conception, if properly understood, is free from reproach."

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>32</sup> Blondel, *Letter of Apologetics*, 148. See also, van Beeck, *GE*, §86, 10, 229 he similarly cites this passage from Blondel.

<sup>33</sup> See *supra*, Chapter 8, "Abiding by Minne's Demands. Part IV—Common love and the Univocal" and my discussion of "gratuitousness" in Bonaventure's distinct rejection of Peter Lombard's identification in Book 1, distinction 17 of the *Sentences* wherein Peter Lombard identifies the Holy Spirit as the "charity by which we love God and neighbor".

<sup>34</sup> See Portier, "Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel", 126, as quoted from De Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroads, 1998), 30-31.

be seen as contextual and thereby inescapably *political*. What loosely coalesced Blondel's association with the Modernists is that "opposition to Neo-Scholastic thought" was fundamentally regarded as "inadequate to contemporary religious needs."<sup>35</sup> Thus, Blondel's project is to be viewed *contra* two-tier extrinsicist approaches, the latter of which entailed it "theoretically possible"—due to its strict separation—"to keep completely separate such spheres as 'religion' and 'politics'...theology and philosophy"<sup>36</sup> And in an attempt to eliminate any sense of lingering doubt, Portier again asserts, "The emphasis in the previous sentence should be on *completely*."<sup>37</sup> Hence, in thoroughly countering this position, Blondel's rejection of varying philosophical apologetics at the time "has an inevitable political dimension".<sup>38</sup> Portier's insight, which reflects both a compelling historical analysis of Blondel's political advocacy of the "social Catholicism" of the *semaines sociales* is at the same time, inextricably, a working through the very implications of immanence—consonant with van Beeck's native attunement—as a thorough critique of two-tier extrinsicism. Namely that from an immanent perspective the political, is interwoven with the theological, as nature is natively open to grace.

Portier's insightful historical/contextual as well as theological reading of immanence and the grace-nature debates as the proper entry for the political within theological reflection is supported by drawing out the various strands of De Lubac's connection with Blondel, or "*les jésuites blondelissants*".<sup>39</sup> Portier thus continues John Milbank's own argument in *The Suspended Middle*<sup>40</sup>: that is, analogous to the opposition both against *L'Action française* and later on, supporters of the French occupied Vichy government, for both Blondel and De Lubac, their "theological opponents" were equally their "political opponents".<sup>41</sup>

Such theological, as well as political oppositions are not only confined to an early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century French context, yet equally redound for us today amid the many unresolved theological debates surrounding contextual relevance and the particularity of Catholic identity. Herein, Portier sufficiently recalls:

In view of his notion of 'the ebb and flow of theology', it might not have surprised de Lubac that a Blondel-inspired theology of nature and grace, rather than a once for all achievement, has proven unstable and unfinished. On the one side, undifferentiated appeals to the graced character of our world threaten to evacuate its Christological and Trinitarian center. Reassertions of philosophical autonomy in appeals to the *praebula fidei* in the *Summa theologiae* of St. Thomas (1,2, ad 1) and Vatican I's dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* unsettle the Christological and Trinitarian center of this theology of nature and grace from another side. Clarifying the senses in which we can truly say the world is graced remains a major task of contemporary Catholic theology.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Portier, "Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel", 107.

<sup>36</sup> Portier, "Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel", 115 (my emphasis).

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Portier, "Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel", 107.

<sup>39</sup> See Portier, "Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel", 125.

<sup>40</sup> See John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> See Portier, "Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel", 121-122.

<sup>42</sup> Portier, "Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel", 129-130.



In the following, we will indeed see how post conciliar theology is continuing to wrestle with the various consequences of a more intrinsic view of a graced world and the theological/political priorities that it establishes in terms of "contextual relevance" and "identity"; the challenges such 'intrinsicism' poses to the integrity and relationship between theology and philosophy; and later on, the implications of these positions in van Beeck's engagement with contemporary fundamental theology and the presence of a certain renewed "extrincism" under the moniker of "dialogue".<sup>43</sup>

## 2. After Blondel: Post conciliar Trajectories

By introducing Blondel at this critical juncture, van Beeck strongly orients two poles that are intimately associated with his thinking of "native attunement". Namely: (1) a view of the anthropology that is variably upheld by the Great Tradition and given renewed expression by Blondel's "immanence". Human integrity is here understood as fundamentally relational and *theonomous*. Which in turn, by way of grace's equally immanent character as fundamentally gratuitous, yet natively anchored and oriented within the created world, (2) highlights the importance of the question of contextuality and historicity for the Church and its relationship to the modern world. Here, contextuality provides an engagement of plausibility, while equally recognizing that the stage of culture, history and late-modernity is not a 'neutral' region of autonomy, yet one of *graced nature* and thereby, intrinsically demanding of theological relevance and potential accountability. A more thorough consideration of Ruusbroec's theo-anthropology of mutual indwelling will ensue. But first, van Beeck well describes the dynamism of his 'native attunement' and its implicit reference to Ruusbroec as the:

[P]aradox of the mystical position. Immanence naturally inspires the search for transcendence; being is natively oriented to ecstasy. In the act of turning *away* from self-containment [i.e. against Neo-Scholastic 'extrincism'] and *towards* transcendence, therefore, all creatures, each according to their proper place in the universe, actualize and identify their most authentic selves to the highest attainable degree. The essence of the mystical vision and experience is, therefore, that the free, patient, self-abandoning focus on the transcendent, unknowable God involves the recovery, in actuality, of the true, implicit identity of humanity and the world. Becoming de-centered turns out to be the finding of the true Center; becoming selfless in this fashion turns out to be the finding of the self, in God; the encounter, in actuality, with the living God prompts true, experienced, minimally self-conscious, genuinely *responsive* identity.<sup>44</sup>

Here, the dynamic movement of van Beeck's native attunement—wherein "immanence naturally inspires the search for transcendence"—explicitly entails a robust "recovery, in actuality, of the true, implicit identity of humanity and the world". Such a position strongly recalls Ruusbroec's own intuitions via the 'common life' [*ghemeyne leven*].<sup>45</sup> Here, a basic thrust of openness towards transcendence orients one fundamentally towards a recovery and the potential redemption and transformation of the world. Instead of leading one away from the world, it instead leads humanity

---

<sup>43</sup> See *infra*. "Van Beeck on the role and identity of fundamental theology today".

<sup>44</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §109, 8, 134-5.

<sup>45</sup> See generally my reflections upon *ghemeyne leven* in "Chapter 10. For God is a common food and a common good": Jan van Ruusbroec and Learning How to Desire in the Christian Humanist Tradition".

and the created world in their respective integrities as *locus capax dei*.<sup>46</sup> And yet, as we will now see, the fecundity of this *locus* itself leads to a plurality of differing trajectories.

*a. Locus capax dei: Alejandro García-Rivera's Theological Aesthetics*

A dialogically distinct, yet related contemporary engagement with this view of *locus capax dei* that I would like to briefly consider—especially in view of its theo-anthropological basis (*capax dei*) and its view of contextuality (*locus*)—is its treatment by the late Cuban-American mestizaje theologian Alejandro García-Rivera (1951-2010). For García-Rivera, engagement with theological aesthetics primarily involves that which "recognizes in the experience of the truly beautiful a religious dimension".<sup>47</sup> Such aesthetics is in turn founded upon a strong fundamental theological engagement with Erich Przywara's *analogia entis*, its use by Przywara's student, Hans Urs von Balthasar in the latter's own theological aesthetics of glory, as well as a provocative attentiveness to issues of contextuality and alterity as arising from his diasporic Cuban-American community, in exile after Castro's revolution.

For García-Rivera, interest in theological aesthetics is founded upon the recognition that while "Beauty is embodied in the natural world"—the "linchpin" of the transcendentals as von Balthasar argues—it does not originate from the natural, as a theological aesthetics maintains that "Beauty's origin is God Himself."<sup>48</sup> To substantiate this aesthetic crossing, through metaphysical difference between Creator and creature, García-Rivera seeks the support of Przywara's *analogia entis* precisely in terms of a thinker of difference or "dissimilar-similarity", in contrast to Rahner's transcendental theological anthropology that seeks a "subjective unity between Creator and creature".<sup>49</sup> This familiar contrast between Rahner and von Balthasar is positioned by García-Rivera as two separate approaches emerging from Blondel's thinking of the immanent character of human integrity. Which, *contra* Neo-Scholastic extrincism, entails the view "that grace is an *intrinsic* rather than an *extrinsic* demand of the human spirit."<sup>50</sup> García-Rivera specifically opts for von Balthasarian difference over Rahnerian view of transcendental unity for clear theological reasons, though these reasons may come as a surprise. For it is specifically as a contextual *mestizaje* theologian that García-Rivera opts more for a Balthasarian-influenced theological aesthetics of difference that is at once attentive to issues of *ressourcement*.<sup>51</sup> This is so, García-Rivera argues, since "[M]odernity rejected

---

<sup>46</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, § 109, 9, 136: "The basic, decisive *entry* in the mystical life—the life of contemplative union with God—consists in the experiential discovery of that point in ourselves at which we are *naturally* (or, as Ruusbroec puts it, 'essentially') united with God. There we find God as the unmediated Presence, more deep-seated in us than the deepest accessible reaches of our persons; there we simply *are* our original selves inasmuch as there we find ourselves natively anchored in God; consequently, that is where we are holy regardless of our actual holiness or sinfulness. It is precisely at this 'fine point of the soul' that our *capacity* for *actual* union with God by grace resides, too."

<sup>47</sup> See Alejandro García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 9.

<sup>48</sup> García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, 14.

<sup>49</sup> García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, 77.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> See García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, 76: "[...]how the issue of difference gave rise to Latin American and Latino theology. In the difference between the American Indian and the European Spaniard lay

the sources of its own tradition, postmodernity now calls into question modernity's sources. As such, postmodernity calls for a re-look at traditional sources in order to re-think or go beyond modern assumptions. Rahner's work may have ushered the Church through the abyss of Modernity, but von Balthasar's work, I believe, may help guide the Church out of the morass of postmodernism."<sup>52</sup> Wading through such a morass, García-Rivera pushes against postmodernity's singular "contextualizing appetite"<sup>53</sup> by furnishing a dual appreciation of both contextuality and particularity of human/cultural difference that emerges from the very primacy of a relationality of "greater dissimilarity" of the *analogia entis*. What emerges is a theological anthropology that resources the traditional Catholic view that sees the intrinsic connection between Creation and Redemption as "crucial *loci* for liberation theology [...] if liberation is to have a subject which seriously answers the challenge of postmodernism".<sup>54</sup> That is, by presenting "a subject capable of being redeemed".<sup>55</sup>

In attempting to address such a challenge by way of his theological aesthetics, García-Rivera rallies to von Balthasar, who García-Rivera argues, "much to his [von Balthasar's] surprise joins Hispanic theology as a welcomed conversation partner."<sup>56</sup> This surprise is none other than the revealing of the dynamics between contextuality and cultural and human differences with that of a Balthasarian theological aesthetics that "rethink[s] the relationship between nature and grace."<sup>57</sup> For not only does the

[R]elationship between nature and grace determines, e.g., how faith understands or explains the human capacity to 'see' God, i.e., the *capax Dei* of a theological aesthetics. The relationship of nature and grace determines, as well, how faith might understand or explain the human capacity for *differing 'visions' of God*, i.e., a *theology of human difference*. Thus, von Balthasar and Hispanics have similar if not identical projects [...] Hispanics, however, ask a further question. Can these visions change the world.<sup>58</sup>

Here again, this transformational project of not only "seeing the form", yet receiving it in the manner of *doxological response* orients García-Rivera's theological aesthetics in its thick, contextual and participative view. The kataphatic is vividly present in García-Rivera, thus "against Rahnerian transcendence, von Balthasar's analogy of being demands the human creature contemplate the Creator from within the very stuff of creation rather than from some transcendental horizon."<sup>59</sup> While at the same time, by way of privileging contextual and human differences is none other than an affirmation of *deus semper maior* such that, "Our 'dissimilar similarity' of creature to Creator

---

hell or redemption. From human difference as experienced in the Americas rose the twin issues of justice and differing visions of God." See also García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, "A Different Beauty" 39-61.

<sup>52</sup> García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, 76.

<sup>53</sup> See Alejandro García-Rivera, "The Cosmic Frontier: Toward a Natural Anthropology", *Journal of Hispanic Latino Theology*, vol. 3:1 (1995), 42-49, 49.

<sup>54</sup> See Alejandro García-Rivera, "Creator of the Visible and the Invisible: Liberation Theology, Postmodernism and the Spiritual", *Journal of Hispanic Latin Theology*, Vol. 3:4 (1996)35-56, 39.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, 76.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, 82.

allows the human spirit to participate in the knowledge and the love of God but only by having every concept, form, or symbol irrupted in the very act of knowing and loving God."<sup>60</sup>

## B. RUUSBROEC AND VAN BEECK'S NATIVE ATTUNEMENT

While García-Rivera's theological aesthetics aims to account for *difference* and *identity* in its distinct, contextualized Latin Hispanic 'theology of human difference'—anchored in a resourced, theological anthropology of the *analogia entis*—for van Beeck's "native attunement", the emphasis is clearly upon *unity* whereby *particularity* "proximately" emerges, though never coincides.<sup>61</sup> Van Beeck does so by way of turning to the other trajectory that stems from the reception of Blondel as "yet another instance of *the age-old Christian faith recovering its own native, authentic vitality by reopening itself to the world.*"<sup>62</sup> Blondel, van Beeck recalls, stands as a major voice within the modern Tradition of the Church in rearticulating its relational anthropology and fundamental openness to the modern world. That is, recasting the view of integrity and authenticity of human 'immanence' by way of "humanity's essential resemblance to God."<sup>63</sup>

More generally, for van Beeck, we can speak of universality and particularity as an unceasing, erotic unity of tension, best articulated by our natural desire for and native attunement to God. Turning to Blondel, van Beeck, will argue that *contra* the Church's then thoroughly anti-Modernist, Ultramontanist position, Blondel's turn towards immanence is performed as a "threshold apologetics", as once innovative as well as deeply within the Tradition. Such that the gratuitousness of God's intrinsic grace within the world is met by humanity's fundamental openness towards and completion of its own native integrity as fundamentally relational (*capax dei*) and particular within its distinct contexts (*locus capax dei*).

It is in this dynamic renewal of Tradition that indeed—for both myself and van Beeck—opens a doorway for a compelling retrieval of the relationality of Ruusbroec's theo-anthropology of mutual indwelling, such that "Ruusbroec confirms, in his own way, the truth of Blondel's anthropological idea."<sup>64</sup> Namely that human autonomy stems from the primacy of a fundamental, *dynamic* ontological relationality with the world and with God. In terms of a theology of creation, union with God, for Ruusbroec, is primarily ontological and essential [*weselijcke*] that "renders us neither holy nor blessed without our effort"<sup>65</sup>. Rather, as created *in the Image*—that is Christ, our "eternal exemplar"—union with God is both fundamentally natural that upholds the dignity of our human

---

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> In this instance, I am quite cautious to make any facile contrasts between van Beeck and García-Rivera as continuing the Rahnerian and von Balthasar lines, as I find the overlaps between these two post-conciliar theologians to be far greater in the dynamism of their thinking of analogy and its corresponding theology of human difference (García-Rivera) with that of "asymmetry, yet mutual reciprocity" (van Beeck) as far more conversant than constructing a false difference. See for example, Patrick Cooper and Marijn de Jong "The Natural Desire for God: Karl Rahner's and Frans Jozef van Beeck's Reconfiguration of Theological Metaphysics."

<sup>62</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §85, 7, 210. See

<sup>63</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §91, 2, 259.

<sup>64</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §90, 3, 250-251.

<sup>65</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Die Geestelike Brulocht*, b, ll. 47-48: "[...] ende si en maecht ons sonder ons toedoen noch heylich noch salich."

nature wherein such perichoretic relationality is continuously created anew [*creatio continua*]. Emphasizing the conjunction, for Ruusbroec, mutual indwelling consists of "posess[ing] this unity in ourselves" and "above ourselves, as a principle and support of our *wesens* and of our life."<sup>66</sup> Thus, *contra* extrincism, nothing is fundamentally "added" to the human person in such a loving supernatural and gracious union with God. Rather, the life of such grace is found in the native capacity for the "superabounding actualization of aspirations [*desiderium naturale*] in creation".<sup>67</sup> Herein, van Beeck nicely summarizes the view as follows: "human integrity turns out to be union with God, and this union turns out to be reunion."<sup>68</sup>

### 1. Unity—'in the Image of the Son'

This 'essential resemblance', or in Ruusbroec's terms—"in the Image"—can be seen as upholding the Christian Tradition's universalist strand of native attunement to God, via our *desiderium naturalis*. Otherwise known in vernacular mystical theological tradition as the "spark of the soul" [*de vonk der zielen*], the "natural inward inclination of the soul towards its origin."<sup>69</sup> That place of relational heteronomy (or 'theonomy', for van Beeck) towards God, Ruusbroec clarifies as "God's image and the origin of us all: of our life and our becoming; wherein our created *wesen* and our life hang [*in hangt*] without intermediary as in its eternal cause."<sup>70</sup> Here, speaking in terms of his theology of "image and likeness" and in exemplarist terms, Ruusbroec first reflects upon both the *unity* of our universal human nature as grounded in the *particularity* of the *image* in specifically Christological and Trinitarian terms:

In the beginning of the world, when God wanted to make the first human being in our nature, then He spoke in Trinity of Persons: 'Let us make human beings to our image and to our likeness.'...And He has created each person's soul as a living mirror, whereupon He has impressed the image of His nature. And so He lives imaged in us, and we in Him; for our created life is one, without intermediary, with the image and with the life that we have eternally in God....For it lives with the Son unborn in the Father, and it is born with the Son out of the Father, and flows out of them both with

In beghinne der werelt, doe god den iersten mensche maken woude in onser natueren, doe sprac hi in drivildegheit der persone: 'Maken wi den mensche toe onsen beelde ende toe onsen ghelike.'...Ende hi heeft ieghewelcs menschen ziele gheschapen also eenen levenden spiegel daer hi dat beelde sijnre natueren in ghedrucht heeft. Ende alsoe leeft hi ghebeeldt in ons ende wi in heme. Want onse gheschapene leven es een sonder middel met dien beelde ende met dien levende dat wi eewelec in gode hebben....Want het leeft met den sone ongeboren in den vader, ende het wert gheboren met den sone ute

---

<sup>66</sup> Ruusbroec, *Die Geestelike Brulocht*, b, ll. 48-49: " Dese eenicheit besitten wi in ons selven ende doch boven ons [selven], als een beghin ende een onthout ons wesens ende ons levens." See Patrick Cooper, "Possessing the Unfathomable: Approaching Jan van Ruusbroec's Mystical Anthropology as Responsive to the Primacy and Praxis of Minne"; See supra Chapter 3, "We Shall See God With the Eyes of our Body'. Minne, Mutual Indwelling and Jan van Ruusbroec's Embodied Speculations on the Glorified Body." wherein I have written substantially on Ruusbroec's anthropology of mutual indwelling.

<sup>67</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §88, 1, 239.

<sup>68</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §90, 3, 251. Which in turn, more generally, by way of such an anthropology, also revitalizes the legitimacy and potential reintegration of mystical theology—both in its historical canon and ongoing, contemporary reflection—within broader theological and philosophical discourses.

<sup>69</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spiegel*, ll. 945-946: "[...] de vonke der zielen, dat es natuerleke ingheneichtheit der zielen in haren orsprong."

<sup>70</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spiegel*, ll. 915-917: "[...] dat gods beelde es ende onser alre orsprong, ons levens ende ons ghewerdens, daer onse gheschapene wesen ende onse leven sonder middel in hangt alsoe in sine eeweghe sake."

the Holy Spirit. And thus we live eternally in God and God in us. For our createdness lives in our eternal image that we have in the Son of God.

den vader, ende vloeyt ute hen beiden met den heileghen gheeste. Ende aldus leven wi eewelec in gode ende god in ons. Want onse gheschapenheit leeft in onsen eeweghen beelde dat wi hebben in den sone gods.<sup>71</sup>

By fully engaging with Ruusbroec's distinct exemplarism, van Beeck rightfully acknowledges that in order to understand the full "flowering of the order of grace",<sup>72</sup> as famously described in Book 3 of the *Spiritual Espousals*—the same text that the Parisian chancellor Jean Gerson famously charged as pantheist<sup>73</sup>—such a gracious union "is undergirded at the level of human nature itself: Christian prayer and Christian service are [thus] deeply natural."<sup>74</sup> From Ruusbroec's decidedly Christian exemplarism—which by virtue of its *particularity* maintains a clear distinction from its inevitable neo-Platonic association—van Beeck first notes that given this fundamentally 'natural' dimension of such particularity, the "spiritual *erōs* with which all human persons seek God...is not a faceless homing instinct automatically impelling them to reunite with an impersonal divine Prototype. Quite the contrary: it is radically personalized....For human persons to be created in the image and likeness of God means: to be naturally stamped with the visage of Christ, the divine *Logos*."<sup>75</sup>

## 2. Particularity—'unto His likeness'.

Alongside such exemplarity, equally important to Ruusbroec's thought lays within the concrete particular. Here, Ruusbroec will semantically speak of history and the order of salvation specifically in terms of "likeness". That is, to "receive His *likeness*" entails that we are "like God through grace and virtues and united with Him above likeness in blessedness."<sup>76</sup> Equally so, the Brabantine contemplative maintains the necessity of grace's heteronomous asymmetry, such that "...the blessedness that is God we can neither contemplate nor feel [*ghevoelen*] in natural light...without the grace of God."<sup>77</sup> Recalling Augustine's famous "*interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*" [higher than my highest and more inward than my innermost self]<sup>78</sup>, Ruusbroec's

<sup>71</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spiegel*, ll. 1786-1788; 1790-1794; 1795-1800.

<sup>72</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §90, 2, 247.

<sup>73</sup> See Rik van Nieuwenhove, "Commitments to Medieval Mystical Texts within Contemporary Contexts: Some Reflections on Medieval Mystical Texts as 'Classic' Texts in the Gadamerian Sense", Patrick Cooper and Satoshi Kikuchi (eds) *Reading Medieval Mystical Texts Today* (forthcoming): "This exemplarist theology, fusing spiritual and ontological elements, finds a late expression in Ruusbroec's theology of the Image. According to the nominalist (for whom only individual things exist), however, divine ideas are not the exemplar or spiritual blueprint of creatures. Rather, they are nothing but the creatures themselves—or rather: the knowledge God has of individual created things. It is therefore little wonder that Jean Gerson, a nominalist, failed to make sense of Ruusbroec's Christian Neoplatonic exemplarism, as outlined in Book III of *Die Geestelike Brulocht*."

<sup>74</sup> See Van Beeck, *GE*, §90, 3, 250.

<sup>75</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §90, 5, 252. Furthermore, in a provocative note that he does not further expand upon, van Beeck notes that Ruusbroec's view of mutual indwelling has the capacity of revivifying, with certain corrections, Karl Rahner's much contested notion of "anonymous Christians". See §90, 5, e, 255.

<sup>76</sup> Ruusbroec, *Een Spiegel der Eeuwigher Salicheit*, ll. 961; 966-967: "[...] sijn ghelijc te ontfane"; "Ende alsoe sijn wi gode ghelijc overmids gratie ende dooghde, ende met heme gheeneght boven ghelijc in salegheden".

<sup>77</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spiegel*, ll. 957-958, 959-960: "Want die salecheit die god es, die en moghen wi niet bescouwen noch ghevoelen in natuerleken lichte [...] sonder de ghenade goods."

<sup>78</sup> See Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 6, 11.

reflection upon the life of grace succinctly encapsulates this dynamic rhythm of exteriority and interiority (or mediation and immediacy) between God and the human person in the following:

Out of this unity where the spirit is united with God without intermediary, flow grace and all gifts....Thus grace falls into us in the unity of our superior faculties and of our spirit, from which, by the power of grace, the higher faculties flow out actively in all virtues and into which same (unity) they return again in the bond of minnen....Now the grace of God which flows out of God is an inward impulse or prodding of the Holy Spirit, Who impels our spirit from within and stokes it towards all virtue. This grace flows from within, not from without. For God is more inwards to us than we are to ourselves, and His inward impulse, or working, within us, naturally or supernaturally, is nearer and more inner to us than our own work. And therefore God works from in us outwards [*van binnen uutweert*], and all creatures from outward inwards [*van buten inwert*]. And this is why grace and all divine gifts and God's interior speech come from within, in the unity of our spirit, not from without, in the imagination, by sensory images.

Ute deser eenicheit daer die gheest vereenicht is sonder middel met gode, hier ute vloeyt gracie ende alle gaven....Dese gracie valt in ons in die eenicheit onser overster crachten ende ons gheests, daer die hoochste crachten ute vloeyen werelijcke in allen doechden overmids cracht der gracien, ende weder inkeeren in dat selve, in bande van minnen....Nu es die gracie gods, die ute gode vloeyt, een inwindich driven ochte jaghen des heylichs gheests die onzen gheest drivet van binnen ende stoect in allen duechden. Dese gracie vloeyt van binnen, niet van buyten. Want god es ons inwindigher dan wij ons selven sijn, ende sijn inwindich driven ochte werken in ons, nattuerlijcke ochte overnatuerlijcke, es ons naerre ende innigher dan ons eyghen wercken; ende daer omme werket god in ons van binnen uutweert, ende all creatueren van buten inwert. Ende hier omme comt gracie ende alle godlijcke gaven ende gods inspreken, van binnen in eenicheit ons gheests, niet van buyten inder fantasien, met senlijcken beelden.<sup>79</sup>

Here, Ruusbroec profoundly reflects upon the human person and the created order as intrinsically open to God and the gift of His grace. Creation is here unmistakably *capax dei*. However, such grace is reflected upon by Ruusbroec in a clearly non-extrinsicist manner, not as coming "from without" into a supposed autonomy and self-sufficiency of the created order. Rather, Ruusbroec recounts the "inward impulse" [*inwindich driven*] or "prodding" [*jaghen*] of the uncreated grace of the Holy Spirit. Herein, there is an elegant, dance of grace that God initiates with created nature intrinsically open to such a mutual exchange. As *interior intimo meo*, the intrinsic grace of the Holy Spirit moves internally to externally, from immediacy to mediation [*van binnen uutweert*]. While in response to such "prodding", Ruusbroec recounts the counter rhythm of the human person as "going out" in affirming the heteronomous otherness of such prodding's amid faith, liturgically and sacramentally, as well as in works of virtue and charity. From where in turn one is capable of pivoting inwardly [*van buten inwert*], of desirously encountering the utter alterity of God, He who simultaneously works in us amid our own work.

Here too *particularity* is upheld as 'proximate'<sup>80</sup> to such universalism by way of the *commitments* that emerge from such a natural desire. Again, in Ruusbroec's theological idiom, such

<sup>79</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Die Geestelike Brulocht*, b, ll. 107-108; 115-118; 128-137 (with slight modification).

<sup>80</sup> While presenting the language of *Humani generis* (DS 3892) "purely philosophical" epistemological position of the human capacity to know "unchangeable truth fully and certainly and not just by approximation", van Beeck goes on to provide a helpful, historical clarification to what he means by particularity as 'proximate to', yet never coinciding with such a Christian universalism. See van Beeck, *GE*, §86, c, [q]; 222-223: "It is characteristic of this type of scholasticism to caricature knowledge by convergance as mere 'approximation'; this amounts to ridiculing all non-definitive knowledge as imprecise and hence uncertain. Fairness requires that

proximate particularity is spoken of in terms of "likeness", or "unto His likeness". Hence, the irreducible particularity that emerges from the performance and distinction [*onderscheet*] of our works and commitments are proximate to, yet can never coincide with such a universalist ontology. Rather, such commitments and particularity indeed remain proximate and distinct. Here, continuing with his theology of "image and likeness", Ruusbroec equally speaks of the *dynamism* and the *erotic unity* of the human person as always mirroring such an Image in likeness, yet never coinciding with it:

For even though the image of God is without intermediary in the mirror of the soul and united with it, yet the image is not the mirror, for God does not become creature. But the union of the image in the mirror is so great and so noble that the soul is called the image of God. Furthermore, the same image of God that we have received and carry in our soul is the Son of God, the eternal mirror, the wisdom of God, wherein we all live and are eternally imaged. Yet we are not the wisdom of God; for then we would have made ourselves and that is impossible and contrary to faith; for all that we are and all that we have, we have from God and not from ourselves....And all that we can know in the light of nature [i.e. reason] is imperfect, without taste and without feeling [*ghevoelen*]. For we cannot contemplate God, nor find His realm in our soul without His help and His grace, and our true practice in His minnen.

Want al es dat beelde gods sonder middel in den spiegel onser zielen ende heme gheenecht, nochtan en es dat beelde de spiegel niet, want god en wert niet creatuere. Maer de eeninghe des beelds in den spiegel es soe groet ende soe edel, dat de ziele ghenoeft es dat beelde gods. Voertmeer, dat selve beelde gods dat wi ontfaen hebben ende draghen in onser zielen, dat es de sone gods, de eeweghe spiegel, de wijsheit gods, daer wi alle in leven ende eewelec in ghebeelt isjn. Nochtan en sijn wi de wijsheit gods niet; want soe hadden wi ons selven ghemaect, ende dat es onmoghelec ende onghelooeve. Want al dat wi sijn ende al dat wi hebben, dat hebben wi van gode ende niet van ons selven....Ende al dat wi bekinnen moghen in lichte der natueren, dat es onvolcomen, sonder smaec ende sonder ghevoelen. Want wi en moghen gode niet bescouwen noch sijn rike venden in onser zielen, sonder sine hulpe ende sine ghenade ende onse ghewareghe ufeninghe in sijnre minnen.<sup>81</sup>

In this respect, for van Beeck, Ruusbroec *admirably* speaks from the Tradition of the Fathers wherein "mystical union [...] lays[s] bare the breathtaking depth" of our native attunement.<sup>82</sup> Here, not only does grace presuppose and perfect nature [*gratia non destruit, sed supponit et perficit naturam*], yet beyond Aquinas and more in a Bonaventurian direction, van Beeck continues: "Far from being obliterated by the actuality of grace, nature is fully revealed *only* in the light of the supernatural. It is not surprising, therefore, that Ruusbroec, before venturing, in the third book of the *Espousals*, into his account of the mystical union, takes time to fathom human nature."<sup>83</sup> In one sense, van Beeck reflects upon what I have regularly stated: namely, that in view of the primacy relationality entails in Ruusbroec, union with God renders one more not less, yet more human, more particular, more distinct.

---

it be recognized that *Humani generis* expressly mentions 'knowledge by connaturality'—that is, *interpretative* or 'participative' knowledge—as valuable in matters of moral practice. Still, it regards this form of knowledge, in a fashion redolent of rationalism, as merely supplementary; it has a low opinion of its ability to *compel the mind* [...] Not surprisingly, Newman's distinction, explained in the *Grammar of Assent*, between notional assent and real assent is foreign to the encyclical's way of thinking."

<sup>81</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spiegel*, ll. 1849-1858; 1859-1863.

<sup>82</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §90, 3, 248.

<sup>83</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, 90, 3, 248 (my emphasis).



However, van Beeck appears to be suggesting something more by recognizing nature's theonomous dependence—that 'nature is fully revealed *only* in the light of the supernatural'. Here, a fascinating paradox emerges, both within the Tradition itself, and in particular with Ruusbroec. That is, while Ruusbroec exemplarism upholds the *intrinsic* dignity and nobility of our human nature, as continued within the tradition of Christian humanism, nonetheless, it marries such intrinsic nobility with a radical sense of heteronomy. This heteronomy is seen in Ruusbroec in the above quote, recognizing the radical insufficiency of our rational knowledge, the "light of nature", "without taste and feeling" [*sonder smaec ende sonder ghevoelen*] that is graciously given in contemplation and "and our true practice in His minnen".

Now, in a historical contextual sense, Ruusbroec's frequent remarks that appear to disparage the "light of nature" can be viewed as directly responding to heretical, autotheistic currents within the Free Spirit movement. Therein, Ruusbroec will occasionally recount in various works the dangerous view that specifically upholds the possibility for "natural contemplation" [*natuerliken scouwen*]<sup>84</sup>—a position, which Ruusbroec will regularly charge as lacking both humility and sufficient works of charity. Thus demonstrating that such contemplation is neither theo-centric, rather "intent on itself" and thus not motivated by minne itself, as he forewarns in his first text, *Dat Rijcke der Ghelieven*:

On account of the emptiness of this natural contemplation and because the grace of God does not impel them, they often fail their fellow Christian [*evenkersten*] in his need. For charity has never failed, but nature is unjust, for in contemplation it is intent on itself. These people consider contemplation to be greater than any work of charity. But that is not true, for works of charity are commanded us. But contemplation, however supernatural, without works of charity, would turn to nothing.

Ende overmids ledicheit dies natuerleecs scouwens ende om datse de gracie gods niet en drijft, so ghebreken si dicke haren everkersten in sijnre noet. Want caritate en ghebrac nie, maer natuere die es ongherecht want si meint haer selven in den scouwen. Ende si achten dat scouwen meerre dan enich werc van caritaten. Ende dat en es niet waer want werke van caritaten die sijn ons gheboden; ende scouwen, al waert oec overnatuerlijc, sonder werken van caritaten: he ghinghe te nieute.<sup>84</sup>

It is undoubtedly the case, that while Ruusbroec's theological reflections are inescapably contextual and should be regarded as primarily set in contrast to such trends within the Free Spirits at the time, it nonetheless appears as though these frequent controversies have had a greater formation upon his thought itself and the "limits" of natural reason. Herein, comparison with the Franciscan-Bonaventurian line of thought is quite evident, as in the following from *Vanden Vier Becoringhen*:

Into this temptation all those fall and stray through the devil's deceit who want to live a spiritual manner of life and are of subtle mind, clever and intelligent in natural understanding, as long as they want to indulge their nature without charity and humility of spirit, following their nature's delight. For their nature and their inner senses flow over in the light of nature and take great pride in it. And they possess this natural light

Ende daer inne vallen ende verdolen overmids des viants raedt alle de ghene die eene gheestelijcke wise willen voeren, ende subtijl sijn van zinne, ende scalc ende behendich in natuerlijcken verstande, eest dat si die [die] natuere oefen willen sonder caritate ende oetmoedicheit van gheests, na lost der natueren. Want hare natuere ende har inwendighe zinne vloeyen ende glorieren inden lichte der natueren. Ende dit natuerlijc licht besitten si met alsoe groter

<sup>84</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Dat Rijcke der Ghelieven*, ll. 526-532.

with such pleasure and self-sufficiency that they think they can grasp and understand all truth and all manner of living without God's supernatural help....For they think they can reach and understand the first truth with their natural light....And they feel more inner taste and joy in the things they themselves find and understand inwardly with their reason than in the things that are beyond reason, the very things that have to be taken on faith and give us eternal bliss. And this is why they are as pagan unbelievers who have no awareness of God.

welost ende eyghenheit, dat hen dunct dat si alle waerheit ende al datmen leven mach, begripen ende verstaen moghen sonde die overnatuerlijcke hulpe gods....Want selcke wane met natuerlijcken licht ghereiken ende begripen die eerste waerheit....Ende si hebben meer inwindichs smaes ende vrouwen in die dinghen die si van binnen met redenen bevinden ende verstaen, dan in die dinghen die boven redene sijn, doe men gheloven moet ende die ons eewighe zalicheit gheven. Ende hier omme sijn si als onghelovighe heidene menscen, doe gods niet ghewaer en werden.<sup>85</sup>

From these points, it is good to restate the challenge that Portier himself announced in view of the contemporary theology's reception of Blondel, namely: 'Clarifying the senses in which we can truly say the world is graced remains a major task of contemporary Catholic theology.' In view of Ruusbroec, it may well be added that this is not merely a contemporary imperative, yet a reoccurring tension within intrinsic views of grace and nature. Thus begging the question: does the recognition of grace's intrinsic character with nature inevitably result in a devaluing of reason, of philosophy becoming monologically "subsumed" into the theological?<sup>86</sup> For the intrinsicism of van Beeck's native attunement, his reading of Ruusbroec implicitly asserts that in view of the relationship of philosophy and theology, autonomy, as well as the dialogical mutuality of philosophy emerges, not as pre-conditional in its relation to the theological, yet as *a posteriori* in the primacy of its heteronomous relation to the theological. Hence, it is only in an authentic relation to the theological that legitimate autonomy, particularity and distinctiveness of philosophy emerge. Thus, akin to the mistake of Gerson—and his nominalist misreading of Ruusbroec's exemplarism for pantheism—while the threat of forgetting such a native attunement and viewing such intrinsicism as 'obliterating nature' is very much present, philosophy is nonetheless not so much 'subsumed into theology' as a certain Bonaventurian line holds. Rather, its autonomy only emerges and is subsequently *safeguarded* by the primacy of its intrinsic, heteronymous relation to the theological.<sup>87</sup> Such tensions raised by van Beeck's intrinsicist view of grace and native attunement—functioning as the paradoxical origin and guarantor of nature's autonomy—will be further explored specifically in terms of the liturgical.

### C. DOXOLOGY, THE ADMIRABLE EXCHANGE, AND LITURGICAL PARTICIPATION

Speaking on the foundational primacy worship possess to doctrine (*Lex orandi, Lex credendi*) and in turn, what van Beeck will call "sound theology", he writes that one of the foundational themes in his *God Encountered* series is a sustained commitment to liturgy and its relation to theological reflection, of which exists on two levels. First, "proximately, theologians must regard liturgical texts as a principal source of sound doctrine"; while secondly, and "more importantly...they must regard

---

<sup>85</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vanden Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 142-150; 153-154; 164-168.

<sup>86</sup> See generally Rik van Nieuwenhove, "Catholic Theology in the Thirteenth Century and the Origins of Secularism", *Irish Theological Quarterly* 75.4 (2010), 339-354.

<sup>87</sup> See also below my discussion on 'dialogue' and the subsequent, implicit extrincism within Fundamental theology.

the *practice of worship* itself as fundamental to doctrine.”<sup>88</sup> This argument is not to be seen as a unilateral assertion of “ecclesiastical discipline [nor]...individual piety”.<sup>89</sup> Rather, it is intended as a critical renewal, both for the “traditional appreciation of the fundamental significance of worship” while equally noting the disjuncture between the praxis of theological reflection removed from the *act* of the liturgy. Hence, van Beeck notes that “we can no longer assume” that theological discussions themselves, “even serious ones...are always and everywhere backed up by worship or prayer, and hence, a matter of Christian faith.”<sup>90</sup> Centering theological reflection thus upon the primacy of worship as a *theologia prima*<sup>91</sup> is indeed the footing wherein both liturgical and mystical theology can thus stake claim in terms of both the originality of its object and manner of reflection, while in clear mutuality with both systematics and theological ethics.

### 1. Excursus: George Tyrrell and the Modernist Legacy upon Mysticism and Spirituality Today

In this respect, it is perhaps helpful to briefly contrast van Beeck’s plea for the centrality of worship—in *both* its liturgical and mystical theological aspects—with a historical excursus on the Irish Jesuit Catholic Modernist George Tyrrell (1861-1909) who, in his similar appeal to the mystical tradition, also repeatedly emphasizes the principle of “*Lex orandi, Lex credendi*”, though with considerably different results.<sup>92</sup> For George Tyrrell, appeals to the primacy of devotion to that of doctrine and theological speculation takes a decidedly polarizing turn, arguably collapsing both speculative theology and mysticism into one another, resulting in an non-dynamized, platitudinarian encounter. To be clear, Tyrrell will reference the principle of *lex orandi* as unambiguously reflecting its origins signification in Prosper of Aquitaine, *ut lex supplicandi legem statuatur credendi* [let the law of prayer determine the law of belief] and not, what Laurence Paul Hemming notes, its more recent historical reversal that switches the order of *orandi* and *credendi*, as for example in Pius XII’s *Mediator Dei*.<sup>93</sup> Which in turn, is continued more recently in Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI’s famous Motu Proprio, *Summorum Pontificum*, which states that *orandi* 'corresponds to her law of faith'. Such a reformulation is not at all the case for Tyrrell. Rather, Tyrrell’s works, of course, are highly contextual, inescapably linked in reaction to the then high degree of rationalism within the Neo-Scholastic manual tradition at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Such contra positions were thus intensified by Tyrrell’s adamant pragmatism and preference for the praxis of Christian *life*, or “living theology” to that of Church’s Creed and more sober, dogmatic Tradition. Taking an isolated quote from St. Augustine, Tyrrell exalts this voluntaristic line in exclaiming, “We are nothing else but wills,” from which he then ontologizes: “[a] man *is*, in his veriest reality, what he loves”.<sup>94</sup> This ontology becomes historicized, as Tyrrell juxtaposes the seeming chaos and historical change of our

---

<sup>88</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §23,1, 82.

<sup>89</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §23,1, a, 83.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> See David W. Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology* (Chicago: Hillebrand Books, 2004).

<sup>92</sup> See George Tyrrell, *Lex Orandi or Prayer and Creed* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1904). See also George Tyrrell, *Medievalism: A Reply to Cardinal Mercier* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1908).

<sup>93</sup> See Laurence Paul Hemming, “Reply to De Maeseneer” in *God out of Place? A Symposium on L.P. Hemming’s Postmodernity’s Transcending: Devaluing God*, *Ars Disputandi* Supplement Series, vol. 3, ed. Yves De Maeseneer (Utrecht: Ars Disputandi, 2005), 89-94, 94.

<sup>94</sup> See Julian of Norwich, *XVI Revelations of Divine Love Shewed to Mother Juliana of Norwich 1373, Preface by George Tyrrell* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, LTD., 1920) v-xviii, vii.

conflictual "world of wills", which stands in need of an emerging Revelation, "discerned in its universality as the Alpha and Omega of all spiritual movement [...] a Divine Love which gives us a standard and criterion whereby to discern between love and love, and to guide our feet through the labyrinth of warring affections into the way of peace."<sup>95</sup>

Hence, from within the very depths of the modernist controversy, appeals to *lex orandi* are inexorably linked with an array of issues that include doctrinal development, historical-critical exegesis, religious experience, ecclesiology and the specific identity and role of the Magisterium. Nevertheless, despite the contextuality of Tyrrell's writings, given the profound influence that early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic Modernism has had upon the retrieval of mysticism and spirituality throughout the previous century, current efforts at trying to reunite both mystical and liturgical theology under the unifying banner of *worship*—such as van Beeck proposes—must therefore take serious the various roots, and in this case, intensification of this divide. Thereby, in retrospect, we can ask, with appeals made to *lex orandi*, whether such appeals arise from the very *act* of piety and worship itself as an attempt to genuinely transform theological discourse, both in terms of its object and manner of reflection? Or conversely, do appeals to devotion seek to expand the range of sources for theological reflection, while largely reinforcing, or challenging, existing methods of speculative theological reflection, made possible by an expanded, diffuse array of sources?

To answer this, and how *lex orandi* functions within the broader array of his thought, we first must have a better sense of what Tyrrell understands as "devotion". For one, it is immediately evident that the sphere of devotion remains largely privatized and individual, while any degree of substantive reflection upon the liturgical rootedness of devotion is virtually absent. And this absence is quite influential, for prayer is almost exclusively referred to as *interior* and *mystical*, "taken widely for the life of Charity, of Divine Love, of will-union with God and His Saints."<sup>96</sup> Appeals to such interiority under the idiom of charity are employed by Tyrrell as an overarching "sacramental principal" of religious life and faith *in toto*, in such a way that its plays off the "relation of inward and outward in religion [that] is akin to that of soul and body."<sup>97</sup>

By prioritizing interiority and its alliance with both the law of prayer and seeking support from the canon of mystical theology, it is well-known that many of these positions would come under significant scrutiny after Pius X's *Lamentabili sane exitu* and *Pascendi dominici gregis*, both released in 1907, as well as by the historically complex pronouncement by the Belgian Cardinal Mercier in his *Lenten Pastoral*.<sup>98</sup> With an eye towards Rome with the assurance that his Belgium flock has been spared from this Modernist contagion, Mercier reiterates, and thereby reinforces, *Pascendi's* characterization of "modernism" (typified by Tyrrell) as founded exclusively upon the individual and the authority of the "interior life of religion [which] remains itself the supreme directive rule of beliefs and dogmas"<sup>99</sup>. To which, in response, Tyrrell shifts attention away from his "equally flawed

---

<sup>95</sup> See George Tyrrell, "Preface", ix.

<sup>96</sup> Tyrrell, *Lex Orandi*, 59.

<sup>97</sup> Tyrrell, *Lex Orandi*, 1.

<sup>98</sup> See Tyrrell, *Medievalism*, 21-34, wherein Désiré Cardinal Mercier's *Lenten Pastoral* is reprinted. See also Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals turn to Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 118-126 for a general historical outline of Tyrrell and the Modernist controversy.

<sup>99</sup> Tyrrell, *Medievalism*, 10.

pragmatism" and exclusive voluntarism and instead, responds to Mercier *et. al.*, arguing that these criticisms are due to his lack of an explicitly developed, Neo-Scholastic metaphysics. Which, Tyrrell adds, is foreign to both the "ancient Catholic and Apostolic conception of a teaching authority belonging to the Church as a whole", as well as the *depositum fidei*, to which Christ commissioned the Church and is entirely foreign to such a metaphysics.<sup>100</sup> Following this contra position, Tyrrell will nonetheless go on to argue for the distinctly "interior" and thereby "mystical" dimensions of Revelation itself, as "directed to, and in some sense proceeds from, the life of Divine Love in the soul".<sup>101</sup> However, before charges of "vital immanence"<sup>102</sup> are made, it is perhaps equally important to note that even in *Pascendi*, defense of an Augustinian *interior intimo meo* is upheld, which, when "rightly understood, bears no reproach"<sup>103</sup>. For Tyrrell, such a theo-anthropological "understanding" is implausible, which we will see, radically changes the trajectory of his work.

Rather, Tyrrell repeatedly cites support from the then lesser known 14<sup>th</sup> Century English anchorite, "*Mother Juliana of Norwich*" as providing the "key to the true interpretation and criticism [of] [...] Christian Revelation and of every religion so far as it reaches after the fullness of Christ" as nothing other than *love* itself.<sup>104</sup> Here, Love dynamically functions as both "revealed and revealer", such that, for Julian, "*love was his mening. Who shewed it the? Love. What shewid he the? Love.*"<sup>105</sup> With this context in mind, Tyrrell's key, repeated references to the English anchorite mystic—with little to no recourse to her theological anthropology—is exemplary of the ways in which the mystical theological canon were being resourced and reshaped by Catholic Modernists as a traditional counter to the *form* of Neo-Scholasticism as exemplified by *Pascendi*.<sup>106</sup> And in view of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, such references to Julian are quite significant in emphasizing a certain polarization, bordering upon the hyperbolic, as Tyrrell quickly enlists the English anchorite's own theological

---

<sup>100</sup> See Tyrrell, *Modernism*, 117.

<sup>101</sup> Tyrrell, *Lex Orandi*, 50.

<sup>102</sup> See DS, 3477: "[...] with natural theology destroyed and the approach to revelation barred by the rejection of the arguments of credibility, with even any external revelation utterly removed, is sought in vain outside of man. It is, then, to be sought within man himself; and, since religion is a form of life, it is to be found entirely within the life of man."

<sup>103</sup> See DS, 3487: "But regarding *immanence* what the modernists mean really, is difficult to show [...] There are some who hold on this subject, that God working in man is more intimately present in him than man is even in himself; which, if rightly understood, bears no reproach."

<sup>104</sup> See Julian of Norwich, *XVI Revelations of Divine Love Shewed to Mother Juliana of Norwich 1373*, Preface by George Tyrrell, v.

<sup>105</sup> See Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (eds.) *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006) 379: "*What, woldest thou wit thy lordes mening in this thing? Wit it wele, love was his mening. Who shewed it the? Love. What shewid he the? Love. Wherfore shewed he it the? For love. Holde the therin, thous shalt wit more in the same. But thou shalt never wit therin other withouten ende.*"

<sup>106</sup> For key references and more extensive analysis that George Tyrrell makes of Julian of Norwich as a pivotal figure in her early-20<sup>th</sup> Century rediscovery, See George Tyrrell, "The Relation of Theology to Devotion", 248-250; "Juliana of Norwich" in *The Faith of the Millions: A Selection of Past Essays*, Second Series (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1901) 1-39; See also George Tyrrell's preface to Julian of Norwich, *XVI Revelations of Divine Love Shewed to Mother Juliana of Norwich 1373* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, LTD., 1920) v-xviii; as well as the republication of his originally revised 1899 essay, 'A Perverted Devotion (II)', in *The Heythrop Journal* volume XXIV, Number 4, October 1983, 379-390. Furthermore, is not this distinctly aesthetic critique, first made by the Modernists, still alive and well today, as, by way of shorthand, theologians will commonly refer to such Neo-Scholasticism as "manual theology", or conversely, as theology coming out of the "manual tradition"?

entanglements as foreshadowing his own Neo-Scholastic adversaries. Therein, the appeal of this otherwise reclusive, late 14<sup>th</sup> Century English mystical writer as none other than a *proto-Modernist*. And it is this form of historical revisionism that one frequently continues to encounter today, as it pertains to mystical theology and its familiar discourses over negative theology and religious experience.<sup>107</sup> For Tyrrell, while such revisionism is consistent throughout his works, these positions are succinctly captured in his 1899 essay, *The Relation of Theology to Devotion*.<sup>108</sup> Here, Tyrrell displays this often conflictual, polarizing relation between *devotional life* and rationalized theology, at first sight as a mutual encounter, as a both/and approach, not intending that “popular devotions are to dictate to theology, but that theology together with them [devotions], must be brought to the test of primitive revelation as interpreted by the Church.”<sup>109</sup> Initially in the essay, Tyrrell’s tone is one of mutuality and encounter, wherein the influence of Newman is especially evident. However, Tyrrell’s particularity later on emerges wherein he argues that as a “concrete religion left by Christ to His Church” Christian Revelation is thus more “directly a *lex orandi* than a *lex credendi*” since the “creed is involved in the prayer, and has to be disentangled from it.”<sup>110</sup> To disentangle its pronouncements from its worship, Tyrrell says that we are in need of a “wise and temperate theology”, which in large part, for Tyrrell, means a theology that does not forget about the specifically *limiting features of analogy*. Such an emphasis, combined with a lack of kataphasis and/or derivative Augustinian participative metaphysics, is a clear forerunner for the latter “rediscovery” and reassertion of negative theology within late-20<sup>th</sup> Century theology. For Tyrrell, such a theology would refuse to “forget that we are constrained to think and speak of things supersensible and eternal in the language proper to things sensible and temporal”.<sup>111</sup> And in another context, he writes of analogy’s purely negative function, not in “giv[ing] us any more comprehensible idea of God...but that it impresses upon us the necessary inadequacy of our human way of regarding Him.”<sup>112</sup> For Tyrrell, appeal to analogy’s greater *dissimilitudo* is resourced by Vatican I’s equally influential defense of theological *mystery*, which Tyrrell uses as a rebuttal to his critics in their overemphasized rationalism:

And indeed reason illumined by faith, when it seeks it with diligence, devotion and sobriety, receives at God’s hand a certain most fruitful insight into mysteries, partly by aid of analogies from things naturally known, partly from the connection of one mystery with another or with another or with the last end of man, yet never is it capable of beholding them after the manner of those truths that constitute its proper object. For of their own nature divine mysteries so surpass the created intelligence that even after they have been propounded by revelation and accepted by faith they remain covered by the veil of faith itself as it were wrapped in a certain obscurity so long as, in this mortal life, we are exiled from the Lord: for we walk by faith and not by vision.<sup>113</sup>

With *Dei filius* as a support, Tyrrell will maintain the usefulness of analogy, yet whenever it is forgetful of its inadequacy, he will maintain that it nevertheless remains “fruitful”—albeit, with his

---

<sup>107</sup> See Rik van Nieuwenhove, “Apophatic Theologian or Phenomenologist of Mystical Experience” in *Jan van Ruusbroec: Mystical Theologian of the Trinity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 29-76.

<sup>108</sup> See George Tyrrell, “The Relation of Theology to Devotion”, 228-252.

<sup>109</sup> Tyrrell, “The Relation of Theology to Devotion”, 240-241.

<sup>110</sup> Tyrrell, “The Relation of Theology to Devotion”, 251.

<sup>111</sup> See George Tyrrell, ‘A Perverted Devotion (II)’, 387.

<sup>112</sup> Tyrrell, “The Relation of Theology to Devotion”, 234.

<sup>113</sup> See DS 3016.

typical flare, the “fruitful mother of all deception.”<sup>114</sup> Hence, as a corrective, such wayward rationalism requires that it “often to be brought to the *lex orandi* test”<sup>115</sup>, one in which is verified and “adheres to the ancient Catholic and Apostolic conception of a teaching authority belonging to the Church as a whole.”<sup>116</sup> While Tyrrell clearly wants to shift the understanding of the Magisterium away from its then ultramontane character, he nevertheless is adamant in insisting that devotion itself possess its own critical capacity, in terms not only of witnessing consistent practice by Catholics, but furthermore, an ability to critically engage with speculative theology, especially when it is forgetful of the role of analogy itself. Hence, by insisting upon subjugating theology to the “test of *lex orandi*”, Tyrrell is wanting, in a certain sense, to return devotion and prayer (*lex orandi*) back to its proper theological setting. However, he does so by way of polarization and diffidence. Thus, one can easily say that the pendulum swings radically opposite for the Irish modernist, such that once enduring the test of devotion, theology recuperates itself “as far as it formulates and justifies the devotion of the best Catholics, and as far as it is true to the life of faith and charity as actually lived, so far is it a law and corrective for all.”<sup>117</sup> In this case, by way of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, devotion is not once again integrated into theology, yet theology itself collapses into lived mysticism—which, by way of its historical reconstruction, can no longer be called *mystical theology*.

Not only was Tyrrell’s lack of balance theologically problematic at the time from a dogmatic perspective—given his repeated stress on analogy’s limitations, as a forerunner to late-20<sup>th</sup> Century “negative theology”. Yet as I have been arguing, such a polarizing approach was perhaps even more so for proponents of mystical theology itself—a distinct, mutually related theological canonical tradition and sub discipline—which both absorbed views upon analogy’s limitations in the name of religious “mystery”, while now being aligned solely within the realm of “religious experience”. In this sense, it is interesting to consider certain themes that Tyrrell develops in his 1897 essay, “What is Mysticism”, wherein he develops a more expansive, explicitly non-hierarchical notion of mysticism, such that “if love be mysticism, then we have the key to all mysticism within ourselves.”<sup>118</sup> For mysticism and spirituality within the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Tyrrell’s greater stress upon the immanent accessibility and socio-horizontal focus of mysticism is immensely influential, as it is combined with the living of Christian *life* within a soteriological horizon. Interestingly enough, he pursues this topic of mysticism immediately with a discussion of hagiography and the need to critically update its approach, in accord with the tastes and demands of the “subjective temper of our days”.<sup>119</sup> For in terms of modern educated sensibilities—an audience to which Tyrrell was initially writing for in the London Jesuit publication, the *Month*, before his removal from staff<sup>120</sup>—Tyrrell cites broad, diverse

<sup>114</sup> Tyrrell, ‘A Perverted Devotion (II)’, 389.

<sup>115</sup> Tyrrell, “The Relation of Theology to Devotion”, 251.

<sup>116</sup> See Tyrrell, *Medievalism*, 116.

<sup>117</sup> Tyrrell, “The Relation of Theology to Devotion”, 252.

<sup>118</sup> See George Tyrrell, “What is Mysticism?” in *The Faith of the Millions: A Selection of Past Essays*, First Series (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1901), 253-272.

<sup>119</sup> Tyrrell, “What is Mysticism?”, 254.

<sup>120</sup> For a historical analysis of this affair, see the introduction to ‘A Perverted Devotion (II)’. In this historical instance, there is indeed a very interesting example of doctrinal development, considering Rome’s censorship of Tyrrell’s 1898 essay as suspect of universalism, given and his citation of Julian of Norwich’s famous “all manner [of] thing shall be well”. This is contrasted by the *Catechism’s* nr.313 explicit citation of this same passage, as well as the 01.12.2010 catechesis that Pope-emeritus Benedict XVI delivered on Julian of Norwich, as her eschatology is an exemplary witness “of the Catholic faith on an argument that never ceases to be a provocation to all believers”.

influences, ranging from the advent of the modern novel, developments with history and the "art of biography", in its "portrayal of a life, of a process; the record of the growth and unfolding of a soul and character."<sup>121</sup> Note here of course, the not so subtle references to doctrinal development that Tyrrell is equally calling to attention, as one equally marked by "process", historical "growth and unfolding", etc. Hence, given 20<sup>th</sup> Century modernity's "subjective temper", Tyrrell pointedly remarks that in terms of hagiography, lists of miraculous events, earlier chronicled at the expense of the ordinary and mundane, are of little interest for educated moderns, for "we care less for what a man does, and more for what he is."<sup>122</sup> This plea for the subject and identity of the saint is also in line with the explicit utility of hagiography: namely, imitation. To which, in reflecting modern aesthetic approaches, Tyrrell poignantly observes that "we are but slightly stirred to grasp at what is only very remotely within our reach."<sup>123</sup> Tyrrell bases such observations as a bridge to his primary contention: that mysticism itself has suffered deeply from such hagiographical tendencies. And in this sense Tyrrell is certainly convincing, in light not only of outdated hagiographic methods, but furthermore, the manuals of spiritual theology, such as Tanquerey's *The Spiritual Life*, which had largely segregated mysticism within a very narrow theological field as something wholly extraordinary to revealed, Christian faith.<sup>124</sup> Such presentation, Tyrrell argues, regards mysticism as

[...] attributed to them [the Saints] as a peculiar possession from which other Christians are excluded. Moreover, mysticism itself, if not entirely misunderstood, is at least regarded as something vague and unintelligible, something akin to illusions and visions, things which no healthy and practical mind would care to meddle with.<sup>125</sup>

Thus, in seeking to reintroduce the credibility and validity of the mystical theological canon, Tyrrell will thus argue against such a rarefied, "infused" understanding of mysticism. Instead, Tyrrell assents to a more broad, inclusive redefinition of mysticism, synonymous with the life of grace as the "love of God[...]'Every Christian in the state of grace loves God and is therefore more or less a mystic."<sup>126</sup> Certainly, Tyrrell wants to humanize and immanetize mysticism as "something within our grasp"—a somewhat unilateral expansion of what the manuals of spiritual theology call "acquired contemplation", or its French 17<sup>th</sup> Century precursor, "prayer of the quiet". Tyrrell will thus emphasize a definite degree of the very naturalness of the act of mysticism, as he broadly understands it. And likewise, it is to be expected that by lacking attention to a certain metaphysic, demanding questions, such as the relation between nature and grace is problematically left unattended. Rather, concerning our love for God and the mystical experience of His immediacy to the soul, for Tyrrell, such immediacy is never one of sensible, and thus conceptual, "intuition". Instead, mysticism is experientially *inferential*, as "fairly expressed by saying that they *feel*, though

---

See [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/audiences/2010/documents/hf\\_benxvi\\_aud\\_20101201\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2010/documents/hf_benxvi_aud_20101201_en.html) as accessed on 11.03.2013.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Tyrrell, "What is Mysticism?", 255.

<sup>123</sup> Tyrrell, "What is Mysticism?", 257.

<sup>124</sup> A.A. Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*, trans. Herman Branderis (Tournai: ET, 1930).

<sup>125</sup> Tyrrell, "What is Mysticism?", 260.

<sup>126</sup> See See Henri Joly, *Psychologie des Saints* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1898), as quoted in Tyrrell, "What is Mysticism?", 261.



they do not *behold*, the Divine presence."<sup>127</sup> And as a wholly immanent act, Tyrrell will identify this inference as a "natural act of the intellect, and will give birth to a self-caused, natural act of love."<sup>128</sup> This here, for Tyrrell, is the core value of mysticism: its immanence and naturalness, while the "utility" of mysticism is seen as contributing to a "living theology that continually proceeds from and returns to that experience of which it is the ever tentative and perfectible analysis."<sup>129</sup> And yet, the reason why the charge of "immanence" was so damaging—a heterodox account of *interior intimo meo*—is precisely because Tyrrell wishes to uncritically marry this living, experiential theology—which he finds in the premodern mystical canon—with the "modern subjective tempor" that regards the subject as autonomously independent from both community and world. Combining such anthropology with his limiting sense of analogy, Tyrrell's plea for mysticism, exemplified by someone as evocative as Julian of Norwich, without recourse to her wider theological context and distinct theological anthropology, only historically reconstructs mysticism as a discourse further afield from serious theological consideration.<sup>130</sup> The pleas for religious experience, as mirroring and arising from the autonomous subject, become inexorably epistemological, while largely overlooking issues of hermeneutically engaging with content as a source for theologizing within the broader Tradition. This point is distinctly born out by late-20<sup>th</sup> Century scholarship on mysticism precisely over the question of the *possibility* of the immediacy and passivity of mystical experience.<sup>131</sup> The critical presumption, however, within these past debates over the mediated or immediate character of mystical experience is precisely how it hinges upon the modern subject himself and the extent to which such experiences reflect and attest to his questioned autonomy as such.

Here too do we see why renewed attention has been given over to the mystical canon explicitly concerning in its views on love, explicitly seen through the prism of a personalist

---

<sup>127</sup> Tyrrell, "What is Mysticism?", 266. Interestingly enough, Tyrrell will contrast this inferential reading of mysticism with a strange, and albeit limited reading of "Rusbrok" (See Tyrrell, "What is Mysticism?", 265) as offering an entirely sensuous and intellectual understanding of God's presence to the soul, as the famous Brabantine contemplative "constantly speaks as though love were an apprehensive faculty". For this reading, it is both entirely unclear what sources Tyrrell is drawing upon, nor does he seem to have any regard for Ruusbroec's consistent appeals to "*ghevoelen*", whereby he writes: "Some of my friends desire, and have prayed me to show and explain in a few words, of the best of my ability, and most precisely and clearly, the truth that I understand and feel [*ghevoele*] about all the most profound doctrine that I have written, so that my words may not mislead anyone but may serve to improve each one". "*Selke van minen vrienden begheren ende hebben mi ghebeden, dat ic met corten waerden tonen ende verclaren soude, na mijn vermoghen, die naeste ende die claerste waerheit die ic versta ende ghevoele can alle der hoechster leren die ic ghescreven hebbe, op dat mijnre waerde niemen vererghert en werde maer ieghewelc ghebetert.*" Jan van Ruusbroec, *Boecksken der verclaringhe*, Opera Omnia I, ed. G. de Baere, trans. Ph. Crowley and H. Rolfson (Tielt: Lannoo, Leiden: Brill, 1981)ll. 24-28.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Tyrrell, *Medievalism*, 47.

<sup>130</sup> See Emile Mersch, S.J., *Theology of the Mystical Body*, 95, as he too tries to reclaim a strong degree of mystical theological immanence, without however making the fatal flaw that Modernism had made: "This apologetic differs greatly from the apologetics of immanentism spoken of by the Modernists. The latter apologetic is immanent to man as man, the former [i.e. Mersch's] is immanent to the man who lives in Christ, to the whole Christ; that is, it is immanent to Him who is purely transcendent, and hence it is strictly transcendent. The transcendent Christ nowhere so strikingly displays His transcendence as in the inner depths, or, if the word is preferred, the immanence of His action on souls."

<sup>131</sup> For a good overview of different theological and non-theological methodological studies of mysticism in late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, see Edward Howells, "Mysticism and the Mystical: the Current Debate", *The Way Supplement*, 102 (2001), 15-27.

anthropology—what the French Jesuit Pierre Rousset would typify as the “ecstatic view of love”, with the likes of St. Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry, in contrast with the “physical” or “Greco-Thomist synthesis” on the “natural view of love”.<sup>132</sup> Reflecting such a modern, personalist anthropology, and love’s ecstatic overcoming of individual isolation, Tyrrell writes: “It is precisely by love and its dependent affections that we are brought into conscious and active relation with the whole world of personalities outside our own....It is love which at once saves and yet overcomes that separateness and individual distinction which is of the very essence of personality...”<sup>133</sup> Given such an isolated, autonomous personalist anthropology, love is seen as “overcoming” such isolation. Here, the modern subject is depicted in full view, while love is addressed as a distinct *need* for fulfillment and relationality, born from lack. And yet, Tyrrell himself is not ignorant of this “gulf” that divides someone such as Julian and the modern subject. Tyrrell acknowledges that figures from the medieval mystical canon are operating from a “psychology of their own”, which he maintains is entirely distinct from scholastic theology and in turn, is “difficult to disentangle from the necessarily figurative language in which it is wrapped.”<sup>134</sup>

Tyrrell’s views are here fortunately outdated, in so far as both the advances by Maréchal and transcendental Thomists as well as by Blondel’s “immanence” and its theological historical *ressourcement* by De Lubac, et. al. in rediscovering precisely a more dynamic Thomas, the full extent of *potentia oboedientialis* and the forceful return of a robust, *imago dei* theological anthropology within Catholic theology precisely under the the idiom of our “*natural desire for God*”. It is this precise theological development as a *ressourcement*, which in looking back at Tyrrell works, is abundantly missing in his pleas for a certain form of natural mysticism and turn towards immanence. And while these themes have been strongly developed within various systematic theologies, the fruit of such development appears at times hardly visible within scholarly reflection over mysticism that is either explicitly non-theological or if it is, still relegates itself within outdated views on the modern subject confined exclusively to the parameters of religious experience. From a systematic theological perspective, such developments clearly signal an opening for a more substantial, *mutual encounter* between mysticism and systematic theology—as typified by van Beeck. And it is the Dutch Jesuit’s intuition, in seeing the potential of this encounter, that if there is to be a real exchange—one in which respects enduring human autonomy as well as the creature’s “native attunement to God” as, what van Beeck would call the creature as radical decentered in their theonomous dependence—then this exchange must indeed be oriented to an *admirable exchange*. That is, to the creature’s deification as the fullness of Christ Incarnated, which, given our natural attunement to God, renders the greater particularity and flourishing of the human person as such. Such a perspective, as we shall now see, for van Beeck, is one of *lex orandi*, wherein liturgical worship is both a source and more importantly, a participation and praxis whereby speculative theological reflection must orient itself in and, as “intellectual worship”, must ultimately return.

### §3. Van Beeck and mystico-liturgical participation

---

<sup>132</sup> See Pierre Rousset, S.J., *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution*, trans. Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001)

<sup>133</sup> Tyrrell, “Preface”, vi.

<sup>134</sup> Tyrrell, “What is Mysticism?”, 268.

Returning once again to van Beeck, the Dutch Jesuit broadly situates the liturgical and “*doxological essence* of the Christian faith”—between the corresponding mysteries of the theological and the anthropological—within the cosmological sphere, “in place and time that this essence is being played out, in response to the person of Jesus Christ”.<sup>135</sup> Here, van Beeck explores the liturgical within an ongoing fundamental theological discussion of the Creed, one in which mediates the Creed between the theological as “*utterly and transcendently gracious*”, while equally emphasizing the liturgical as an “*invitation to human authenticity in believing, inspired by universal humanity’s God-given capacity for God*—a capacity definitively revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”<sup>136</sup> Once again, not only do we see van Beeck heavily reliant upon this theological anthropology to which he will return to time and again via the Tradition, but equally important is that the human integrity of such an “invitation” thus involves fundamental theological reflection.

And while such mediation clearly gives way to an ongoing hermeneutics of interpretation, liturgical mediation—contextualized and always concretized in the particularity of the embodied material world—is “far from keeping the worshipping community at a distance from God”.<sup>137</sup> Rather, van Beeck will reengage such hermeneutics with his more characteristic, thick aesthetics of participative worship, which he argues is squarely in line with deification and hence, mystical theology’s “*admirabile commercium*”. Here, bridging the discourses and mutual influence of liturgical and mystical theology upon a firm Christological grounding thus allows for van Beeck—once again, showing a profound resemblance to the inheritance of Ruusbroec—to liturgically characterize both the transcendental and immanent encounter with Christ in more familiar mystical theological categories, such as kataphasis and apophasis.<sup>138</sup> Here, van Beeck can thus argue for the tension of both “saying and unsaying”, not as a suspended dialectic, yet as a dynamic that yields to a “positive result”.<sup>139</sup> Here, the primacy of Christianity as a positive religion, over and against any natural religiosity comes to expression. Such a positive result is thus, none other than the liturgical, whereby “Christian worship is the act by which it most closely participates in the divine nature.”<sup>140</sup> Here, van Beeck is both recalling us, yet innovating at the same time, a crucial point that has so often been overlooked and compromised in the late-20<sup>th</sup> Century rediscovery of “negative theology”, whereby he warns us against “the concomitant development of a notion, prepared by nominalism, that apophatic theology and mysticism are free-standing, self-authenticating acts of the human mind in

---

<sup>135</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §65, a, 72-3.

<sup>136</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §65, 2, 73.

<sup>137</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §66, 1, 75.

<sup>138</sup> See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Brieven I, Opera Omnia X II*. 62-75, 79-82 (translation modified): “They have a heavenly life, for Christ lives in them, God and man. And therefore they are imaged [*gebeeldet*] and unimaged [*ongebeeldet*]. They are imaged with the life of our Lord, with his passion, his death and with all virtue. And in their spirit they are free and idle [*ledich*] and unimaged of all things. And therefore they are unrepresentable [*onverbeeldet*] and are transformed in divine clarity. And so they go out and in and find living nourishment always. They go out imaged with the humanity of our Lord in good conduct, holy practice and all virtue. They go in imageless with the Spirit of our Lord where they find and possess eternal clarity, unfathomable wealth, taste and comfort, more than they can grasp or comprehend. They are well enlightened from above and well kept below and they have found the true nature of love [*minne*], for they love themselves and all creatures in God, to God and for God....These people also love themselves and all creatures to God, that is where they stand united with God and all the saints before the presence of God, in eternal honor, in eternal praise, with all that they are able to achieve.”

<sup>139</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §69, 1, 93.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

relation to God, and not forms of worship, let alone Christian worship.”<sup>141</sup> Not only do we see a certain balance between the kataphatic and the apophatic, which is always to be commended. But furthermore, he roots the *via negativa* away from an all too common, platitudinous speculation and Derridean indecision.<sup>142</sup> Instead, he marries it with a robust, participative metaphysics of desire—one in which is equally lacking in Jean-Luc Marion—whereby God’s utter transcendence and greater alterity is *performatively* approached in liturgy itself. That is to say, as worship. Here, the *via negativa* is enshrined and enhanced by liturgy itself and likewise, theology, its servant and beneficiary, as the pursuit of “intellectual worship”. For this sense of performativity—“to a positive result”—is *continuous* in its linkages, both with kataphasis and apophasis. And unlike Marion, it is rooted in the need, urge and proliferation of naming and imagining, as well as unsaying, evidenced by the Roman Rite’s enduring, regional practices of the Lenten veiling of crosses, statues and altarpieces. For van Beeck, the appeal of *lex orandi* and the liturgical does not stem from a Modernist hostility and opposition from the law of belief (as we have seen in George Tyrrell), nor as a pious refuge of unspeakable, glorious alterity in an attempt to collapse the philosophical and theological rationalities under the idiom of onto-theology—as is the case for Jean Luc Marion. Rather, for van Beeck, he bridges the strengths of both the mystical and the liturgical in such a way that characterizes worship itself as arising from the *erotic*; from our “native attunement to God”. What Ruusbroec, in reflecting upon the “way and manner” in which Christ gives himself in the Eucharist” similarly depicts Christ’s minne as both utterly gratuitous, as well as the “voracious lust [*ghiereghe ghelost*] Christ has for our blessedness”, such that, “no matter how much He consumes of us, He cannot be satisfied, for He has bulimia [*den mengersael*], and His hunger is without measure.”<sup>143</sup> Here, worship arises specifically from this inexhaustible eros, one in which does not reflect human subjectivity characterized by a fundamental privation and lack, yet a human desire that fundamentally participates in God’s greater alterity. Here, such a transcendent otherness is deduced neither from early modernity’s take on the *remoteness of God* “shorn of all immanence”<sup>144</sup> nor the weakness of analogy seen in Tyrrell’s Modernist plea for “mystery” and its reiteration in an exclusive, rational argument for negative theology. Rather, for van Beeck, such a desire is deeply liturgical and *participative* in its origins and return, as he recalls to his aid various sources from the Tradition (Gregory of Nyssa, Clement of Alexandria, John Damascene, Dionysius the Areopagite, Augustine, Aquinas, Ruusbroec, Nicholas of Cusa) that culminate in an “aware[ness] of the limitlessness of our own inner desire for beatitude”, which, as an *admirabile commercium*, preserves and advances human integrity amid “our total consummation in God.”<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup> van Beeck, “Trinitarian Theology as Participation”, 321-322.

<sup>142</sup> See the now classic exchanges between Marion and Derrida at Villanova in Jean-Luc Marion, “In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of ‘Negative Theology’”, as well as the following discussion by Marion and Derrida, “On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion, Moderated by Richard Kearney” in *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999) 20-53, 54-78. See also Patrick Ryan Cooper ‘When Silence Refuses to Keep Quiet’ (Unpublished dissertation, 2009) a critical analysis of Jean-Luc Marion, Jacques Derrida and discussions over the ‘third way’ in mystical theology and its retrieval within contemporary French Phenomenology.

<sup>143</sup> See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*, Opera Omnia VIII, ed. G. de Baere, trans. A. Lefevere (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), ll. 740, 731-733: “Mochten wi sien de ghierghe ghelost die Cristus heeft tote onser salecheit”; “Ende wat hi op ons teert, hi en mach niet vervult werden, want hi heeft den mengersael ende sijn hongher es sonder mate.”

<sup>144</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §66, 4, a, 78.

<sup>145</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §67, 1, 79.

Such a participative desire is in turn Christologically centered and reaffirmed as fundamentally liturgical, as "paradoxically [...] in proportion as Christians have more emphatically professed that in Christ risen they truly know the God they worship, they have also felt more, not less, deeply compelled to profess God's utter transcendence."<sup>146</sup> Here, Christ is not merely the object that elicits the liturgical act 'to God', yet in a participative move, *in God*, the Church "appeal[s] to Christ's perfect worship".<sup>147</sup> Such liturgical participation in Christ's own kenotic worship, as *mystici corporis*<sup>148</sup> thereby mediates the immediacy in which "Christians truly know the God they worship—a God who becomes more, not less, adorable and ungraspable for being so intimately known."<sup>149</sup>

This liturgical emphasis within theological reflection, in turn, van Beeck identifies another primary theme in *God Encountered* that is especially relevant to our reflection on mystical theology and its status in relation to systematic theology. Namely, a Christology of "encounter" as "interpreted in terms of a *mutuality of sharing*", which van Beeck argues is the "central focus" or primary object of Christian theology.<sup>150</sup> Such a systematic Christology of encounter, at the intersection of cosmos and humanity, yields a distinct opening to mystical theology. This is evident precisely in terms of divinization, whereby to "become partakers of the divine nature" [2 Pt, 1,4] by virtue of the Incarnation itself and its transformed enhancement of created material reality such that, as Ruusbroec states, "He remained God and became human, that humans might become God."<sup>151</sup> Appropriately positioned not as a privatized form of autonomous experience, instead van Beeck generously conveys the Tradition's "endless variations" of this "exchange principle", or "*admirabile commercium*" [admirable exchange] as a core dimension of revealed, Christian faith that has organically developed by Tradition, as an economy that mediates and fulfills both cosmological and anthropological spheres.<sup>152</sup> Such an assertion builds upon a natural openness, theonomous

---

<sup>146</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §66, 3, 76.

<sup>147</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, § 34, 2, 154.

<sup>148</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §76,2,c, 142 and his interesting reference to Emile Mersch's work on the "Whole Christ", in which "De Lubac, in his book *Catholicism*, took advantage of...in order to explain systematically that *Christian doctrine is nothing if not social*." In the corresponding footnote [i], he further elaborates: "The original theology of Christ's Mystical Body was universalist as well as spiritual: it consistently set the Church, viewed as the community intimately united in Christ, against the horizon of the unity of the human race. It is regrettable that the more recent theology of Christ's Mystical Body came to be encumbered, especially at the hands of Roman theologians, with such strongly hierarchical and institutional accretions that by the time Vatican II came together the image of the People of God had to be introduced by way of corrective."

<sup>149</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §34, 2, 155.

<sup>150</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §23, 2, 84.

<sup>151</sup> See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, II. 979: "*Hi bleef god ende wart mensche, op dat de mensche god worde*."

<sup>152</sup> See Emile Mersch S.J., *The Whole Christ*, trans. John R. Kelly S.J., (Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Company, 1938), 578-580, and his historical retrieval of the "Mystical Body of Christ" as inseparable from Christological dogma, whereby "the divinity of the Saviour and the divinization of the Mystical body [...] are disclosed together, one within the other. Christ is fully revealed only when the nature of the Church is revealed, for the fullness of Christ is the Church." (578) And then again: "They [i.e. Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Athanasius, Hilary, Cyril of Alexandria, etc.] teach that the very fact of the Incarnation, which makes Christ the Man-God and the common Saviour of men, has bestowed such abundance of divine life upon His sacred humanity that it becomes the source and principle of all life, possessing in itself sufficient grace to make us all sons of adoption and deified men [...] [and] in their refutation of the Christological heresies the Greek Fathers [...] declare that the Mystical Body is constituted by the union of human nature with eternal Life, just as the union of two natures in the one Person of the Son constitutes Christ." (579) Surprisingly, van Beeck does not build upon the Leuven Jesuit, Emile Mersch's theology, with the exception of a single reference to the fact that "in an equally explicit

grounding and "native attunement", as "actualized" or furthered in "likeness" of its deified ends. This point is evident in noting the very contextual basis in which many of the Patristic Fathers made use of this exchange principal, wherein van Beeck argues:

Christianity entered a world where religion was often associated with trade and where trade was largely carried on by barter, often across the forbidding barriers of race, language, religion, and spheres of influence and power. In such a world, the image of the exchange of goods (along with related images, such as redemption) could furnish the Christian faith with a telling metaphor: God involved the human race in a paradoxical trade-off. The Church Fathers, from Irenaeus on, never tired of repeating, in endless variations, the *divinization* theme: 'the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ..., out of his limitless love, became what we are, so that he might make us what he is.'<sup>153</sup>

Speaking against the excess of "modernism", as exemplified by many soteriological threads in certain strands of the Protestant tradition and its "experientialist bias", over and against both the "integrity of the faith...[and] the visible faith-community"<sup>154</sup>, van Beeck juxtaposes this with the Tradition's natural transition from Christological dogma and creation's fundamental attunement to God to that of the *admirabile commercium*:

Consequently, faith introduces the believer, not so much to God, as to God's work; it becomes a matter, in Melancthon's classic phrase, of 'knowing his [Christ's] benefits,' rather than of becoming, in Christ, 'partakers of the divine nature'. This has profound consequences in the area of Christology. It removes from the heart of Christian theology what is perhaps the most central theological theme of the patristic tradition—a theme that gave rise to endless variations: 'Out of the limitless love God's Word, who is God's Son, became what we are, so as to make us what he is.' This broad and capacious theme, known as the 'exchange principle', had warranted, since Irenaeus, the Christian conviction that humanity and the world are called into participation in the divine life.<sup>155</sup>

In arguing for the inseparability of a hermeneutics of tradition and "participation in the church's present faith experience", like Tyrrell, van Beeck interestingly, yet repeatedly cites *Dei Filius*' "most fruitful insight into the mysteries" (DS 3016) to support this stress upon both participation and mystery inherent within theological hermeneutics. For van Beeck, the key importance *Dei filius* (DS 3016) reinstates is the inherently hermeneutical task of theology, one in which privileges the centrality of the mysteries of revealed, Christian faith. And thus in turn, the necessity for their *thick*, hermeneutical pursuit as a form of participative understanding. Furthermore, "objective", scientific knowledge cannot stand apart, van Beeck argues, from "antecedent, human interest—i.e.

---

way, Henri de Lubac, in his book, *Catholicism*, took advantage of Émile Mersch's marvelous historical and theological studies of the Church as the Body of Christ." *GE*, §76, 2, 142. See also the attached footnote (*GE*, §76, 2, [i], 142-3) wherein van Beeck interestingly notes: "The original theology of Christ's Mystical Body was universalist as well as spiritual: it consistently set the Church, viewed as the community intimately united in Christ, against the horizon of the unity of the human race. It is regrettable that the more recent theology of Christ's Mystical Body came to be encumbered, especially at the hands of Roman theologians, with such strongly hierarchical and institutional accretions that by the time Vatican II came together the image of the People of God had to be introduced by way of corrective."

<sup>153</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §23, 2, 84.

<sup>154</sup> van Beeck, van Beeck, *GE*, §20,1, 62.

<sup>155</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §20, 2, 63.

participation.”<sup>156</sup> Which is to say, the intentionality inherent in knowing, an intentionality that includes: “interest, a sense of presence, encounter, participation, self-abandon, capacity for worship”.<sup>157</sup> This participation, furthermore, is distinctly a human phenomenon, intrinsic to sociality whereby we can neither refuse to “project a presence onto others”<sup>158</sup> nor “cannot not participate”<sup>159</sup> within a mutual intentional structure. Rather, relationality is inherently natural for humans, argues van Beeck, and such mutual intentionalities are never “neutral”, never an objective *as such*, for it is always already touched and invested with meaning, identity and relationship. This anthropology of mutual intentionality and participation, refuses however a reductive, hermeneutical circle and instead, turns upon a theological, sapiential foundation wherein knowledge of God functions in one “being content to be *known* by It, and to feel Its touch within us, which will transform us in all we do”.<sup>160</sup> However, with regards to participation, such a sapiential knowledge as *being-known* is always contextual, rooted in relationships and the very givenness of Creation: “[W]e will know It only by participation, yet never apart from everything and everybody else we know.”<sup>161</sup> Thus, such participative knowing resists the very modern (and Modernist) trappings of *autonomous* exclusion, possession and verifiability, such that we see in exclusive appeals to the autonomy of “religious experience”. Of course, van Beeck certainly recognizes a deeply apophatic move in God’s greater dissimilarity as “irrevocably Other”, and yet, such alterity and its participative knowing, for van Beeck, is inescapably a function of *bearing witness* to such knowing in and through its contextual, mediated horizon.

#### §4. Unity and Catholicity in Theology: Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology, Conversant with Mystical and Liturgical Theology

What is at stake in “economy” and theology? As we have seen, the *admirable exchange* both epitomizes and preserves none other than the crucial linkage between doxology and soteriology, between the divine *exitus* and humanity’s and the world’s graced *reditus*. While economy here stands for *reditus*, it is one fundamentally of reception and participation, yet founded upon a clear *asymmetry*, in so far as the

[N]atural order and the order of grace are governed by the dynamics of an encounter that is divinely initiated—of a partnership that is entirely of God’s making [.....] The account of God’s *exitus*—the central profession of faith—must, therefore, be considered the foundation of Christian faith, and consequently the standard against which all other doctrines are to be measured.<sup>162</sup>

Hence, the dogmatic content of Christian faith—Creed, Councils, the Church’s magisterium— in their respective legitimacies are normative and asymmetrically asserted. And yet, van Beeck will also stress that such an *exitus* and asymmetry is not to be understood in a linear progression, yet as

---

<sup>156</sup> van Beeck, “Trinitarian Theology as Participation”, 296.

<sup>157</sup> van Beeck, “Trinitarian Theology as Participation”, 297.

<sup>158</sup> van Beeck, “Trinitarian Theology as Participation”, 298.

<sup>159</sup> van Beeck, “Trinitarian Theology as Participation”, 299.

<sup>160</sup> van Beeck, “Trinitarian Theology as Participation”, 305.

<sup>161</sup> van Beeck, “Trinitarian Theology as Participation”, 306.

<sup>162</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §57,3,a, 23-4.

mutually related with the act of creation itself and its "native attunement" to such *exitus*. Hence, the interpretation of grace and nature is seen as mutual and dialectical. Or, in philosophical terminology: a greater preference for univocity in its stress of immanence over and against equivocality, while clearly reaffirming God's greater dissimilarity precisely in terms of *semper maior*. Hence, van Beeck clearly refuses a clear, two-tiered structure, such that the "orders of grace and nature are intertwined, not juxtaposed."<sup>163</sup> This relationship he will term as *perichoretic*, though because of the prior asymmetry of the *exitus* as the normative content of Christian faith, the intertwining and mutuality of nature and grace are placed in the tension of balancing *mutuality and asymmetry*. Which in turn confirms that for van Beeck, the positive and revealed dimensions of Christian faith make it superior to natural religion. Such an affirmation is mutually balanced by the *divine exitus'* anthropological infrastructure. Herein, van Beeck argues that the Incarnation event has neither "replaced or overwhelmed" creation's integrity. Instead, such an event enhances it to "rediscover, at the heart of the order of creation, its prior, native openness to the order of the incarnation".<sup>164</sup> Hence, such an emphasis upon creation's native attunement to God, not only as mutual, yet *intrinsic* to the asymmetry of the divine *exitus* is the opening for the necessity of *fundamental theology*.

In establishing the basic parameters of systematic theology and its foundational unity, van Beeck first describes the relation between constructive, dogmatic and fundamental theology as ideally marked by a shared sense of "mutuality", most distinctly between that of dual integrity of understanding and faith.<sup>165</sup> At its core, theology is marked by the mutual interplay between its ongoing hermeneutical pursuits, *fides quaerens intellectum*, while "at a deeper level...theology must be *mystagogical*". Neither due to theology's object, nor the personal piety of its practioner, rather, as we have analyzed earlier on, theology's *intrinsic* mystagogical dimensions, van Beeck argues, stems from the human person's *immanent theonomous core*. For a mystagogical theology "leads the mind into the depth and fullness of *its own native potential* in the very process of leading it to its limits, as well as beyond them."<sup>166</sup> By *virtue of* this immanent theonomous core of the human person, van Beeck sees in this theological anthropology not only theology's primary function in terms of the service of faith. Instead, in furthering the tradition of Christian humanism, van Beeck correctly sees theology's equally important, *critical* function as intrinsically stemming from our own "native potential". "Thus, on the other hand, theology is also meant to be an education of human intelligence precisely insofar as it is natively in search of the infinite: theology is 'understanding in search of faith' (*intellectus quaerens fidem*)."<sup>167</sup>

Here, the critical function of theology is once again stressed by way of its "native" or "natural" character of the human intelligence itself, one in which is characterized by way of its *erotic search* for the infinite. Van Beeck's Christian humanism is especially evident whereby he states that "faith in God must be the exaltation of humanity, otherwise the Christian faith-commitment would be merely superimposed, adventitious, and sectarian, and its only possible defense would be of the fundamentalist kind."<sup>168</sup> Thus, the very critical dimensions arise *intrinsically within* theological

---

<sup>163</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §57,3,d, 25.

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §12, 1, 35.

<sup>166</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, § 12, 1, a, 36.

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, § 12, 1, a, 37.



reflection itself, and not extrinsically, as conceived in the more critical dialogical model of theology and its relation to other academic fields, society and the Church. Rather, by theology's intrinsic critical sense, as stemming from its *desiderium naturalis*, van Beeck provides a compelling groundwork to contemporaneously argue for the continuing place of theology within academia today.<sup>169</sup> In this case, native attunement grounds the interplay and commitment to both the very *particularity* of religious traditions as interpretative of such a theological anthropology, while equally *universal* and naturalistic in its acknowledgement of humanity, the world and other faith traditions. Therefore, the function of such native attunement is that with regards to its intrinsic character, van Beeck's "conception" aims at "put[ing] an end to all 'extrinsicism' in the understanding of the relationship between positive religion and natural religiosity, faith and reason, grace and nature, the living God and the universe."<sup>170</sup> Instead, on a horizontal level, such an immanent, native attunement mediates religious particularity, universality and difference, while aiming to ensure their respective integrities. And in turn, in its in-depth, vertical mediation, native attunement "upholds the traditional Catholic realization that the order of grace, symbolized by the positive Christian profession of faith, transcends humanity and the world in their natural integrity without being alien to them."<sup>171</sup>

While such orientations establish systematic theology as a hermeneutical interpretation of culture and religion, van Beeck nuances the very contextual nature of such a hermeneutical theology. Interpreting the thick, dynamic convergence between religion and culture in light of the "Great Tradition", van Beeck writes that "The great Christian Tradition, however, has never simply contented itself with this natural, spontaneous interplay between religion and culture. It has always also sought to *influence* and even *transform* culture."<sup>172</sup> Thus, from this conviction, theology can neither resort to mere description, nor can its Tradition hermeneutics remain static and avoid cultural developments as well. Instead, van Beeck will insist upon this point in raising to issue systematic theology's "*central—or in any case most challenging—task...[as]the search for new forms of unity between religion and culture.*"<sup>173</sup> Such an appeal for "new forms of unity" is characteristic and equally at the core of van Beeck's thought, as he lays out systematic theology's equally intrinsic, *constructive* dimension in mediating between the positions of dogmatic and fundamental theology: "situated as it is between Church and Culture, worship and worldliness, witness to the world and willingness to learn from it".<sup>174</sup> And in true Jesuit manner, such a constructive mediation and

---

<sup>169</sup> On this note, See the following comments by the Most Rev. Rowan Williams's Sermon in Leuven, 02.02.2011, in which he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven: "All universities have the vocation of challenging again and again the various ways in which cultures can trivialise or ignore the desires of the mind [...] But for the *Christian* university, this has an added dimension. The Christian intellectual community is an environment which honours the belief that the most basic level of human *eros* is the desire for communion with God. And that means that the Christian university is more, not less, passionate about the critique of idolatry and fantasy. At its heart, whatever the diverse individual convictions of its members, lies a set of convictions about what is due to the full dignity of human beings made in the divine image. And to be faithful to this requires a persistent and constantly renewed questioning of all that diminishes and distorts or trivialises humanity at every stage of its existence, from womb to grave." <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/904/archbishop-awarded-honorary-doctorate>, as accessed on 18.02.2013.

<sup>170</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §91, 2, 260.

<sup>171</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §14, 1, 41.

<sup>173</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §14, 2, 41-2.

<sup>174</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §14, 2, 42.

development requires "true spiritual discernment" as well as a "special sense of balance between the appreciation of existing harmony and order and the power of imagination."<sup>175</sup> In turn, such a constructive theological angle, van Beeck puts forth, is theology's "first loyalty, as well as the core of the theologian's vocation: *in the present moment to understand, and perhaps to further, the Church's living, historic Tradition as a whole.*"<sup>176</sup>

The "Great Tradition", consistently referred to by van Beeck, is the "Tradition of worship, life, and teaching of the undivided Church."<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, there is an unavoidable heuristic that he establishes in *God Encountered*, in both its "discovery and...recovery", which nonetheless avoids specific definition.<sup>178</sup> Instead, van Beeck will argue that the *fundamental openness* of the Great Tradition preserves its "spacious structures" by precisely foregoing the temptation of reducing it to "certainty and assurance rather than understanding."<sup>179</sup> And in pursuing and safeguarding such an understanding—rather than clear, certain knowledge of the Great Tradition—so too does it avoid both "integralism" and "modernism" reductions. Instead, van Beeck characterizes the Great Tradition as an "organic, open unity of structure"<sup>180</sup> that is fundamental to catholicity and the "search for new forms of unity between faith and culture"<sup>181</sup>, positions that are at the heart of van Beeck's theological contributions. In a concise manner, van Beeck nicely defines the twin positions of integralism and modernism, which, van Beeck argues with appeal to the Great Tradition, are both "extremes and equally undesirable".<sup>182</sup> Van Beeck states:

*Reductive* systematizations take the *depth* out of the structures of the Christian faith; they create forced coherence by *reducing the faith to the totality of its manifest, objective elements*. *Selective* systematizations take the *breadth* out of the structures of the Christian faith; they create forced coherence by *selecting one of the faith's manifold themes and forcing all other themes into subordination around it*. The former introduce totalitarian principles into the Christian faith, which tends to turn it into an ideology; the latter introduce rationalist principles, which tends to lead to heresy; both set themselves up as authorities over the living Tradition.<sup>183</sup>

Hence, in one way, we can see this defense of the openness of the Tradition as an expression of van Beeck's Christian humanism, which recognizes the mediation of context to the mysteries of the Church's faith. "The Great Tradition understands that humane cultural developments will prosper, not in a setting of total control (i.e. 'integralism'), but in a basically free, dynamic openness that favors the human potential [...] Culture, therefore, deserves a discriminating welcome; it must not be fought and tamed."<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §14, 4, 43.

<sup>177</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §4, 1, 7.

<sup>178</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §4, 2, 8.

<sup>179</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §17, 1, 53.

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §18,1, 56.

<sup>182</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §19, 3, e, 61.

A. VAN BEECK ON THE ROLE AND IDENTITY OF FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY TODAY

Returning once more to the very mediating function of van Beeck's theological anthropology as a plea for a dynamic immanence between the orders of nature and grace, the importance of such mediation in terms of fundamental theology is that such an emphasis goes both ways. Native attunement, van Beeck reminds us, as a movement from particularity to universality, precisely involves a fundamental theology that demands for "integrity" in such a move.<sup>185</sup> Integrity, both for in respecting the dignity and alterity of others—which Christian faith, given its hermeneutical status, can never dismiss as "definitively irrelevant, dated, or unworthy of consideration"<sup>186</sup>—as well as the Church's own human affirmation of the fundamental integrity of the act of faith. While the particularity of faith is reaffirmed as a "gracious gift", it nonetheless corresponds to the humanity's native attunement as precisely open and receptive to the gratuity of such a gift. Likewise, the mediation of native attunement, from universality to particularity is similarly upheld, in that such a "universalist orientation [...] is not available apart from some positive form of commitment or faith."<sup>187</sup>

With this two-way exchange in mind, a more distinctly radical hermeneutics, as well as postmodernity's affirmation of difference, contingency and theological reaffirmation of an adventitious extrinsicism amid a Derridean posture of hospitality to *pure* alterity would undoubtedly be highly critical of van Beeck's thinking of unity. Unity, from this vantage point, is construed as a form of ontological enclosure and a reduction of difference to a closed, hegemonic narrative in its privilege of unity as primary. Hence, postmodernity's engagement with contemporary culture and the technological onslaught of excessive, communicative mediums resorts to a more descriptive, *de facto* recognition, one in which "casts doubt on the very possibility of any unified understanding of the world and humanity."<sup>188</sup> Here, the prospect of "unity" is gauged as a modern, human achievement, under the banner of "progress". Against this modern, technological and socio-economic argument, one in which does not purport to leave the realm of description in its culture hermeneutics, unity is thereby seen as idealistic and *implausible*. Theologically speaking—and it is important to bear this in mind—here, it is not a matter of whether or not claims of unity are *credible* or *accountable*, with reference to its primary sources of reflection and discourse. Rather, the critique is made with reference to *plausibility* and a certain foundational ratification and legitimation of a *credibility-gap* as now fundamental in its cultural hermeneutical description.<sup>189</sup>

By shifting the theological terrain away from the task of credibility and/or accountability to that of cultural plausibility, such shifts lead to the adoption of a *critical* fundamental theological approach, which in part sees theology's apologetical dimensions as situated within and oriented towards the radically secular, post-Christian cultural climate within major regions of Europe and the

---

<sup>185</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §91, 3-4, 260-262.

<sup>186</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §91, 1, 258.

<sup>187</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §91, 3, 260.

<sup>188</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §92, 2, 266.

<sup>189</sup> See my description of unity in theology, its *de facto* absence amid fragmentation and specialization, as well as its *de jure* injunction in Patrick Cooper, "Touching and Being Touched. A Book Review Essay of Toine van de Hoogen's "A Taste of God: On Spirituality and Reframing Foundational Theology". *Bijdragen: Tijdschrift voor Filosofie en Theologie* 73, 3: (2012) 325-336.

urban cosmopolitan centers of North America today. In Leuven, we know this approach quite well as the hermeneutical-contextual theological approach. And as the praxis of theology should always attend to its embodied, concrete, Incarnational rootedness, the emphasis upon such a contextual approach is not only the distinguishing hallmark of current theology within Leuven, yet its very strength. However, in terms of unity, there is a profound risk in rejecting the claims of a differentiated unity—both intrinsically, within the practice of theology itself, as well as its continual reemergence within both religion and culture—by the gradual, habitual substitution of the *de facto* credibility-gap of its cultural hermeneutics for a more fundamental, *de jure* divorce between Creator and the creaturely itself. Here, whether it be a resignation towards, or the celebration of difference and multiplicity, recognizing the contextuality of theology shifts its contemporary imperatives away from the transformative demands of an ever-new unity and synthesis, and instead, steers it towards the description of plausibility. Here, one runs the grave risk of losing a taste for unity and the inexhaustible participation within the “admirable exchange”. This is especially the case, van Beeck argues, “in the universities, where theology most keenly experiences the pressure to adopt a truly scholarly (i.e. neutral, critical, skeptical) stance.”<sup>190</sup> By this, van Beeck at first charges such a scholarly independent, fundamental theology as guided not so much by its Tradition hermeneutics as its self-reflexive, critical attitude, which of itself is an insufficient guide.

However, as a “good Jesuit”, transforming the praxis of criticism as nothing other than discernment<sup>191</sup> van Beeck also sees potential in such a scenario that fundamental theology currently occupies within the academy as suspended within an epoché that “can be both deeply fruitful as well as deeply missionary.”<sup>192</sup> In such a milieu, he notes that while more traditional apologetics and their unqualified use of positive theology may indeed at first appear to be more properly and “explicitly theological”, given their rhetorical particularity. However, while functioning within the universalist tendencies of a fundamental apologetics by contrast “sounds more secular, but *in practice* it is often more properly theological—or rather, Christological.”<sup>193</sup> As an exercise in cultural hermeneutics that takes culture and its concerns seriously, such a praxis-oriented fundamental theology is inherently Incarnational in “continuin[ing] to take on humanity and the world with a love that includes every conceivable concern.”<sup>194</sup> Here, such a praxis-oriented, fundamental theology thrives upon its critical discernment as nothing other than an *imitatio Christi* in taking serious contemporary culture and its concerns.<sup>195</sup> And yet, discernment acts as a corrective to a hermeneutics that bases itself upon neutral description, which “tend[s] to adopt *dominant concerns* as the arena for their encounter with culture.”<sup>196</sup> Instead, such discernment operates by way of an accountability in recognizing various

---

<sup>190</sup> van Beeck, *GE* §92, 4, 267.

<sup>191</sup> See Henri De Lubac, S.J., *Méditation sur l’Eglise*, trans. Michael Mason (Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist Press, 1963) 174: “The very word ‘criticism’ means discernment, and there is, of course, a kind of criticism which is good—particularly self-criticism. That kind is a striving for realism in action—a determination to bar all that cannot justify its claim to genuineness. It is an examination carried out in humility, capable of recognizing the good achieved, but arising out of an essentially apostolic discontent and a perpetually restless spiritual dynamism.”

<sup>192</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §92, 4, 267.

<sup>193</sup> van Beeck, *§GE*, 93, 9, 282.

<sup>194</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> An example of van Beeck’s distinct cultural engagement is exemplified by a fine article concerning the Denying Politicians Communion, as proposed by the US Archbishop Raymond Burke leading up to the then 2004 Presidential elections. See, Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J., “Denying Communion to Politicians: A Theologian Explains Why it is Wrong”, *Commonweal Magazine*, volume CXXXI, Number 11, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004, 19-21.

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*

cultural concerns by way of the credibility of their theological relevance, and not simply because they appear somehow as dominant.

While mindful of van Beeck's balanced, constructive approach to current trends within fundamental theology, he is nonetheless equally, if not moreso, critical of its current pursuit and autonomy in relation to other theological disciplines. For van Beeck, this autonomous, fundamental theology that he has in mind is epitomized by his well-known fellow Chicagoan, David Tracy.<sup>197</sup>

The first challenge that he levels against Tracy is the way in which he separates the various "publics" of Church, academy and society in which fundamental theology is called to recognize and mediate between in our contemporary, post-modern, pluralistic context. Contrary to this contextual departure, van Beeck recognizes that native attunement itself fundamentally mediates the theological and cultural in a "direct encounter", one in which is always open to new expressions of unity between religion and the contemporary world.<sup>198</sup> This direct encounter is then analogously applied whereby van Beeck recalls the "classic Catholic configuration" in equally placing dogmatic and fundamental theology in such a direct relationship. Following from this direct encounter and recalling van Beeck's earlier sapiential definition of theology as "intellectual worship", he thereby argues that it's a matter of concrete "discernment [...] to determine if the need for a configurative balance between Church and culture demand more emphasis upon fundamental or dogmatic theology."<sup>199</sup> Once again, this appeal to "discernment" is made with the view of a concrete, embodied cultural hermeneutics that participates in this direct encounter and ultimately open to cultural transformation, rather than primarily one of adaptability, accommodation and neutral description. From this prerogative, van Beeck charges that fundamental theology today often too easily invests criticism with a near formal authority, which "in an autonomous, unbiased fashion...abjudicate[s] the claims of both faith and culture."<sup>200</sup> Admittedly, the strength of this approach in positioning theology as a mediator of distinct, yet related publics is that it takes secularization and pluralism seriously, responsive to the contextual nature of theology in general and in particular, "empathetic to the credibility gap that *de facto* separates faith from culture and hence, doctrinal theology from fundamental theology."<sup>201</sup> However, and this is indeed a strength in van Beeck's critique, not only is this credibility gap empathetically recognized, yet the problem is that, when viewed from a perspective of unity and direct encounter between faith and culture, such a gap also becomes ratified and legitimated *as such*. Which in turn, under the idiom of "dialogue" between these contextually divided publics, such a ratified gap, *de jure*, increasingly appears in its hermeneutical engagement as a latent return of "extrinsicism" and further polarization. With this heavy critique, van Beeck claims that such trends within much of current fundamental theology depicts a view of the world and humanity as intrinsically separate and distinct from God. And

---

<sup>197</sup> See e.g., David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981); *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity", *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), 548-570; *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>198</sup> See van Beeck, *GE*, §92, 5, 269.

<sup>199</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, § 92, 5, [m], 270.

<sup>200</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §92, 5, 270.

<sup>201</sup> *ibid.*

specifically in terms of Tracy, van Beeck concludes that privileging the primacy of critical reflection results in “control[ing] the encounter”, unflinching in its gaze towards the academy and thus, maintains its neutrality as an “arbitrator” and not as a “mediating participant [...] between grace and nature without sharing in either.”<sup>202</sup>

Arising from this critical depiction of current trends within fundamental theology as separate and autonomous, van Beeck extends this critique in noting that while critical reflection is absolutely necessary to “purify positive faith and thus deepen it”, however it can by no means “generate any positive faith itself.”<sup>203</sup> Rather, positive faith alone can give meaning and purpose to critical reflection, without which criticism alone cannot justify itself. For, as van Beeck very wisely points out, given the insistence of separating such disciplines, “it is notoriously hard to pass from critical reflection to positive theology.”<sup>204</sup> Instead, for van Beeck, such difficulty shows both an asymmetry and primacy to positive faith, though albeit inseparably intertwined with a fundamental theology—what positive faith alone can provide: “the account of the actual life of grace experienced in positive Christian worship, life and teaching.”<sup>205</sup>

## B. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the wealth of van Beeck’s theological synthesis and the dynamic immanence of his ‘native attunement’ allows for us to better heed the compelling injunctive put forth by Louis Dupré. Writing in the forward to the revised translation of Henri De Lubac’s famous *Surnaturel*, Dupré rightly calls upon the great Brabantine mystical theologian, stating that “Spiritual writers...who wrote in the tradition of Ruysbroeck, held out for an unmitigated version of the desire of God as God is in himself.”<sup>206</sup> Which, by way of continual *ressourcement* and *retrieval*, “[T]heology must once again become spiritual. The spiritual attitude excludes a break between nature and grace. Embracing all of life, yet in a receptive attitude, it is at once more worldly and more deeply steeped in grace.”<sup>207</sup> Hence, “spiritual” theology here means a praxis oriented discourse committed to thinking through the profound repercussions of both cosmological and anthropological orders as natively attuned to God. While in turn, upholding this natural relationship as a furthering of their respective autonomy, particularity and immanence amid such a theonomous relation. Thus for van Beeck, the question becomes whether or not contemporary theology, in proceeding from such a native attunement, is indeed relearning how to be spiritual?

---

<sup>202</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §92, 5, 271.

<sup>203</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §92, 6, 271.

<sup>204</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> van Beeck, *GE*, §92, 6, 272.

<sup>206</sup> See Louis Dupré, “Introduction”, Henri De Lubac, S.J. *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), xiv-xv.

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.*

## CHAPTER V

### ABIDING IN MINNE'S DEMANDS. PART I—CONTEXT AND RETRIEVAL

And this is what it is to love God and to be loved. What love is in itself we cannot understand, but its works are like this. Love gives more than one can grasp, and it demands more than one may or ever can pay. The demand of love is sometimes in the heart as a desiring, burning fire, in the soul and the body, a violent storm [*oerwoet*] and restlessness, and in the spirit a hungry, consuming voracity. The voracity of this love consumes the work of the spirit in a simple inactiveness [...] There, modeless love is brought to perfection.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. INTRODUCTION. CONTEMPORARY AESTHETIC CONTEXT: A LOVE DIVIDED

In the spring of 2012, I had the privilege of attending a major biennial modern art exhibit with a group of Leuven colleagues in Luik entitled, "Images of Love, Love of the Image".<sup>2</sup> And after having reflected upon the diversity of exhibits, often depicting excessive and conflicting images of current conceptions of love, such an exercise has definitely helped me with my research and the task of situating my retrieval of Ruusbroec's mystical theological understanding of love, or *minne* within contemporary discussions over the nature and significance of love today. Two immediate and enduring impressions that I had from this exhibit are: First, after having viewed and engaged with many (though certainly not all) of these images, at the end, this exhibit left me thoroughly exhausted. And secondly (and this is immediately related to the first point), current Western cultural venues display an incredibly divided sense, bordering upon incoherency, of what constitutes and passes for "love" today.

Entering the exhibit itself—interestingly enough, gesturing more towards a universal language—the introduction made the claim that "Love never attains its goal. Instead, its movement alone is that which counts"<sup>3</sup>. For my part as a viewer, by trying to generously follow such movements throughout the exhibit, I was being pulled in so many diverse areas that at the end, I was emotionally left with that certain "morning after...never again..." sensibility. The performance of a particular aspect of love's unambiguous violence and jarring destructiveness were highly visible.<sup>4</sup> Or the many images of bedrooms having been wrecked and beds completely a mess, after the sexual act had been

---

<sup>1</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia 7a, Vanden XII Beghinen*, I, ll. 604-611, 612 (slightly modified): "Ende dit es gode minnen ende ghemint werden. Want minne si in haer zelven, men caens niet verstaen, maer hare werke sijn dusdane. Minne gheeft meer dan me ghevaten mach ende si eyscht meer dan men betalen mach och can. Der minnen eyschen es biwilen int herte als een begherende berende vier, in ziele ende in lijf oerwoet ende ongheduer, ende inden gheeste een hongherich verterende ghier. Der minnen ghier verteert die werke des gheests in een eenvuldich ledich sijn [...] Daer es wiselose minne volbracht."

<sup>2</sup> This past artistic exhibit can be consulted at [http://www.bip2010.be/theme/medias/site/NL\\_Persbericht\\_BIP2012\\_NEW\\_SP.pdf](http://www.bip2010.be/theme/medias/site/NL_Persbericht_BIP2012_NEW_SP.pdf), as accessed on 16.08.2012.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> I am thinking specifically about the sprawling list of *in memoriam* that ended the photographic slideshow of those who had appeared in Nan Goldin's "Ballad of Sexual Dependency", some of which can be consulted at the following site, <http://visualarts.slowcentury.com/post/86796415/the-ballad-of-sexual-dependency>, as accessed on 10.08.2012.

performed. Or the very frequent appearance of guns as erotic instruments of power and the subject's willful and domineering extension into the world as erotically and perversely embraced.

In short, what many of the contemporary photographic exhibits overwhelmingly had depicted was the very collapse of love conceived largely in Romantic and idealistic terms. That is, the individualistic promise of the naturalness of human love. And in turn, the familiar narrative of the force of love as surpassing social constraints and mores, while offering itself as the end goal of volitional, human strivings. Hence, a Romantic idealism that holds out for and optimistically aims to secure love as a natural, human end—an end, in all of its promise and hope. Which, in turn, is regarded as the very source of love's meaningfulness. It is the collapse of this distinctly modern, naively optimistic romantic understanding of love that grounded the thrust of most of the exhibits, imaging love largely in terms of a disordered and uncontrollable *eros*. Frequently, erotic love was depicted as ruthlessly personal and with no communal basis. Instead, it was shown as unlearned, passionately wild, and inevitably destructive. A force—uncoupled from the vast range of procreative fruitfulness—that resists being conscripted into the safe harbors of promise, meaningfulness and resolution. Instead, the rawness of love was being imaged and depicted as largely responsible for the wreckage of both physical environments and ultimately the wreckage of lives. Thus, while I regard many such artistic depictions as at best extremely limited and lacking nuance in their understanding and depiction of love—especially its poor depiction of erotic love as “obsession”, “addiction” and ultimately pathological—I nonetheless am very intrigued by a certain caution and trepidation that is implied by many of these depictions. Fear, not so much connected to places of vulnerability in which love often occurs, yet in love's ability to *wound us*. Which, albeit perversely, attests to the continuing sense of meaningfulness that we ascribe to love and the traditions that such wounds continue to echo.

As a strong contrast, the exhibit made exception for a few more “iconographical”, gratuitous and less-injurious depictions of love, most of which I sense our group of young theologians immediately recognized and were thus more open to huddle around and take certain “rest” within. I am thinking of the vivid simplicity and clear lighting of Chrystal Mukeba's “Confrontations: 2009-2011” that depict her aging grandmother bravely, yet vulnerably confronting her own nearing mortality.<sup>5</sup> Or Sibylle Fendt's *Gartners Reise*<sup>6</sup> that depicts an elderly married couple going on their last vacation, as the wife suffers from a progressive form of Alzheimers and the newness of life such loss of memory brings, not only for the woman suffering Alzheimers, yet seemingly also for the marriage itself. And while both exhibits were also deliberate in showing glimpses into the vividness of exhaustion that is also an unmistakable reality within such loving, the simplicity and clarity of presentation and execution of both of these photographic exhibits clearly attests to their undeniable sense of ‘rest’. Love, seen in its tenderness, fragility and gratuitous self-offering.

And yet, amid such stark divides that this exhibit portrayed, the one photographic series that continues to remain with me is that of Moira Ricci's exhibit, *20.12.53 - 10.08.04*<sup>7</sup>. The dates mark the birth and unforeseen, tragic death of Ricci's mother. This photographic exhibit is comprised of the

---

5 These photos can be consulted at <http://www.chrystelmukeba.com/index.php?/project/confrontations/>, as accessed on 10.08.2012.

6 These photos can be consulted at <http://www.sibyllefendt.de/>, as accessed on 10.08.2012.

7 These photos can be consulted at [http://www.strozzina.org/manipulatingreality/e\\_ricci.php](http://www.strozzina.org/manipulatingreality/e_ricci.php), as accessed on 10.08.2012.



subtle manipulation of old family photos of Ricci's mother throughout various stages of the mother's life, as Moira gently inserts herself in these photos that seemingly neither distorts nor alters the photo's original composition.



Figure 1 Mamma e Lidia - "20.12.53 - 10.08.04", 2004-2009 Lambda Print, Aluminium  
Courtesy l'artista; Galleria Alessandro De March, Milano  
© Moira Ricci

Speaking of her artwork, Ricci said once in an interview about the exhibit:

20.12.53 – 10.08.04 [exhibition title] didn't come up from an idea but rather from a strong desire to go back in time and stay with my mother [...] I left my hometown at 18 years old, and when I lost her I immediately regret for the time we didn't spend together. From the day I saw her lifeless body I have been trying to enter in her pictures in a way that could help me in removing that image from my head. Transferring my own figure in my mother's photographs I had the illusion to be with her, take care of her as her guardian, and warn her on what could happen to avoid her death.<sup>8</sup>

These photos exhibit Ricci's desire that is both entirely understandable as well as completely other than the more typical performance of desire that so readily claimed much of the exhibit's attention. Ricci's desire is shown as both entirely unique and particular, all the while remaining publically communicable.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.artfacts.net/index.php/pageType/newsInfo/newsID/6193/lang/1>, as accessed on 25.05.2012.



Figure 2 Zio Auro, Cla e mamma - "20.12.53 - 10.08.04", 2004-2009 Lambda Print, Aluminium  
Courtesy l'artista; Galleria Alessandro De March, Milano  
© Moira Ricci

There are both clear boundaries wherein the family's private history remains intact and enclosed—most notably, the unspecified nature of her mother's death. And yet, the choice of photographs that Ricci used are of situations that are quite common and thus, present no obstacle in our sharing Ricci's equally complex, yet simplified gaze. In short, we are presented with the impossibility of love's object. No matter how much Ricci inserts herself into this photographic past and attempts to warn her mother and save her from her unexpected death, such aspirations are themselves impossible. And yet, such an impossibility neither subdues her loving nor prevents her from remaining close to her mother. She is aware of a certain degree of failure and this shows itself in her regret. Yet this failure is also articulated in the intensity of her desire to remain with her mother, a desire that violates the unavoidable facticity, historical privilege and normativity that we give to the photographic image as an artifact and documentary evidence. Love thus shows itself above such horizontal, normative constraints, while at the same time, abiding in love's own rationale, ordering and desire, Ricci responds to these demands, as she inserts herself within these concrete, old family photos. How do we understand Ricci's desire to remove the image of her deceased mother by inserting herself in such old photos with the destructive, erotic violence earlier on depicted? While their movements and their overall direction are quite opposite, can we still affirm by way of love's own distinct logic and rationale, these diverse images under a general, unified heading of

'love'? And secondly, how are distinctly theologically-based, Christian understandings of love to respond to such current and largely predominant notions of love today?

## §2. RETRIEVING RUUSBROEC'S MINNE

With these challenges in mind, I find such contexts ripe in the possibility for retrieving sources within the Christian tradition—and more specifically, within the contemplative and mystical theological tradition—that can both effectively respond to these discussions, as well as critique certain normative presumptions that may well hinder us from rethinking love anew, doing so while firmly and creatively situated in continuity with Christian tradition itself. In this regard, I put forth the claim that the admirable doctor, Jan van Ruusbroec's understanding of love as *minne*—a unitive, dynamic understanding of love that is differentiated from, yet incorporates dimensions of both *caritas* and *eros*—has a critical potential to both expand and give further depth to our rethinking of love, as well as its distinct promise to do so from the seat of its own embodied primacy. As unitive both "above reason and yet not without reason"<sup>9</sup>, Ruusbroec's reflections upon *minne* can enable us to refine, nuance and provide a unique alternative to otherwise polarized, contemporary theological discussions over the competing priorities of *caritas* and *veritas*, resultant in part by the failure to think love beyond what modern metaphysics has thus divided. While maintaining its unity, love by necessity needs a third term to think such primacy beyond the current impasse between self-possessive and self-denying love. In turn, if we are to uphold such a unified understanding of love, we then need a conceptuality of love that is able to seamlessly thread the linkages between love's various manners and modalities, as Ruusbroec's *minne* provocatively illustrates. For Ruusbroec, the modes of *minne*—*karitas*, or active love; affection [*liefde*]; erotic love or desirous yearning; modeless enjoyment—are phenomenologically integrated and theologically synthesized with equal attention to *minne*'s various manners: gratuitous/gratuitous, reciprocal. Thus, holding out for such a synthesized, unified conceptuality of love is called for if love is indeed to convincingly and creatively assert such primacy for us today.

Working more broadly within the tradition of Christian humanism, my retrieval of Ruusbroec in part echoes the work of the late University of Chicago philosopher and classicist Allan Bloom and his own "[A]ttempt to discover the real phenomenon of eros".<sup>10</sup> For Bloom, this entails moving away from erotic love's modern, debased impoverishment that has univocally linked *eros* to sex, while dismissing erotic longing and the impossibility of its satisfaction within relationships (most notably in terms of friendships). Instead, Bloom regards emerging patterns of relationality as having largely discarded such longing for far more banal forms of relationships in terms of "contacts". For Bloom, therefore, "retrieval" is inherently coupled with polemic, whereby his advocacy of the Western

---

<sup>9</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia* 3, *Die geestelike brulocht* b, ll. 1481-1485: "In the unity of spirit, in which this vein wells, one is above activity and above reason, but not without reason; for the enlightened reason, and especially, the faculty of loving, feels this touch, and reason can neither comprehend nor understand the mode or manner, how or what this touch might be." "In eenicheit des gheests, daer dese adere walt, es men boven werken ende boven redene, maer niet sonder redene; want die verlichte redene, ende zonderlinghe de minnende cracht, ghevoelt dit gherinen, ende redene en can niet begripen noch verstaen wise noch maniere, hoe ochte wie dit gherinen si."

<sup>10</sup> See Allan Bloom, *Love and Friendship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 29. My sincere thanks and gratitude to my dear friend Bradford Manderfield demands mention, for not only referring me to this text, but in so doing, reminding me of my own educational roots in the Chicago Great Book tradition.

Canon and the Great Books education entails a "flight out of our own time to those times and places that believed in it [eros]"<sup>11</sup> and that "the best books not only help us to describe the phenomena, but help us to experience them."<sup>12</sup> In this respect, Bloom's literary and phenomenological descriptions of eros, while himself aiming for a "detailed and comprehensive description of what is it we are trying to explain as we experience it before we enter into explanation"<sup>13</sup> is instructive for those of us who research medieval mystical (and especially vernacular) theological texts. Namely, our continuous fascination with mystical theological texts and their display of an unmistakable dynamism, one of both ardent apophatic rigour, coupled with the erotic insistence and unique logic to speak, to name, to respond as a "hunger unstilled [...] [which one] cannot speak about it, nor can he be silent about it"<sup>14</sup>, as evidenced in the various, highly embodied metaphors that such authors make use of to describe the reality of love and union with God. Beyond mere literary performance, traditionally, we can understand various mystical theologian's expansive use of metaphor and play with the constraints and the possibility of language as intensifying Gregory the Great's "*amor ipse notitia est*" [love itself is knowledge], a perspective that we may today analogously translate as Bloom highly doubts whether "one [can] really discuss eros without arousal".<sup>15</sup>

For Ruusbroec, his unified descriptions of minne—"the nearest and the clearest truth that I understand and feel"<sup>16</sup>—are frequently seen as one of the last examples of this great Augustinian synthesis of understanding and will that so strongly characterized late-medieval mystical theological texts.<sup>17</sup> Here, while writing within a specific eucharistic context, Ruusbroec shows this synthetic unity, characterizing the various modalities of union with God as a life of minne, of "*versta ende ghevoelen*" with exuberant phenomenological and literary force, grounded upon its theological literacy and clarity:

Whoever wants to become drunk with minnen should behold and note and admire two points of minnen that Christ has shown us in the holy Sacrament [...]. The first point teaches us that Christ has given His flesh as food to our soul, and His blood as drink. Such a marvel of minnen was never heard of before. Now the nature of minnen is always to give and take, minnen and be loved [*ghemindt*]. And both of these are in anyone who loves [*mint*]. Christ's minne is voracious and generous: even though He gives us all that He has and all that He is, He also takes back all that we

Soe wie dronken wilt werden van minnen, hi sal aensien ende merken ende verwonderen .ij. poente van minnen die ons Cristus bewijst heeft in den heileghen sacramente [...]. Dat ierste poent leert ons dat Cristus ghegheven heeft onser zielen sijn vleesch in spisen ende sijn bloed in drank. Al selc wonder van minnen en was daer to voren nie ghooert. Nu es der minnen natuere altoes gheven ende nemen, minnen ende ghemindt werden. Ende dit es beide in ieghewelken die mint. Cristus minne die es ghieregh ende melde: al gheeft hi ons al dat hi heeft ende al dat hi es, hi nemt oec weder al dat wi hebben ende

---

11 *ibid.*

12 Bloom, *Love and Friendship*, 30.

13 *ibid.*

14 See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia 10, Vanden blinkenden steen*, ll.554, 556-558: "Ende dit es een hongher onghespait...men caent <oec> ghespreken noch verswighen, want het es boven redene ende verstaen, ende onthghende alle creatueren."

15 Bloom, *Love and Friendship*, 20.

16 See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia 1, Boecksken der verclaringhe*, ll. 24-28 (with modification) : "Selke van minen vriended begheren ende hebben mi ghebeden, dat ic met corten waerden tonen ende verclaren soude, na mijn vermoghen, die naeste ende die claerste waerheit die ic versta ende ghevoelen van alle der hoechster leren die ic ghescreven hebbe, op dat minre waerde niemen vererghert en werde maer ieghewelc ghebetert."

17 See Rik van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec: Mystical Theologian of the Trinity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

have and all that we are. And He demands of us more than we can accomplish. His hunger is great without measure: He consumes us thoroughly, for He is a voracious glutton and has bulimia [*mengerael*]: He consumes the marrow out of our bones. Yet we grant it Him willingly. And the more we grant it Him, the better we taste to Him....For He wants to change our sinful life and consume it in His life that is full of grace and glory [...] If we could see the voracious lust Christ has for our blessedness, we would not be able to restrain ourselves from flying into His throat. Even though my words sound wondrous, those who minnen understand me well.

al dat wi sijn. Ende hi eischt ons meer dan wi ghelesten moghen. Sijn hongher es sonder mate grooet, hi verteert ons al uut te gronde, want hi es .i. ghieregh slockard ende heeft den mengerael, hi verteert dat margh ute onsen beenen. Nochtan onnen wijs hem wel. Ende soe wijs heme meer gheonnen, soe wi hem bat smaken....Want hi wilt onse sundelege leven verwandelen ende verteeren in sijn leven, dat es vol gratien ende glorien [...] Mochten wi sien de ghiereghe ghelost die Cristus heeft tote onser salecheit, wi en mochten ons niet onthouden, wi en souden heme in de keele vliegghen. Al luden mine waerde wonderlec, die minnen die verstaen mi wel.<sup>18</sup>

Retrieving Ruusbroec and situating such a move amounts to the challenge of contemporaneously translating the vast applications and width of such a love [*wijtheit van minne*] aided by the depths of its phenomenological and theological fluency, doing so precisely amid love's current contextual status as *divided* and thereby *discredited*. Divided, as between the narratives of eros, in all of its desire, pathos, immanence, and arousal, seen as entirely other and incommensurable from the narratives of *caritas* as completely gratuitous, disinterested, kenotic, and blithely transcendent. Such a contemporaneous, divided view of love thus poses the challenge of whether or not one can maintain a unified understanding of love, necessarily pairing both asymmetry and mutuality. That is, holding in a dynamic unity, the utter gratuitousness of love with the mutuality of its desirous exchange and reciprocal demand. For Ruusbroec, by coupling this at times fierce dynamism, minne not only immediately confronts current divisions surrounding love, yet it also intelligibly and provocatively challenges many of its normative presuppositions. For such conflicting narratives both argue from the very premise and primacy of love's gratuitousness—or "disinterested love" [*pur amour*—a "pure givenness" and away from what phenomenologist and philosopher of religion Jean-Luc Marion and others call such demands as an "economy of exchange". In this case, by taking a distinct, theological reading of Ruusbroec and encountering his presupposition of mutual indwelling, such a reading is thus able to supplant a more critical capacity in retrieving Ruusbroec's minne within contemporary contexts. Namely, by challenging its own presuppositions that the demands of love are necessarily extrinsic to the human person and are thus equivalent to the imposition of hegemonic power. Legitimate as this critique is, mutual indwelling shifts the very terrain and focus of minne's demands to the interiority of the person, thus opening our narratives of love:

There we are inactive, and God our Heavenly Father dwells in us in fullness of His grace, and we dwell in Him above all our works in one enjoyment. Christ Jesus lives in us, and we in Him. In His life we overcome the world and all sins. With Him we are raised up in love to our heavenly Father. The Holy Spirit works in us and we with Him all our good works. He cries out in us with loud voice, without words: 'Love the Love

Daer sijn wi ledegh ende god onse hemelsche vader woont in ons volheit sijnre ghenaden ende wi woonen in hem boven alle onser werken in een ghebrucken. Cristus Jhesus leeft in ons ende wi in heme. In sijn leven verwinnen wi de werelt ende alle sunden. Met heme sijn wi opherecht in minnen tote onsen hemelschen vader. De heileghe ghesst werct in ons ende wi met hem alle onse goede werke. Hi ropt in ons met luder stemmen sonder waerde: 'Mindt de

---

18 Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia* 8, *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, 718-720; 721-738; 739-742.

that loves thee eternally!' His outcry is an inward touch in our spirit. The voice is more fearsome than thunder. The lightning bolts that come out of it open heaven to us and show us Light and eternal truth. The heat of His touch and His Minnen are so great that they will burn us up entirely. His touch in our spirit calls out without cease: 'Pay thy debt; love the Love that has eternally loved thee!' From this comes great restlessness within, and modeless conduct, entirely without modes; for the more we minnen, the more we lust to minnen; and the more we pay what minne demands of us, the more we keep on owing. Minne does not keep silent, it cries out eternally without cease: 'Love Love!'

minne, die u eewelec mindt!' Sijn roepen dat es een inwendegh gherinen in onsen gheeste. Die stemme es vresseleker dan de donder. De blixenen die daer ute comen, openen ons den hemel ende tooenen ons licht ende eeweghe waerheit. De hitte sijn gherinens ende sijnre minnen es soe grooet, dat si ons te male verberren wilt. Sijn gherinen ion onsen gheeste roept sonder onderlaet: 'Betaelt uwe scoud; mindt de minne, die u eewelec ghemindt heeft!' Hier ave comt grooet ongheduer van binnen ende wiselooes ghelaet al sonder maniere; want so wi meer minnen, soe ons meer lust te minnen; ende soe wi meer betalen dat ons minne eischt, soe wi meer sculdegh bliven. Minne en swight niet stille; si roept eewelec sonder ophouden: 'Mindt de minne!'<sup>19</sup>

Hence, retrieval of Ruusbroec's understanding of *minne* within contemporary theological and philosophy of religion discourses on love enables one to gauge the strength (and weakness) of contemporary expressions of love by way of their (in)ability to make linkages. More specifically, linkages that provactively show this dynamic unity by way of a variety of competing or conflicting instances of love within relationships in specific acts, representations, textual narratives, etc. Such linkages not only expose and uncover complex instances within love itself: for example, forms of desirous yearning and their reciprocal demands within overall gratuitous, charitable acts (and vice versa). But furthermore, I contend that these linkages evince love's own intrinsic rationality—as Ruusbroec says that *minne* is "above reason, but not without reason"—as seen in its various, dynamic movements. From a theologically committed perspective, such linkages make sense of love's abiding simplicity—as a union that rests in God *in* His "greater dissimilarity" and in others. As well as the continual praxis of love's enduring complexity and contextual, situated character as continuously unfinished and growing in likeness *unto*, or "cleaving to" [*aenclieven*] this Image of love and its endless, 'abysmal' depths [*afgrondigher minne*].

#### A. THE QUESTION OF THE "PURE" GIFT AND ITS REFUSAL OF ECONOMIC RETURN

Therefore, guided by my critical retrieval of Ruusbroec's understanding of *minne*, aspects of my research aim at both highlighting, as well as addressing the contemporary need for a both a praxis-based, theological conceptuality of love today to convincingly situate, narrate and conceptually link love's various modalities (karitas, or active love; affection [or *liefde*]; erotic love or desirous yearning; modeless enjoyment) as well as its various manners (asymmetrical gratuitousness, mutual reciprocity). In order to do so, I would like to situate this retrieval of Ruusbroec's *minne* as critically responsive to postmodern discourses over "the gift" and its theological<sup>20</sup> (c.f. Gaudium et spes, 24) and philosophical resurgence. These well-known discussions have been advanced by the likes of Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida—both of whom have inquired over the very [im]possibility of a 'pure gift', as well as thinking phenomenological givenness as such, free from any and all demands, reciprocity and horizon, all of which would metaphysically determine and predicate

---

<sup>19</sup> Ruusbroec, *Van seven trappen* VII, ll. 1094-1111.

<sup>20</sup> See Gaudium et spes, 24: "This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."

such givenness into a forced "economy of exchange". In response to these discussions and their search for a purified transcendence, free from all forms of particularity and immanence, the question that my retrieval of Ruusbroec itself demands is whether or not privileging such agapic gratuitousness as love's highest reality—or 'purest' [*pur amour*—manner of expression can in fact respond to love's demands and sustain such seemingly disparate linkages? Or, while maintaining the primacy and asymmetry of the gift, does love's unified, yet distinct modalities collapse and only further become polarized as a result of such gratuitousness, akin to the largely incoherent and divided aesthetic depictions of love discussed earlier?

In turn, by opting for such a unified understanding of love—while refusing its current divisions—one equally confronts contextual views that easily dismiss such an understanding of love as naively optimistic, reflecting (as many of the art exhibits attempted to portray) what is seen as a largely *discredited* view of the human nature/condition. One that avoids the terrors of modern history, thereby dismissing a presumptive view of love as "overly optimistic" and too much aligned with Romantic idealism. To critically confront such contemporaneous views and their normative presumptions, retrieving Ruusbroec is once more a highly interesting move, as the Brabantine contemplative often matches his thinking upon the demands of minne precisely within reference to our very failures in satisfying such demands. Despite minne's inescapable failure and its resultant erotic insatiability, Ruusbroec does not conceptually employ the familiar strategy of dividing love into various *loves* of greater or lesser purity according to their manner, as well as their object of love itself. This is not to say that as a moral category, he does not portray distinctions between well-ordered and disordered minne—that is not at question. Rather, specifically in terms of minne's erotic impossibility and necessary failure, for the Brabantine contemplative, such failure (or restlessness) does not attest to a division within or dismissal of minne; rather, its positive insatiability only invites for greater union and likeness:

The Spirit of God demands of our spirit that we minnen, thank and praise God in the measure of His nobility and His dignity. In this all loving spirits in heaven and on earth fail. They exhaust themselves [*Si werken hen ute*] and they fall into a faint before the fathomless sublimity [*grondelooese hooegheit*] of God. And this is the noblest and the highest means between us and God [...] for above this means we have received the Image of God in the very life of our soul, and there we are united to God without means; nevertheless we do not become God. But we always remain like God, and He lives in us, and we in Him by His grace and our good works. Thus we are united to God without means above all virtues, where we bear His Image in the uppermost part of our createdness [...] Thus we remain eternally like God in grace and glory, and above all likeness, one with Him in our eternal Image.

De gheest gods eischt onsen gheeste dat wi gode minnen, danken ende loven na sine edelheit ende na sine weerdde. Ende hier in ghebreken alle minnende gheeste in hemel ende in eerde. Si werken hen ute ende vallen alle in onmacht vore de grondelooese hooegheit gods. Ende dit es dat edelste ende dat hooeghste middel tusschen ons ende gode [...] want boven dit middel hebben wi dat beelde gods ontfaen in de levendegheit onser zielen ende daer sijn wi gode gheeneght sonder middel; nochtan en werden wi niet god. Maer wi bliven altooes gode ghelijc, ende hi leeft in ons ende wi in hem overmids sine gratie ende onse goede werke. Aldus sijn wi gode gheeneght sonder middel boven alle dooghde, daer wi sijn beelde draghen in dat overste onser gheschapenheit [...] Ende aldus bliven wi gode eewelec ghelijc in gratien ende in glorien, ende boven ghelijc een met heme in onsen eeweghen beelde.<sup>21</sup>

---

21 Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia* 9, *Van Seven Trappen*, V, ll. 908-912; 915-920; 922-924.

In the above passage, Ruusbroec nicely transitions from the failure and demands of minne, its intimate linkage with his anthropology of "mutual indwelling" and how, by precisely gauging this theological anthropology, we can understand the nature of minne's demands. Not as some form of extrinsic, subjugating, cruel hegemony, yet as a stirring and insatiable restlessness that arises within us. One that is due, not to some form of privation and lack, yet as mirroring an abysmal fullness that cannot be encompassed.

It is often said that amid the continuously rapid and expanding consumerism of the global markets and our relentless consumption—leaving us to confront ourselves amid an *age of indebtedness*—the parallel rise of (Christian) Spirituality too mirror's such consumption by way of people's strong, "spiritual hunger". And regardless whether one wishes to overall critique or support the rise of spirituality, the spiritual *thirst* of many cannot be denied. However, while narratives of economic consumption and its stoking of our endless desires relies upon the basic presumption of *scarcity*<sup>22</sup>, or that which we lack, retrieval of Ruusbroec begs the question whether or not we can also speak of God loving us with such a univocal, desirous love—the 'voracity of Christ's lust for our blessedness' and 'God's desire to be fully ours, if only we will be fully His?'

For Ruusbroec and the enduring relationality of minne, God's greater dissimilarity is repeatedly affirmed, so too the insistence that such strong language of union with God does not result in the "creature [...] becom[ing] God, which is impossible. For the essence of God [*gods wesen*] can neither diminish nor increase; nothing can be taken from Him, neither can it be added to Him. Nevertheless, all loving spirits are one enjoyment [*een ghebruken*] and one blessedness with God without difference."<sup>23</sup> More than simply a metaphysical and dogmatic theological argument that can easily be brushed aside, retrieving Ruusbroec's understanding of minne, in all of its demands and erotic insistence, as a *univocal* love that joins our loving with God's loving, offers the promise of further challenging the normative presumptions we hold towards desire as mirroring our own restless finitude. And instead, arguing instead for a more robust, *theological* understanding of desire and the erotic, not as arising out of any source of scarcity or lack, yet as mirroring the abysmal fullness in which we are naturally united to God. A fathomless abundance that demands the work of such love responds to, yet can never overtake, precisely because of such greater dissimilarity between Creator and creature. From this immanent, abysmal fullness, is precisely wherein we can speak of the creatureliness of the human person as a *locus capax Dei* [place capable of God].

Situating love upon such an abysmal grounding can be viewed as analogous to Ruusbroec's own mystical anthropology of mutual indwelling. First, Ruusbroec claims that relationship with God is fundamentally natural to the human person. This is his exemplarist strain emphasizing that we are eternally begotten *in the Image* of God, the divinity of Christ, 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity, stating : "This image is essentially and personally [*weslec ende persoonlec*] in all people, and every person has it whole and entire, undivided [...] And thus are we all one, united in our eternal image, that is God's

---

22 See William Cavanaugh's "Scarcity and Abundance" in *Being Consumed*, (New York: Eerdmans, 2008), 89-100 for a moral theological account of Christian desire, economics, and a distinct mode of consumption out of abundance, as seen in light of the Eucharist.

23 Ruusbroec, *Boecksen*, ll. 456-459: "Want so worde de creature god, dat onmoeghelec es. Want gods wesen en mach menderen noch meerren, noch heme en mach niets niet avegaen noch toegaen. Nochtan sijn alle minnende gheeste een ghebruken ende ene salecheit met gode sonder differentie."



image and the origin of us all: of our life and our becoming; wherein our created being and our life hang [*in hangt*] without intermediary as in its eternal cause."<sup>24</sup> However, this exemplarism is not to be confused with the operation of grace, Christian faith and the works of love as necessary for salvation, as Ruusbroec emphatically and repeatedly stresses that "[O]ur createdness does not become God, nor (does) the image of God (become) creature."<sup>25</sup> Hence, Ruusbroec will equally emphasize a soteriological and thus, historical stress, saying that we are also individually "created unto the image" like a mirror and that no matter its degree of likeness, a mirror can never be confused with the Image in which it reflects, either in likeness, nor sinfully obfuscated by way of unlikeness.

To support this tension of the human person as both eternally *in* the image as well as the representational action of being *created unto*, and thus receiving and responding to, or *cleaving to* this image, Ruusbroec relies upon minne's erotic logic to support such dynamism. For minne itself refuses to simply merge and rest within the *identity* of such an Image that collapses difference and distinction, while bypassing its creaturely reception and desirous response to such a founding alterity. Which is to say, minne upholds the intrinsic and implacable desire and violent restlessness [*oerwoet*] to mirror such an Image and the virtuous praxis of growing in likeness and union with God in the order of grace. Thus, thinking human autonomy and its seat of individuation in conjunction with the primacy of relationality and the very naturalness of union with God, for Ruusbroec, is attested by the stress that he places upon the enduring importance of our works of love. The more one grows in union and likeness to the otherness of God, the more one becomes distinctly human in all of their created particularity. Likewise, eschatologically, if we are to affirm love as dynamic and its continuing movements as enduring, ongoing and eternal, this then invites us to further consider our understanding of love and the human person—of whom is imaged in such love—as reflective of the praxis of both this desirous, continuing, abysmal depths from which such stirrings arise. Which nonetheless—given minne's specific rationale—demands reinsertion [*via ghemeyne leven*] within the concrete particularity of the world. To use the Biblical metaphor, as a tree is known by its fruits (or the lack thereof), so too shall we be known by the work and the distinction [*onderscheet*] of our desires. Recalling our chapter's prefatory quote, affirming minne's core incomprehensibility and its abysmal grounding can be seen and attested to by way of the very specificity and endurance of our ongoing desires. For such desires not only reflect and respond to such depths, yet by virtue of minne's own distinct, erotic rationale, such desires meaningfully engage these endless depths as well. Not by way of negating nor silencing the indeterminacy of love's restlessness, yet insiting upon the superabundant createdness of its foundational movements. An excess, which both confronts such an abyss, while abiding by its demands that cannot but reinsert itself into the very concrete praxis of living out and responding to love's stirring call.

---

24 Ruusbroec, Opera Omnia 8, *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, ll. 912-913, 913-917: "Dit beelde es weselec ende persoonlec in alle menschen ende ieghewelec mensche heevet al te male gheheel, onghedeilt [....] Ende aldus sijn wi alle een, vereenecht in onsen eeweghen beelde, dat gods beelde es ende onser alre orsprong, ons levens ende ons ghewerdens, daer onse gheschapene wesen ende onse leven sonder middel in hangt alsoe in sine eeweghe sake."

25 Ruusbroec, *Spiegel*, ll. 918-920: "Nochtan en wert onse gheschapenheit niet god noch dat beelde gods creature. Want wi sijn gheschapen toe den beelde, dat es: dat beelde gods te ontfane. Ende dat beelde es onghescapen, eewegh: de sone gods."

As a provisional conclusion, I have argued that by theologically engaging Ruusbroec and his anthropology of mutual indwelling, we can thus make sense of his view on the very intrinsic nature of minne's demands as a stirring and erotic insatiability. In short, as the intelligibility of minne only becomes fluent by engaging with Ruusbroec's own distinct theological fluency, we are thus able to retrieve his thinking anew within a contemporary context ripe for such retrieval. And in doing so, we may respond to love demands to "Pay thy debt; love the Love that has eternally loved thee!"<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia* 9, *Van Seven Trappen*, VII, ll. 1106-1107: "'Betaelt uwe scoud; mindt de minne, die u eewelec ghemindt heeft!'"

## CHAPTER VI

### ABIDING IN MINNE'S DEMANDS. PART II— PURE GIFT AND *PUR AMOUR*: FRANÇOIS FÉNELON AND THE RETHINKING OF LOVE'S DEMANDS BESIDE THE GRATUITOUS GIFT

#### §1. INTRODUCTION AND THEMATIC CONTEXT

The following analysis builds off continuing research into the late medieval Brabantine mystical theologian Jan van Ruusbroec and retrieval of his understanding of love as *minne* within contemporary fundamental theological and philosophy of religion discourses today. This retrieval is opened by and in critical-constructive dialogue with Jean-Luc Marion's own turns to love and the various mystical theological sources that have in part guided such a move.<sup>1</sup>

Marion's definitive turn to love has occurred in tandem with his phenomenological accounts of the gift, givenness [*donation/Gegebenheit*] and its rigorous defense that "implies a perfect and pure gratuity, in which it is necessary to give for nothing, without there ever being a return."<sup>2</sup> And while a significant amount of secondary literature has variably critiqued Marion's hermeneutical renderings of the erotic phenomenon, few have challenged his privileging the singularity of love's univocal giftedness and absolute gratuitousness. In the following, the argument is opened (without yet finalizing any claim)<sup>3</sup> that by maintaining a univocal emphasis of *sameness*, with an equal emphasis of love's pure gratuitousness in fact problematizes the very *receptivity* and active, ethical responsiveness of love itself. And instead, by maintaining such 'pure gratuity', such lines of thought compel it towards utter passivity—amid a givenness that is so univocally and infinitely excessive, seen rather as an imposition and as that which is "*over against*" in its overwhelming any and all response. Amid this critique of a lack of economy, Marion will however maintain that by placing the demands of relationality within more of an economy of exchange and reciprocity ultimately undoes both love's radical gratuitousness and in turn, love itself as gratuitously given. And yet, as we will soon see in the famous historical case of Fénelon and Bousset, there is nothing new about these converging lines of argument.

---

<sup>1</sup> See generally See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001) 139-195. See also Jean-Luc Marion, 'In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology'', in J.D. Caputo and M.J. Scanlon (eds.), *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999, 20-53; "What Cannot Be Said: Apophasis and the Discourse of Love", in K. Hart (ed.) *Jean Luc Marion: The Essential Writings* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) 325-338; "Words for Saying Nothing", *Erotic Phenomenon*, 143-150.

<sup>2</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, "The Reason of the Gift", S. Mackinlay, N. de Warren, trans., *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, eds. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 101-134, 105.

<sup>3</sup> See *infra*, Chapter 8, 'Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part IV—Common love and the Univocal'

### A. PRIMARY CLAIM

By way of retrieving Ruusbroec's minne, the hermeneutical position advocated for centers upon the need for both a praxis-based, theological conceptuality of love today to convincingly situate, narrate and conceptually link a unified account of "distinct" loves, that are distinguished by way of their differing objects—caritas; affectionate love [*liefde/liebe*]; erotic love and desirous yearning; and modeless enjoyment—as well as its various manners—gratuitous, reciprocal.

In particular, this following reflection focuses on the *manners of love* as its theme. Namely, the gratuitousness of love, traditionally viewed in terms of "selfless" love, in contrast with the reciprocal demands of "selfish" love. While such manners distinctly yield to well-known typologies of love, such as *eros* and *agape* (Nygren)<sup>4</sup> or "natural" and "ecstatic" love (Rousselot)<sup>5</sup>, this current analysis will bracket such typologies—and their distinct, relational 'objects' of lover, beloved—as consequent and secondary to the manner(s) of love, to love's *praxis*. And yet, as evidenced by this inquiry into the various manners of love itself, this hermeneutical position nevertheless opens in conversation with Marion's own erotic reduction and his phenomenological attempt to lay claim to love's rigorous conceptuality. For the praxis of love to endure—especially amid suffering, when absent of any supporting consolation or rationale, as well as to dynamically endure eternally, as an unrelenting, "voracious" desire—love can thus never be separate from its intelligibility, as *amor ipse notitia est*". Hence, a *sapiential* approach is thus put forward.<sup>6</sup> For retrieval of Ruusbroec's minne in contemporary discussion will be tested, not so much along the lines of the plausibility of doing so, yet whether it possesses something genuinely constructive and convincing to offer. Thus, in furthering such a sapiential approach, the position advocated more broadly attests to mystical theology's diverse needs for a historically-resourced, contemporaneous profile as *mystical theology today*.

### B. THE PURE GIFT

However, in terms of the manners of love, the question of the "gift" and its philosophical (Marion, Derrida) and theological resurgence<sup>7</sup> cannot be ignored. For this immediately brings to

---

<sup>4</sup> See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros. Part 1: A Study of the Christian Idea of Love, Part 2: The History of the Christian Idea of Love*, trans. Philip S. Watson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution*, trans. Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> See Declan Marmion and Rik van Nieuwenhove and their analysis of theology, spirituality and *sapientia*, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, (Cambridge: University Press, 2011) 2-5, 4: "...a retrieval of a theological perspective which is both theological and spiritual, in which theology is not just speculative but also sapiential. In other words, the task of theology is not only to teach, but also to delight and to move; to do not only with *scientia*—scientific and analytical knowledge—but also with *sapientia*—the more contemplative knowledge of love and desire (Lat. *sapor* = taste)."

<sup>7</sup> See *Gaudium et spes*, 24: "Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, "that all may be one [. . .] as we are one" (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.

question whether privileging gratuitousness as love's highest manner of expression—what will later on be argued as a revival of the “disinterested love” or *pur amour* in the Quietist tradition of Fénelon and its early 20th Century Modernist retrieval (Tyrell, von Hügel, Bremond et. al)—can in fact sustain the linkages of love's various modalities. Or whether love's unified, yet distinct modalities collapse underneath such a *pure* conceptuality of love that advocates for the primacy of love as gratuitous, as *over against* other such modalities.

Overall, reflections on “the gift” in fundamental theology and philosophy of religion has been a central topic of concern.<sup>8</sup> There are many diverse conversations taking place under the banner of the gift—from responses to Mauss's anthropological reflections on the social gift and power relations, to readings of Heidegger and Husserl. Highlights of these exchanges include Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion's well-known exchanges at Villanova in 1997, as well as the 2003 Mater Dei conference that specifically reflects upon Marion's phenomenological and theological readings of givenness and the saturated phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> While diversely moving from the onto-theo-logical critique to the possibility of a *donatology* as more fundamental, there are certain shared presumptions in many of these discussions. In particular, axiomatic to both Derrida and Marion's distinct reactions to Mauss and the [im]possibility of the gift, “as such” is the need to strictly oppose it to an economy of relations and exchange. Rather, the possibility for the gift to be phenomenologically given is determined whether or not it is “pure”. Purity is thus constitutive of the gift as such. In terms of phenomenology, is this criterion so self-evident? Or (as this present essay seeks to contend) is there not a history that has contributed in framing such a highly particular understanding of the gift, what accedes to its purity, as radically distinct from economies of exchange and the diverse motives within such a horizon?

In George Pattison's recent monograph, *God & Being: An Enquiry*, the Oxford systematic theologian concisely presents Derrida's thinking over the pure gift and the conditions of its possibility in the following:

A pure gift, by way of contrast, would require that the giver should not give so as to impose on the recipient: the giver would have to conceal himself; similarly, the gift would have to appear as other than a gift in order not to become an obligation or debt; and, finally, the recipient would need absolutely to forget the gift.<sup>10</sup>

By way of such conditions and the understanding the pure gift's [im]possibility, I find it extraordinary how such discussions replicate in so many instances both the logic, the standing controversies of “quietism” as well as the intuitions surrounding the Archbishop of Cambrai, François Fénelon (1651-1715) and his defense of the tradition of mystical theology in terms of the disinterested character of *pur amour*. In the following, I will explore these themes in Fénelon, which in turn will enable future to access to what extent Marion's own thinking of the gift, the givenness of love and the

---

<sup>8</sup> See generally Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001). See also John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds.), *God, the Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> See supra note 2.

<sup>10</sup> George Pattison, *God & Being: An Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 310-311.

[im]possibility of the erotic phenomenon extends and replicates the tradition surrounding *pur amour*.<sup>11</sup>

## §2. THESIS: THE CONTINUING LEGACY OF FÉNELON'S PUR AMOUR

In order to sufficiently bring about such a constructive/critical dialogue between two historically disparate figures (Ruusbroec and Marion), the first immediate task is to inquire what lies behind Marion's own position of thinking of love in terms of its pure gratuitousness by way of historical genealogy. In this case, it is pivotal to confront the profound impact that the tradition of *pur amour* has had upon the French cultural, philosophical and theological history. And in this respect, the exceptional figure of Archbishop François Fénelon and his systematic treatment and defense of *pur amour* in his 1697 work, *Explication des Maximes des Saints* [Maxims of the Saints] is undoubtedly a primary source in the exposition of such views. While in terms of Marion's own intellectual history and his diverse, dialogical partners, it must be acknowledged that Fénelon is not a major conversation partner for Marion. Instead, in terms of the *Grand siècle* of French 17<sup>th</sup> century intellectual history, the more obvious figure in Marion's oeuvre, beyond of course Descartes, would undoubtedly be Blaise Pascal. Nevertheless, a general analysis of key thematics of *pur amour*, with Fénelon as its primary advocate, offers considerable promise. For it helps yield a fundamental explanation of why Marion immediately transitions from securing a phenomenology of givenness at the end of *Being Given* as "opening onto" the question of love and its definitive, confessional response in *The Erotic Phenomenon*.<sup>12</sup> For Fénelon's thinking of the primacy of gratuitous, disinterested love, stripped of all "mixed" forms of self-interest and projection, unveils not only a pure manner in which to distinctly think, honor and love God in His greater alterity and transcendence. Furthermore, *contra* the moral rigor and scrupulousness of Jansenism, the influence of the Fénelonian *pur amour* tradition, in its defense of a disinterested, self-less love for God, is as much about countering the rise of this intensely introspective modern subject as it is about the moral praxis of loving the otherness of God.<sup>13</sup> Removed from its immediate, polemically-charged historical context, one of Fénelon's enduring contributions is the solidifying of this utterly passive, disinterested, donative subject, which is of significant importance, both for Marion's "gifted" subject, as well as overall in terms of Christian views of love. For while the dynamics of "mixed" and "pure" forms of love are secured, the question increasingly becomes whether or not such pure love equally entails the very *impossibility* of ever receiving and possessing the gratuitous gift of the Other's love,

---

<sup>11</sup> See Marc De Kesel, 'A Drop of Water in the Sea': Reflections on Michel de Certeau's Every Day Life Spirituality's. *Studies in Spirituality* 21 (2012) 1-25, 22 wherein he reflects upon the violence of Fénelon's *pur amour*: "To be faithful to God, so Fénelon states on so many pages in his voluminous oeuvre, one must be aware that he is nothing more than a drop of water in the sea, and that, even to be faithful to himself, he has to do everything in order to become such a drop, which is to say that he has to exist in a way that is almost similar to disappearing. The one who really loves God (in what Fénelon calls the *pur amour*, which is the absolute opposite of *amour propre*) knows he is nothing and, consequently, has to do everything he can in order to really become nothing". See also Marc De Kesel, *Niets dan liefde: Het vileine wonder van de gift* (Amsterdam: Sijbolet, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002) 320-324.

<sup>13</sup> See R.A. Knox, *Enthusiasm* (Oxford, University Press, 1950), 244-249. The following treatment of Fénelon's historical context is largely indebted to Knox's historical account.

lest it devolve to an imperfect degree of mixed, selfish love. Hence, a pure love, marked by its posture of pure receptivity, thereby equally entails a *lack of possessiveness*.

A. THE QUIETIST CONTROVERSY AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY'S LAST BLOW?

Speaking of the *Grand Siècle* of seventeenth century France, in his well-regarded church history monograph, *Enthusiasm*, R.A. Knox writes: "But just before and all through the seventeenth century [...] the mystical genius of the Christian religion came to the surface again; the pools were filled with water. Mysticism became, once more, a familiar feature of Christendom; to some minds, a peril."<sup>14</sup> One way to gauge this tremendous growth and renewed interest in Christian mysticism in France in the Seventeenth Century can be seen in the distinction between "acquired" and "infused" contemplation. For such a distinction entailed both immense, practical consequences, as well as a productive, conceptual distinction—analogue to more contemporary discussions on the relationship between kataphasis and apophasis.

Concerning the growth of many popular spiritual devotions and in view of the (Counter)Reformation<sup>15</sup>, Knox strongly argues against ascribing such developments as externally oriented between Protestants and Catholics. Rather, by heeding the important distinctions mystical theology traditionally makes between *meditatio* and *contemplatio*, Knox thus portrays this growth of spirituality overall in 17<sup>th</sup> Century France as primarily an internal ecclesial matter. "What did receive official encouragement at the time was the practice of meditation. And it is as a revolt from the practice of meditation that mysticism", at this time at least, thus " makes its appeal."<sup>16</sup> He then goes on to clarify:

But what if you [...] had come to feel, after long practice of meditation, that it was not meant for you, or was no longer meant for you [...] Was there such a thing as 'acquired contemplation'? The prayer of quiet was something beyond man's contrivance; it was all supernatural. But it had a kind of natural counterpart, usually called the 'prayer of simple regard'. This meant that you *deliberately* gave up trying to elicit emotions in your prayer; you remained simply attentive to God's presence [...] It was this process, recommended in so many 'short methods' of interior prayer, sometimes even by Jesuit authors, that led to the wide diffusion of mysticism in the seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup>

From this historical backdrop, one can say that the Fénelonian controversy is framed in testing the viability and limits of such distinctions. And thereby in turn, the legitimacy of mystical theology itself as a related, yet distinct form of theological reflection. If there "was...such a thing as

---

<sup>14</sup> Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 283.

<sup>15</sup> See Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 244: "What is its origin, this stream of contemplative prayer which runs through the seventeenth century? How did a single age produce such a spate of monographs on the interior life, biographies of interior souls, popular devotions calculated to spread the mystical idea? Dean Inge [See William Ralph Inge's "Christian Mysticism considered in eight lectures delivered before the university of Oxford, 1933] has suggested that it was a state of mind artificially induced by the counter-Reformation; the word went out from headquarters that all Catholics were to be mystics, as a counterblast to the mystical propaganda—such as it was—of Protestantism."

<sup>16</sup> Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 244-245.

<sup>17</sup> Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 247.

'acquired contemplation"', then horizontally and in everyday life, the relevance and engagement with the mystical theological tradition becomes potentially far more "common" and accessible.<sup>18</sup> If not, then mystical theology itself increasingly appears as a rarefied discourse that lacks genuine integration within the world as created. Rather it becomes a matter of "piety", with all of its derisive and familiar connotations as a spiritual pursuit increasingly separate from and even incompatible with the world, history<sup>19</sup>, while contemplation becomes viewed as highly exceptional, asymmetrical and utterly gratuitous—in a word, *unnatural*. And it is from this lineage and predominant historical reception that contemplation and mystical theology, as "mysticism" becomes thus circumscribed within an increasingly narrow, limited sphere left remaining to it. What early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Modernists would later on be retrieve and imbue with renewed vigor and importance. That is, what we now call *asmystical experience*.

For Fénelon's part, while predominant receptions of his work did away with any and all nuance by labelling it as "quietism", in the *Maxims* itself, we see both, on the one hand, the sober defense of "acquired contemplation" as largely distinct from the exaggerated rhetoric of Mme. Guyon. While, on the other hand, we also see the defense of *pur amour* as an asymmetrical, *purified* concept. A pure love, distilled from linkages of "impure" forms of love, as well as the corresponding virtues of faith and hope as self-referential and no longer gratuitous. And in turn, by attempting to safeguard the gnostic "secret"<sup>20</sup> of such "disinterested love", Fénelon publically argues that the canon of mystical theology has continuously preserved a secret, heterogeneous element within the otherwise common, theological tradition. Thus, Fénelon portrays *pur amour* and mystical theology both as equally rarefied, in the hopes of preserving, "without diluting any approved doctrine or experience"<sup>21</sup> of this canon. Which for Fénelon, means that it is highly exceptional and attainable by the few, while nonetheless equally at the core of human interiority itself.

Hence, by analyzing these distinct themes immediately linked with Fénelon's *pur amour* can, in turn permit us to gauge the extent of its influence. From the rigor of its logic of gratuitousness, to its highly exceptional and rarefied character—all the while equally setting the standards for all other forms of "mixed love"—it is Fénelon's pure conception of love, which I would argue, is intimately repeated in more contemporary, postmodern discussions over the pure "gift", its gratuitousness, its [im]possibility, while exempted from all forms of economic reciprocity and return.

### B. CUM ALIAS

The papal brief *Cum alias* (1699), issued under the pontificate of Innocent XII on March 12, 1699 and its subsequent reception is certainly as complicated as the political and ecclesiastical drama

---

<sup>18</sup> See generally Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, trans. Donald Attwatter (London: Burns & Oates, 1977) See also Louis Dupré's essay on "Jansenism and Quietism", in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, (eds.) Louis Dupré and Don E. Salyers, in collaboration with John Meyendorff (London: SCM Press, 1989) 121-141.

<sup>19</sup> See generally Edward Howells, "Relationality and difference in the mysticism of Pierre de Berulle." *The Harvard Theological Review*, 102.2 (2009), 225-243.

<sup>20</sup> See François Fénelon, *Selected Writings*, ed. & trans. Chad Helms (New York: Paulist Press, 2006) Art. XLIV, 294.

<sup>21</sup> See Fénelon, *Selected Writings*, 210.



between Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, Archbishop of Meaux and leading French theologian, and the Archbishop of Cambrai, François Fénelon. For such a conflict has been called as one of the “epic controversies of ecclesiastical history”.<sup>22</sup> And yet while the collective stakes were high in this polarizing controversy, in the end, Rome did not simply side with Bossuet’s charges, as it appears to have its own voice in this debate. Canonically, this is evidenced in what can easily be interpreted as, what Knox argues as the “most lenient course” of disciplinary action at Rome’s disposal, declaring its articles of condemnation, not by way of a more severe papal bull, yet that of a brief. Knox later on clarifies that:

Through the direct influence of the Pope (Innocent XII) none of the propositions was stigmatized as ‘heretical’, or even as ‘bordering on heresy’. The propositions were condemned *in globo*, so that one could not say for certain which of them were erroneous, which were merely rash, or offensive to pious ears. The book was condemned in general, not on the ground that it betrays the reader into wrong conclusions, but on the ground that it *might* do so by gradual degrees.<sup>23</sup>

Knox’s interpretation of the papal brief can clearly be seen in the conclusion of *Cum alias* itself, wherein it states that: “*Condemned and rejected as, either in the obvious sense of these words, or in the extended meaning of the thoughts, rash, scandalous, ill-sounding, offensive to pious ears, pernicious, and likewise erroneous in practice.*”<sup>24</sup>

In no sense should we make light nor underestimate the severe ramifications that this papal brief entailed. Personally, the Archbishop of Cambrai’s close ties to the court of Louis XIV and Madame de Maintenon were severely damaged, not to mention the disgraceful absence of even a eulogy at his funeral mass.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, *Maxims of the Saints* would be placed on the Index for over a century. Perhaps even more damning is the complex, broad reception the Fénelonian controversy has indelibly associated *le cygne de Cambrai* with the Quietist heresy, typified by figures such as Miguel de Molinos, his *Guida Spirituale* (1675) and his later condemnation and life imprisonment. The effects of such an association cannot be underestimated in terms of the damage and disrepute this brought upon not only the personal legacy of someone like Fénelon, but furthermore, the very tradition, pursuit and cultivation of contemplation and mystical theology itself. For it is precisely this tradition that Fénelon claims to be in continuity with (however, the extent to this continuity is yet to be seen) and defends in the preface of *Maxims*. To this canon of mystical authors, Fénelon includes: Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard and Hugh of Saint Victor, Theresa of Avila, Theresa’s confessor, Balthazar Alvarez, John of the Cross, Ruusbroec, Tauler, as well as figures of the French School, such as François de Sales and Cardinal de Bérulle.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 339.

<sup>23</sup> Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 347-8.

<sup>24</sup> See Henry Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2010), 1349. See *contra* the conclusion of Molinos’ condemnation in the decree, *Coelestis Pastor*, Nov. 20, 1687, (Denzinger, 1288): “*Condemned as heretical, suspect, erroneous, scandalous, blasphemous, offensive to pious ears, rash, of relaxed Christian discipline, subversive, and seditious respectively.*”

<sup>25</sup> See Peter J. Gorday, *François Fénelon: The Apostle of Pure Love*, (Brewster, MA: Paraclette Press, 2012) viii.

<sup>26</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, 210-1.

By recalling this diverse array of canonical figures of mystical theology, Fénelon's intention is in part to defend the very theological foundations and legitimacy of this distinct canon. Foundations to which he rightly had perceived were under severe attack in its various, questionable associations with Quietism at large, as well as in particular, the concluding articles resulting from the Conference of Issy (1695), in which judgment was passed on Mme. Jeanne Guyon. Thus, keeping in mind this volatile context, Fénelon argues that he wants to "show how far these holy authors are from harming the dogma of our faith or from favoring any falsehood."<sup>27</sup> In turn, Fénelon suggests that such canonical figures and their reception were themselves not free from the taint of false, heretical associations. In this case, Fénelon cites the need to distinguish this canon amid contemporary quietistic currents and its false, exaggerated opinions, broadly drawing parallels with historical movements such as the "false Gnostics" of the Patristic era, the "Beghards" of the Low Countries as well as the "Alumbrados" of Spain.

And yet, Fénelon's own explicit defense of the tradition of mystical theology, as well as implicitly—though he never once mentions her name—that of Madame Guyon herself positions himself in such a way to then defend his own thinking of the disinterested character of *pur amour* by claiming its own canonical precedence. Such an argumentative and rhetorical maneuver thereby significantly complicates things. Just as *Cum alias* had pronounced its condemnations of Fénelon's defense of pure love *in globo*, where then does this leave the legacy of mystical theology itself in which Fénelon himself claims to defend? Despite Rome's leniency towards Fénelon himself, combining the pronouncements made in *Cum alias* with those against Molinos in *Coelestis Pastor* (1687), in total amounted to a chilling effect on the viability of continuing the tradition of mystical theology itself. Such a historical scenario in many ways is not unlike the results several centuries earlier in terms of Eckhart's condemned theses in *In agro dominico* (1329)<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, however, the dawning eighteenth century lacked figures such as Ruusbroec, Tauler and Suso *et.al.* to help correct and restore the continuing pursuit of mystical theology upon a firm, theological foundation.

Rather, it is perhaps better to mention what the papal brief explicitly did not say nor condemn. In this regard, *Cum alias* stayed clear from Fénelon's argument of the primacy of *pur amour*. Rather article 23, the last article of *Cum alias*, condemns Fénelon's conclusion that stresses the *singularity* of such love, in contradistinction to the corresponding virtues of faith and hope seen as "mixed" and imperfect. "Pure love itself alone constitutes the whole interior life; and thence arises the only principle and the only motive of all acts which are deliberate and meritorious."<sup>29</sup> However, this judgment should be viewed as necessarily clarifying article 13 of the earlier Issy conference: "within the most perfect prayer the act of charity includes the acts of the other virtues."<sup>30</sup> In short, the question becomes to what extent is Fénelon's conception of *pur amour* divisive and negating the legitimacy of other forms of "mixed", selfish love, as well as the other virtues.

---

<sup>27</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, 210.

<sup>28</sup> See Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 501-529.

<sup>29</sup> See Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1349. See also Fénelon, *The Maxims of the Saints*, 297.

<sup>30</sup> Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 342.

Another issue that *Cum alias* deliberately avoids is the issue of acquired contemplation—otherwise known as the “prayer of simple regard”. In this, Knox provides an intriguing reflection on the nuanced reasoning of *Cum alias* and the delicate stance that it takes:

It should be made clear, then, that the prayer of simple regard [“acquired contemplation”], with its neglect of ‘sensible images’, was not included in the condemnation; the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of the propositions originally selected which bear on the subject [by Bousset], were deliberately left out....Nor is the charge of ‘Quietism’ well-founded when mystical writers venture to suggest that the prayer of simple regard is a prayer suitable to the needs of many. On the contrary, the twenty-second of the condemned propositions<sup>31</sup> was precisely aimed against the forty-fourth of the *Maxims*, which taught that the way of disinterested love was a mystery jealousy guarded against all but a small *élite* of highly privileged souls.<sup>32</sup>

However, some contemporary writers who approach quietism, *pur amour* and Fénelon’s concise distinctions suggest that such “arcane” terms—for example, between “acquired” and “infused” contemplation—were mistakenly entangled in doctrinal controversy for what primarily remained a pastoral affair.<sup>33</sup> And this is perhaps as regrettable a mistake now—implying that mystical theology is at best, an application of moral and pastoral theology, without a proper “object” of its reflection—as it was then. For at the time, such confusions were considerably influential, as Knox describes Bossuet as not possessing a clear understanding of neither the history nor the technical distinctions within mystical theological writings, such as the difference between “acquired” and “infused” contemplation.<sup>34</sup> The fundamental importance of this distinction within mystical theology, its lack of appreciation and engagement by Bossuet is an important recognition that Knox makes of this entire ecclesial controversy. In one letter, Bossuet complains that the “Quietists...make extraordinary prayer seem so ordinary ‘*que tout le monde y soit appelé* [that everyone is called]’.<sup>35</sup>

While fully recognizing the existence of such confusion over terms between “acquired” and “infused” contemplation and their further application, there were nonetheless “dangerous tendencies” to be found within this revived appreciation of mysticism in seventeenth century France. Fundamentally, this can be traced back to a certain, intrinsic *divisiveness* of its character and temperament, with various figures— De Sales, Bérulle, Olier, Tronson and later on, Mme. Guyon and

---

<sup>31</sup> See Denziger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1348: “Although this doctrine (about pure love) was designed a pure and simple evangelical perfection in universal tradition, the ancient pastors did not propose it indiscriminately to the multitude of the just, unless the practice of their interested love was proportionate to their grace.”

<sup>32</sup> Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 350.

<sup>33</sup> See Gorday “*François Fénelon*, x. In this balanced, historical study, Gorday notably attempts to “re-immerses the concept of ‘pure love’ in Fénelon’s own context, so that it might shine more clearly [...] in its own peculiar light.” (xiv) This approach is positioned *contra* modern tendencies to gloss over Fénelon’s polemical context, instead portraying notions such as ‘pure love’ as “vapid” and without consequence. Nevertheless, even for Gorday, the distinction between “acquired” and “infused” appears confused, as he equates “the prayer of quiet”—traditionally seen as infused contemplation—with that of the “prayer of simple regard”, traditionally considered to be “acquired”.

<sup>34</sup> See Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 284: “While Bossuet himself had written on prayer and piety in his manual *États d’oraison*, and “has been called a master of prayer by no less an authority than Père de Causaude...we know that at the time of the Issy conference, he had never read St. Francis of Sales”. Knox later on writes that for Bossuet, “It is certain that elsewhere he writes as if the whole notion of contemplative prayer were foreign to his thought. He insists on treating the mystic’s application to God’s presence as if it meant signaling out one *conception* of the Divine nature and discoursing on that notion with your intellect, to the exclusion of all others; an obvious misunderstanding of the whole mystical approach.”

<sup>35</sup> Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 248.

Fénelon himself—all of whom were far more apt to draw clear distinctions than forge linkages and syntheses. In terms of the distinct character of mystical theology and its associations with quietism, these divisions are clearly highlighted by both Knox and Henri Bremond, as the differences revolving around meditation and contemplation involves more than merely a spiritual technique. Referencing Bremond's strong defense of Fénelon in his *Apologie pour Fénelon*,<sup>36</sup> Knox writes that the "real issue...is between an anthropocentric and a theocentric type of spirituality."<sup>37</sup> Knox further describes Bremond's characterization of the anthropological model, typified by well-known Ignatian spiritual methods such as the Daily Examen and Spiritual Exercises, both of which "treats prayer as a means to an end, the end being our own perfection....Whereas, to the mystic, prayer is its own justification; a continual attitude of loving attendance upon God is the thing, precisely, we were made for."<sup>38</sup> Hence, Knox summarizes that "When I meditate about God, I seldom lose sight of what he is *for me*, my Benefactor, my Last End, &c....Whereas, when I use the prayer of contemplation, my mind is more easily directed to the thought of what God is *in himself*, without any reference to my perfection or even to my salvation."<sup>39</sup>

### C. FÉNELON'S TYPOLOGY OF LOVE

In his typology of the gradation of love, from selfish and 'mixed loves', to that of the highly distilled<sup>40</sup>, for Fénelon these include: (1) servile; (2) covetousness; (3) hopeful love; (4) charity; (5) *pur amour*. And although he rarely discusses it, Fénelon's basic description of "servile love"—"love of God's blessings apart from God"—which Fénelon calls entirely selfish is to be found the basic presupposition that one can entirely bracket the gifts of God from God, as Giver of such gifts. Interestingly enough, postmodern discussions on the gift and givenness itself also operates on this very foundational presupposition: not only does givenness and the gift not imply a g/Giver, but in turn, some have argued (Derrida) that the perfect gift is one in which it is given anonymously.<sup>41</sup>

Another feature that appears in this typology concerns 'selfless love'—distinguished as the proper love for God—as clearly extrinsic and thus unmixed with immanence itself. Such a line of thinking clearly distinguishes human autonomy from that of God, such that loving God as God is viewed as having no bearing on the created self. Otherwise it would still remain "mixed" and not *l'amor pur*. Additionally, Fénelon makes a very telling and interesting initial move in his line of argumentation in introducing Art. 1 of *Maxims*: namely, that concupiscent love is itself fundamentally un-natural. Rather, the anthropological argument made is that by seeking one's happiness, rather than God's glory goes "against the essential nature of the creature..."<sup>42</sup>. Instead, self-abandonment is thereby equated with our full turning to God is itself argued as fundamentally natural.

---

<sup>36</sup> See Henri Bremond, *Apologie pour Fénelon* (Paris: Perrin, 1910).

<sup>37</sup> Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 248.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 249.

<sup>40</sup> Which I intentionally emphasize here, as Fénelon repeatedly employs metaphors of early-modern Science and Chemistry, in strong Cartesian fashion, in a univocal attempt to arrive at what is 'certain and unshakable' concerning love in its purity of substance.

<sup>41</sup> See supra note 10.

<sup>42</sup> See Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. I, 220.

Following from this anthropological basis, a primary form of distinguishing these various types of love is the degree of its self/self-less character, as well as the question of motive. This is especially evident in Article IV on Hope and its relationship to Charity, as he argues for their distinction. For Fénelon, love is solely voluntaristic and thus, one type of love cannot co-exist with another when considering the question of motives. This becomes starkly evident when arguing that the virtues of hope and charity are distinct, not only because of their diverse motives, yet because their formal objects are different. In this case, the object of charity is God's goodness, which bears no resemblance to humans. While conversely, hope's object is understood as God's goodness, defined as good as it relates to us.<sup>43</sup> For Fénelon, as the object of charity subsists in of itself, without any relationship to us, only goes to reaffirm the discussion that the very desire of *pur amour* is neither immanent nor does it arise from the human person, yet is purely extrinsic and "given". Fénelon anticipates this problem when he strictly separates the selflessness of charity from the selfishness of hope in the following:

The only difficulty that remains is to explain how a totally selfless soul can want God, God being defined as her possession. Is this not, one might say, to fall short of selflessness' perfection? Is this not to backtrack in the way of God and to return to a motive of self-interest in spite of the tradition of the saints from all centuries who bar from the third state of the righteous any selfish motive? It is easy to answer that the purest love does not prevent us from wanting—indeed, it would have us to want positively—all that God wants us to desire. God wants me to want him inasmuch as he is my property, my treasure, my happiness and my reward....The object and the motive are different. The object is my self-interest, but the motive is not selfish because it is a question of God's good pleasure.<sup>44</sup>

### **1. Pur Amour**

Fénelon then goes on to define *pur amour* as

One can love God with a love born of perfect charity, without any mingling of motive or self-interest. At which stage one loves God in the midst of trials and tribulations in such a way that one could not love him more even if he showered the soul with consolation.<sup>45</sup>

Fénelon then goes on to clarify the manner and its endurance of tribulations, such that there is neither "fear of punishment nor the desire of reward" in such a love, as it is set in a clear eschatological horizon.<sup>46</sup> Despite its radical insistence, Fénelon then supports the rigor and purity (removed from all self-interest) of *pur amour* by citing the Impossible case as a test of its absolute

---

<sup>43</sup> See Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. IV, 228: "Therefore, these two virtues [charity and hope] conserve in this state a real distinction and specificity in all Scholastic rigor. The formal object of charity is God's goodness or beauty considered simply and absolutely in itself without any idea that relates to us. The formal object of hope is God's goodness, defined as good for us and difficult to acquire."

<sup>44</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. IV, 228-229.

<sup>45</sup> Fénelon, General introduction to *Maxims*, 218.

<sup>46</sup> This first definition is also the first condemned article in *Cum alias*, the papal brief of March 12, 1699 by Innocent XII.

and pure selflessness.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, it is important to note that Fénelon intentionally describes this radically selfless type of love as *amour*, and not as *caritas*. Hence, there is in fact desire<sup>48</sup> in such a *pur amour*, when he says: "A real desire and a sincere expectation of promises fulfilled....This pure love [l' amour pur] is not content with not wanting a reward apart from God Himself."<sup>49</sup>

However, keeping in mind the anthropological basis in Fénelon's thinking, the Archbishop of Cambrai, in a rigorously consistent manner, notes the utter distinctiveness of desire in *pur amour*, such that "He would desire beatitude for himself only because he knows that God also desires this, and that He wants each of us to desire it also for His glory."<sup>50</sup> Here, Fénelon presents the idea that beatitude and the natural desire for God are removed from its immanent creaturely origins. Namely, that such a desire does not arise from the very person himself. Rather, one desires such beatitude only because it is "given". That is, it is only through revealed Christian faith that one knows that God also desires that we desire Himself and His glory. For Fénelon, if it would be the converse—that such a desire would emerge naturally from within the human person—then such a love would be deemed as 'mixed' and therefore, not *pur*. Therefore, it needs stress once more. This is indeed *amour*, yet it is now a *purified amour*—desire in the pure exteriority of its givenness, without any admixture of the self. Hence, this subtle, yet definitive turn that such a mystical theology expresses is not only a *rupture*, yet it demonstrates a clear extrincism, in that the subject can no longer give an immanent account for its desire and love for God. Instead, its logic and appeal must come from God and not from creation's natural attunement and disposition towards God.<sup>51</sup> This further reinforces the intrinsic linkage between *pur amour* and the impossible case and why Fénelon would cite such an "impossibility", beyond highlighting the rigor and extent of its selflessness. Arguably, for what the impossible case emphasizes are both its basic voluntaristic and fideistic dimensions of love as *pur amour*, accentuating that such a desire to love God is not native to the human person. Rather, it must be secured from elsewhere.

## 2. The Impossible Demand

While for Rome, this distinction between charity and hope did not in of itself prove problematic, the application of its strict divisiveness did, especially as Fénelon expounded upon this distinction in his understanding of "holy indifference", which received four separate condemned theses in *Cum alias*.<sup>52</sup> For Fénelon, "holy indifference" is "nothing more than the selflessness of love" wherein one "no longer wants anything except for God alone and in the way that God wants her to want him by this attraction."<sup>53</sup> And in its "most extreme trials", Fénelon calls this holy indifference "abandonment".<sup>54</sup> While the Council of Trent's position on *created grace* and human "cooperation"

---

<sup>47</sup> See Fénelon, General introduction to *Maxims*, 218 (my emphasis): "One would still love him [God] *as much* even if—supposing an impossible hypothesis—he did not know that we loved him or if he decided to damn eternally those who loved him."

<sup>48</sup> Once again, not dissimilar to Marion's own thinking of eros as the "erotic phenomenon".

<sup>49</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. II, 223.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> See supra, "Chapter IV. Frans Jozef van Beeck, Native Attunement and the 'admirabile commercium'".

<sup>52</sup> See articles 4-7 from *Cum alias* in Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1330,1331,1332, 1333.

<sup>53</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. V, 230.

<sup>54</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. VIII, 236.

clearly hangs over these discussions<sup>55</sup>, we can also see *Cum alias* furthering this interpretative line specifically in terms of desire itself. Namely, that our desire for beatitude cannot be merely *elicited* from and informed by God, independent of nature itself. Rather, such desire must come from the specificity of the human person himself, if indeed the *integrity* of the human as *cooperative with* God's grace is to be upheld. And yet, Fénelon cannot be found as wanting of subtlety and nuance, as he clarifies later on in Article V that holy indifference is not an "absolute determination on our part to desire nothing," which he states is not "selflessness, but rather the extinction of love that is a true desire and will."<sup>56</sup> Rather, Fénelon insists that holy indifference is the "positive and constant determination *to want and to want nothing*."<sup>57</sup> Why does Fénelon insist upon such a distinction? He does so, since an absolute determination to "desire nothing" is in fact a negative self-desire. It remains a desire, for it remains a want insofar as it desires to absolutely not want, thus negatively remaining inscribed within a selfish desire itself.

The impossible demand [*demande impossible*], otherwise referred to as the "impossible case" [*cas impossible*] is an important, reoccurring theme that Fénelon notes throughout *Maxims*. Generally conceived, the impossible demand is understood as the passive soul's willingness, via *pur amour*, to suffer damnation if this would be most pleasing to God. In article II of *Maxims*, Fénelon writes:

If, imagining an impossible case, given God's purely gracious promises, in which God would wish to annihilate the souls of the righteous at the moment of their corporeal death, or seek to deprive them of his vision and keep them eternally in the temptations and miseries of this life, as Saint Augustine postulates, or even would wish to have them suffer far from him the pains of hell for all eternity, as Saint John Chrysostom postulates, following Saint Clement, the souls who are in the third stage of pure love would neither love God less nor serve him with any less faithfulness.<sup>58</sup>

Immediately thereafter, Fénelon clarifies the very "impossibility" of this demand, as he enjoins that: "Again, it is true that this supposition is *impossible* because of God's promises, because he gave himself to us as a Rewarder."<sup>59</sup> Thus, while clearly maintaining the impossibility of such a demand, Fénelon clearly states that for some, such an "impossible case *seems* to her to be possible and real".<sup>60</sup> The consummation of the impossible demand then takes on an explicit Christological dimension, resulting in the tenth condemned thesis by *Cum alias*:<sup>61</sup>

It is at this point that the soul is conflicted. She dies on the cross with Jesus Christ; saying, 'O my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' In this involuntary gesture of despair, she makes the absolute sacrifice of her own self-interest for the sake of eternity [...]<sup>62</sup>

As such, one can reasonably ask why is such an "impossible" supposition at all important for Fénelon as a key to his thinking of *pur amour*? All the more so, considering the very first words of *Maxims* in

<sup>55</sup> See supra "Chapter VIII. Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part III—Common love and the Univocal".

<sup>56</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. V, 231.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid* (my emphasis).

<sup>58</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. II, 224.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, (my emphasis).

<sup>60</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. X, 241.

<sup>61</sup> See Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1336.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid*.

Fénelon's preface, whereby distancing himself from the exaggerated and incautious rhetoric of someone such as Mme. Guyon, he clearly states: "I have always believed that one should speak and write as soberly as possible concerning the interior paths" and that "this subject demands extreme discretion."<sup>63</sup> Arguably, in a treatise that is at pains to abide by such discretion, the rare moments of metaphorical and literary flare occur with regard to the topic of the "impossible demand". So why does Fénelon risk further derision and potential accusation on what remains a sheer impossibility?

First off, it needs to be clarified that the earlier articles of the conference of Issy, which made pronouncements on the works of Mme. Guyon—and to which, in its immediate historical context, Fénelon's *Maxims* are written as an immediate response—includes in article thirty-three the allowance to "acquiescence in our own damnation on an impossible supposition".<sup>64</sup> From this opening initiated at Issy, it can be generally said that Fénelon makes ample usage of the impossible demand to thematically illustrate the very limits and boundaries of selfless love and in turn, the self *qua* self. Furthermore, the very logic of the impossible demand shows *pur amour* to be conceived along largely voluntaristic lines, hence "illogical" with regards to the bounds of normative reason.<sup>65</sup> For as Fénelon earlier describes, that which is regarded as "reasonable" is directly tied with "mixed", selfish intentions. The unique logic of the impossible demand thereby drives a fideistic point that what God desires has no intrinsic connection to creaturely desires. God, in this case, is enshrined and safeguarded as totally Other by way of admitting the paradoxical nature of the "impossible demand".

With attention to his earlier definition<sup>66</sup> notice how Fénelon's thinking of the *impossible demand* is intimately linked with the *pure gratuitousness* of God's love and His promises. In this case, a pure gratuitousness in which nothing is owed then opens up to the exceptional logic and limit of this impossible demand. This provides a unique take also on our overall question of the manner(s) of love, and whether the passive receptivity of *pur amour* entails any degree of possessiveness. While it is traditionally held that it is impossible to separate beatitude itself from the love of God, the Archbishop of Cambrai innovates this claim by also stating that while the "object" and "end" of our love cannot be separated, they

[...] can very well be separated with respect to motives. God cannot fail to be the beatitude of the faithful soul, but the soul can love him with such selflessness that *the beatific vision of God would not increase in any way* the love she bears him without any thought for herself, and the soul would love him just as much even if God were never to be her beatitude.<sup>67</sup>

While principally, we see here Fénelon referring to the absence of beatitude as not impacting upon the motives of *pur amour* and not the object nor end of such love, nevertheless this also suggests that there is in fact no inherent possessiveness to such a love and perhaps such possessiveness—even in our eternal beatitude—would risk downgrading the purity of such love. In this respect the *cas impossible* remained highly controversial, as Bossuet claimed that it negated the virtue of Christian hope in salvation. In turn, we can see that Fénelon attempts to respond to this fundamental criticism

---

<sup>63</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, 209.

<sup>64</sup> Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 342.

<sup>65</sup> See Fénelon's descriptions of "concupiscent" and "hopeful" love, *Maxims*, 216-221.

<sup>66</sup> See *supra*, note 59.

<sup>67</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. II, 224 (my italics).



with the “love of Hope”, his third out the five types of love. Namely, that charity is the perfection of hope, while remaining distinct from such hope.<sup>68</sup>

### 3. Without a Trace

As it has been presented, in order to argue for *pur amour*, the instinct of Fénelon's overall thought, in a decidedly Cartesian manner, is always one of dividing and distinguishing ideas, relations, as well as motives, in order to arrive at that singular love wherein “all interior paths tend” and is the “highest degree of Christian perfection.”<sup>69</sup> In Fénelon, there are generally three principal divisions that guide his work: (1) love, as divided within itself, between “mixed” and “pure” forms of love; (2) humanity, in its relation to God, the basis of which justifies the exclusive figure of selflessness and gratuitousness within *pur amour*; and lastly, (3) the human person as divided within itself.

Strongly linked with the impossible demand, it is this third division that is evident in Fénelon's intriguing reflections upon “suffering” in article XIV of *Maxims*.<sup>70</sup> In this article, Fénelon argues that when those who suffer the “final trials leading to the purification of love”—purified, that is, from all selfish, mixed motives—there is a “separation of the superior part of the soul from the inferior inasmuch as the senses and the imagination have no part in the peace and communications of grace that God grants...in a simple and direct manner that surpasses all meditation or reflection.”<sup>71</sup> For Fénelon, this separation is attested by what he calls “physical traces”, such that while “simple and direct, acts of the mind's understanding and will...leave no visible, physical trace behind”, these simple acts are juxtaposed with “meditative, reflective acts that, leaving a physical trace, communicate themselves to the imagination and the senses, that which we call the inferior part...”.<sup>72</sup> By this argument of “traces”, Fénelon is implicitly rendering a more modern, and epistemological subject-centered account of what, earlier on, someone like Ruusbroec would term “images” [*beelden*].<sup>73</sup> However, unlike the Brabantine contemplative, for Fénelon, the concept of the “trace”

---

<sup>68</sup> See Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. IV, 227-230.

<sup>69</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, 212.

<sup>70</sup> See Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XIV, 250-251.

<sup>71</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XIV, 250.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Brieven I in Opera Omnia X*, ll. 62-72: “They have a heavenly life, for Christ lives in them, God and man. And for this reason they live both with images and without. [*Ende hier om sijn si gebeeldet ende ongebeeldet*] They have the images of the life of our Lord, his suffering and his death and all virtue. And in their spirit they are free and idle and empty of all things. And for this reason they are without images and over-formed [*over formt*] in divine clarity. And so they can go out and in and find living nourishment always. They go out with the image of the humanity of our Lord in good conduct, holy practice and all virtue. They go in without images with the Spirit of our Lord where they find and possess eternal clarity, unfathomable wealth, taste and comfort more than they can grasp or comprehend.” “Deses hebben een hemels leven want Cristus levet in hem god ende mensche. Ende hier om sijn si gebeeldet ende ongebeeldet. Si sijn gebeeldt mitten meven ons heren, myt sijnre passien ende mit sijnre doot ende mit ammen doechden. Ende si sijn nu los ende ledich [*ende ledich*] ende ongebeeldt van allen dingen in horen geest. Ende hier om sijn si overbeeldet ende over formt in godlicher claeinheit. Ende aldus moegen si uutgaen ende ingaen ende altoes levende spise vynden. Si gaen uut gebeeldt miiter menscheit ons heren in gueden zeden, in heiliger oefeninge, in allen doechden. Si gaen in beeldeloes mitten geest ons heren daer si vynden ende besitten ewige claeinheit, grondelose rijcheit, smaeck ende troest, meer dan si begripen of ghevatten moegen.”

fully refers, not to the image itself, yet to the self-reflexive subject, as simple acts can take place with little to no recognition or awareness itself—hence, *without a trace*. Such acts are in turn differentiated from discursive, image-based acts of the will and understanding that are communicated to the senses, imagination and are thus, characterized by their embodied forms of knowing and acting.

Following this conception of “traces” and the division of the “superior” from the “lower” parts of the soul, Fénelon draws a Christological parallel, stating that given such a separation in the midst of suffering, “It is thus that Jesus Christ, our perfect model, was happy on the cross inasmuch as he enjoyed heavenly glory through the superior part of his soul while he was still suffering in the inferior part with a feeling of rejection by his Father.”<sup>74</sup> This statement was carefully condemned in *Cum alias*, not on the supposed grounds of Christ’s “happiness” while on the cross, yet on Fénelon’s suggestion that the division within such suffering entailed that the “inferior part [i.e. Christ’s embodiment] was not communicating with the superior part...its involuntary anxiety”.<sup>75</sup> Interestingly enough, Rome does not find fault with the converse statement that Fénelon thereafter makes, regarding the absence of “peace or its beatitude” communicated from the “superior part” to its “inferior”. Rather, one can legitimately interpret *Cum alias* as appearing keen to maintain the very real linkage, from bottom-up as it were, of Christ’s embodied humanity and the role that His suffering had played on his overall understanding, will and consciousness, as both fully-human, fully-divine.

Rome’s insistence on this part, however is not solely Christological in nature, yet stands at the matrix between Christology and the Church’s various spiritual devotions oriented to Christ’s Passion. Amid this backdrop, in this somewhat unique, condemned article, Rome appears keen on fully addressing Fénelon’s own problematic lack of linkages—immediately recalling Bossuet’s own seminal charge that the very singularity of the idea of *pur amour* annuls the Christian virtue of hope in salvation. Hence, the epistemological separation between the “superior” and “inferior” parts of the soul is made explicit in the more central issue at stake, the relationship between discursive meditation and contemplation. For Fénelon, what he principally has in mind here is to draw the strict distinction between the imageless or traceless character of contemplation and its “peaceful selflessness of perfect love” from that of discursive meditation, which at times can leave very definitive “traces” in its emotive, “hurried and anxious excitement”.<sup>76</sup> Thus, the thirteenth article of *Cum alias*, I would argue, proclaims its condemnation with a eye on defending the great variety of the Church’s tradition of discursively meditating upon the image-rich events of Christ’s Passion and their often emotive, thoroughly embodied character that (in some cases) *does indeed leaves a trace*. Therefore, the influence of Article XIV *Maxims* and Fénelon’s thinking of “traces” is further developed at various points, as he likens meditation to a more embodied, discursive form of prayer, “inherent to the exercise of selfish love”<sup>77</sup>, while contemplation is aligned with a “simple or loving look” or *pur amour*.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XIV, 250.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. See also Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1339.

<sup>76</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XI, 244.

<sup>77</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXI, 263.

<sup>78</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXI, 263-4.

As it is with *pur amour*, it is critical for Fénelon to clearly distinguish meditation from contemplation, for the “passage from meditation to contemplation is like the passage from selfish to pure love.”<sup>79</sup> Fénelon depicts meditation as revolving around a discursive logic of independent “acts that are easy to distinguish one from the other....because they derive a conviction about a truth from a conviction of another truth already known”.<sup>80</sup> By Fénelon’s estimate, the limiting factor of such discursive prayer is the manner in which it revolves around the self and as such, is “commingled with self interest”, most importantly the “selfish motives of fear and hope”.<sup>81</sup> And yet, Fénelon is at pains to maintain the legitimacy, albeit imperfect, of such forms of selfish prayer as the “ordinary foundation of the interior life and the exercise of love for all the righteous who are not yet in the state of perfect selflessness.”<sup>82</sup>

#### 4. Acquired and Infused Contemplation

Recalling our introduction to the Fénelonian controversy and *pur amour*, one of the central issues at stake is the viability of the linkages within Mystical theology, both between meditation and contemplation, and more specifically, between “acquired” and “infused” contemplation. This strong distinction between meditation’s “discursive acts” from that of contemplation is made explicit in Art. XXVII of *Maxims* concerning “pure and direct contemplation”.<sup>83</sup> In this article, Fénelon treats the issue of “acquired” contemplation and interestingly enough, avoids any explicit mention or reference to *pur amour*. Instead, the “simple and amorous look” of this directly acquired mode of contemplation concerns that of “pure faith”, which, Fénelon argues is itself “negative”, or apophatic.<sup>84</sup> The apophatic dimensions of “pure faith” are in turn supported by appeal to Denys the Areopagite, wherein the apophatic “[...]does not have to do voluntarily with any noticeable image and distinct and qualifiable idea, as Saint Denis says [...] but it goes beyond all that which is distinct and perceptible (that is to say comprehensible and limited)”.<sup>85</sup> Later on in the same article, Fénelon clarifies that the apophatic character of pure faith does not, however, exclude any and all images whatsoever. For to hold such a position, Fénelon argues, is to:

[...]create a fanciful contemplation that has no real object and that can no longer distinguish God from nothingness. It is to destroy Christianity under the pretext of purifying it. It is to invent a type of deism that falls directly into atheism, wherein any real idea of God, as distinguished from his creatures, is rejected.<sup>86</sup>

Avoiding such a position, Fénelon thereby relies upon a strong metaphysical turn as a way of balancing the simplicity of acquired contemplation’s “amorous look” with the necessary distinction pure faith holds towards God. Thus, while the apophatic register of pure faith “goes beyond all that which is distinct and perceptible”, instead it “only limits itself to the purely intellectual and abstract

---

<sup>79</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXIII, 266-7.

<sup>80</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXI, 263.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXI, 264.

<sup>83</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXVII, 270.

<sup>84</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXVII, 270, 271.

<sup>85</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXVII, 270.

<sup>86</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXVII, 272.

idea of being, which is without limits and restriction.”<sup>87</sup> Unfortunately, Fénelon does not elaborate further on his thinking of such unlimited being, which such pure faith is founded upon. Instead, he cites other standard, metaphysical positions, such as the relation between essence and attributes in order to secure that the simplicity of such contemplation does not forego necessary dogmatic distinctions. Hence, once again, it is more a question of the viability of Fénelon’s linkages that are at stake, this time between the simplicity of apophatic pure faith and the “distinct... attributes of God [Trinity and Unity]” as well as, via the Incarnation, the “distinct view of the humanity of Jesus Christ and of all his mysteries”.<sup>88</sup> Such lack of linkages once more proves problematic for Fénelon in the following article, Art. XXVIII—which contains condemned article 17 of *Cum alias*—wherein he positively affirms that:

Contemplative souls are deprived of the distinct, sensible, and thoughtful view of Jesus Christ in two different times [...] First of all, in the incipient fervor of their contemplation [...] Second, a soul loses Jesus Christ from sight in the final trials [i.e. the “impossible demand”] because God then removes from the soul the possession and the thoughtful knowledge of all that which is good in her, in order to purify her of all self-interest.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, we see a disjunction in Fénelon’s account between his more acceptable theoretical defense, often contrasted by its more problematic, pastoral application. In this case, it is the very particularity and distinctly embodied humanity of Jesus which is considered “deprived”. And in turn, the very historicity of Jesus and the discursive framework in which the Church’s spiritual devotions have as their focus in meditating upon His incarnate mysteries. For Fénelon, he defends the simplicity of such acquired contemplation and its apophatic pure faith as “nevertheless very real and very positive.”<sup>90</sup> Recalling his anthropological assertion in Art. XV regarding the enduring happiness of Christ suffering on the Cross, Fénelon writes: “The simplicity of this purely immaterial idea, which has not passed by the senses or by the imagination [...] admits of all the objects that pure faith can present to us. With respect to divine things, it only excludes perceptible images and discursive operations.”<sup>91</sup> Thus, analogous to the separation between the lower and higher parts of the soul during Christ’s suffering, so too do we see a similar move in the pure faith of acquired contemplation. For the immediacy of such contemplation, *without any trace*, bypasses the senses and imagination of discursive meditation that “considers the mysteries of Jesus Christ by a methodical and perceptible working of the imagination in order to etch the traces of them in the mind and to be moved by consolation.”<sup>92</sup>

Noticeably absent in the presentation on acquired contemplation is that of *pur amour* itself. This distinctly changes with Art. XXIX of *Maxims*, wherein Fénelon describes passive contemplation as infusing “into souls the purest and most perfect love.”<sup>93</sup> Fénelon then immediately clarifies this, by arguing against a naïve, simplistic argument that would presume the passivity of such infused love as

---

<sup>87</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXVII, 270.

<sup>88</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXVII, 271.

<sup>89</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXVIII, 272-273. See also Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1343.

<sup>90</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXVII, 270.

<sup>91</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXVII, 270, 271.

<sup>92</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXVII, 271.

<sup>93</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXIX, 274.

“miraculous”. Recognizing that while “several mystics have supposed that this contemplation was miraculous because within it we contemplate a truth that has not passed by the senses or by the imagination,” Fénelon argues that such views—although he does not mention anyone specifically—are to be attributed to the “philosophy of the Scholastics, with which these mystics were imbued.”<sup>94</sup> The position that he takes in this regard is hermeneutically astute, recognizing the sources and intellectual heritage that had previously informed such mystical theological treatises. As a counter argument, Fénelon first claims that “grace without miracle is sufficient for the most lively faith and for the most purified love.”<sup>95</sup> In turn, by siding against the understanding of passive, infused contemplation as extraneous and “miraculous”—or “mystical experience”—Fénelon rightly turns to a more anthropological field in accounting for the “naturalness” of such passive, infused contemplation.

#### D. DISCONTINUITY IN MYSTICAL THEOLOGY—A MATTER OF ANTHROPOLOGY

In this anthropological vein, Fénelon begins by asserting that those earlier mystics who understood infused contemplation as ‘miraculous’, such figures also “recognized a depth of the soul that was active in this contemplation without any distinct operation of the physical senses.”<sup>96</sup> Here, Fénelon recalls a standard theological anthropological model prevalent amongst (late)medieval mystical treatises, which posits a lower, bodily unity that includes the five senses, reason, desire; the “higher” unity of memory, understanding and will; and finally (especially for Rhinish and Low Countries late-medieval mystics) the “ground” of the soul, or its *wesen*, as a place of mutual indwelling between God and the human person.

Fénelon strongly distances himself from this Augustinian-based, Trinitarian anthropology, and instead signals towards a far more modern anthropological depiction, wherein “the core of the soul is not really distinguishable from its properties”.<sup>97</sup> This statement, although Fénelon himself does not further elaborate upon it directly, nevertheless has immense consequences for Fénelon’s thinking of *pur amour*. By leveling away the earlier, tripartite anthropological structure (i.e. body—soul—spirit), the efficacy of human acts of knowing (apophatic, pure faith) and willing (*pur amour*) become totalizing of the human person in distinctly bearing the *imago dei*. Therefore, by rendering *indistinguishable* the *soul’s core from its properties*, this modern take on the founding *identity* of human act makes sense of what later on become commonplaces in speaking of an anthropological portrait as either *positive* (in this historical context, typified along Quietist lines), or more *negative*, (as typified by Jansenism).

By collapsing the abiding relationality of the Trinitarian structure of the human soul that earlier on, mystical theology in varying degrees upheld, for Fénelon, ideas such as “mutual indwelling” or differentiated union—the greater one’s union with God, greater one becomes uniquely a human person—are no longer tenable. Thus, when later on speaking of traditional

---

<sup>94</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXIX, 274-5.

<sup>95</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXIX, 274.

<sup>96</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXIX, 274-5.

<sup>97</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXIX, 275.

mystical theological themes such as the soul's transformation into God—though explicitly not deification, which Fénelon immediately conflates with the hypostatic union<sup>98</sup>— or its “annihilation”, given such an anthropology, we are able to understand his insistence on the utter passivity of *pur amour*. For, given the primacy of such *identity*—which stands at the basis of his anthropology—unity with God thus entails annihilation of all that is “mixed”, self-reflexive, and thus impure. With this anthropological framework we are able to understand Fénelon, when he summarizes that “the more a soul is passive with respect to God, the more she is acting in respect to what she must do”.<sup>99</sup> In this regard, Fénelon claims that such passive, infused contemplation has nothing explicitly ‘miraculous’ about it, rather the pure acts of “faith and love [are] so simple, so direct, so peaceful so uniform that they seem to form only one sole act, or even seem to be no act at all but rather the tranquil repose of pure union”. Or, what De Sales would term as “pure unity.”<sup>100</sup> And it is this “single act”, which encompasses the entirety of the human soul, that Fénelon will call the “prayer of silence or quietude”.<sup>101</sup>

In this respect, Fénelon's *pur amour* is deeply tied to the distinct reception he makes of the *imago dei* tradition, no longer regarded as a natural, ontological union, yet as a moral union. That is, one of similitude and “referral”<sup>102</sup> and thus solely within the realm of grace. Speaking of the state of pure passivity and its receptivity of grace within contemplative prayer, Fénelon gives a provocative, anthropological metaphor:

Water that is disturbed cannot be clear, nor can it reflect the image of neighboring objects, but still water becomes like the pure glass of a mirror. It received without alternation all the images of various objects, and it keeps none of them. The pure and tranquil soul is the same. God imprints on her his image and that of all other objects that he wishes to imprint. Everything is imprinted; everything is erased. This soul has no proper form, and she has equally all those that grace gives her. Nothing remains to her, and everything disappears as in water as soon as God wishes to make new impressions. Only pure love gives this peace and this perfect docility.<sup>103</sup>

Fénelon clarifies and develops this line of thought more explicitly when discussing his distinct, *imago dei* theological anthropology and the subject of moral transformation:

The state of transformation of which so many of both the ancient and modern saints have so often spoken is none other than the most passive state, that is to say, the state that is the most exempt from all selfish activity or worry [...] In this state a soul has only one love and she only knows how to love. Love is her life. Love is her being and her substance, because it is the sole principle of all her affections. Since this soul makes no anxious movements, she makes no

---

<sup>98</sup> See Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXXV, 285.

<sup>99</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXIX, 276.

<sup>100</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXIX, 275.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. See also von Hügel, his description of the “Pure love Controversy” and how the “One act” stood at the center of the Modernist retrieval of the Archbishop of Cambrai, as *pur amour* was argued to be “the very perfection of Christianity”. Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and her Friends*, vol.2 (London, James Clarke & Co, 1961), 146-181, 181.

<sup>102</sup> See my discussion in “Chapter VIII Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part IV-Common love and the Univocal” wherein Marion's similar position is analyzed in view of the *imago dei* in abandoning its “essentialist” dimensions (via; the “image” and instead, opting solely for a “moral union” of similitude, or “likeness” and hence, continual “referral” towards an other that is “elsewhere”).

<sup>103</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXX, 278.

resistance to God's hand, which pushes her. *Thus she only feels a single movement, which is to know him that is imprinted on her [...]Therefore, the image of God, obscured and nearly erased in us by sin, is redrawn more perfectly and a resemblance is therein renewed—a resemblance that is called transformation.*<sup>104</sup>

Such an anthropological conception of the *imago dei*, “nearly erased in us by sin” is highly discontinuous with early mystical theological figures—i.e., Ruusbroec's view on the very naturalness of mutual indwelling—which again, restates the question to what extent was there continuity within this tradition of mystical theology that Fénelon himself was proclaiming to defend? Was mystical theology distinctly recognizable at this stage, or was Fénelon simply appealing to this canonical tradition in order to fend off Bossuet's growing criticism of his perceived quietist views?

Such questions in part provide a genuine look into the spiritual temperament of the age and the preceding figures of the French school of Spirituality. At issue is the interpretation of the humanity's sole reliance upon God as no longer opening onto the question of “natural mysticism” and the exaggerated claims of autotheism (as it had in earlier centuries), yet as a source of existential anxiety at the creaturely self's lack of autonomous “necessity”. While discussing the topic of God's absolute freedom, entailing that “Grace is never owed to us; otherwise it would not be grace”, Fénelon aptly depicts this mood of existential anxiety in stating:

Nor does He [God] owe to our soul the right to exist after this life. He could let her fall back into nothingness from her own weight. If it were otherwise, God would not be free to determine the duration of his creature, and it would become a necessary being.<sup>105</sup>

In line with the logic of the “impossible demand”, a critical theme at stake in Fénelon's defense of mysticism, is his insistence that the creature's contingency and lack of necessity in its absolute dependency upon God in no way impinges upon God's freedom. However, as a productive contrast, while a figure such as Ruusbroec would not formally disagree with Fénelon on this point, the Brabantine's accent is nonetheless entirely different, as seen in the following:

[...]we find a triple unity in all people naturally, and in good people also supernaturally. The first and the highest unity is in God; for all creatures hang in this unity with (their) being [*wesene*], life, and subsistence [*onthoude*]; and if they should be cut off in this way from God, they would fall into nothingness and be annihilated. This unity is in us essentially [*weselijc*] by nature, whether we are good or evil, and it renders us neither holy nor blessed without our effort. We possess this unity in ourselves, and in fact, above ourselves, as a principle and support [*onthout*] of our being [*wesens*] and our life.

[...]drierhande eenicheit vintmen in alle menschen natuerlijcke, ende daer toe overnatuerlijcke in goeden menschen. Die eerste ende die hoogste eenicheit es in gode, want alle creatueren hanghen in deser eenicheit met wesene, met levne ende met onthoude; ende scieden si in deser wijs van gode, si vielen in niet ende worden te niete. Dese eenicheit es weselijc in ons can natueren, weder wij sijn goet ochte quaet, ende si en maect ons sonder ons toedoen noch heylich noch salich. Dese eenicheit besitten wi in ons selven ende doch boven ons [selven], als een begin ende een onthout ons wesens ende ons levens.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, Art. XXXV, 284-285, (my emphasis).

<sup>105</sup> Fénelon, *Maxims*, 240.

<sup>106</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, Opera Omnia III, *Die geestelike brulocht*, b, 41-49.

While more in-depth analysis of Ruusbroec is still to come, for now, the productiveness of this brief comparison is to show how earlier on, for someone like Ruusbroec, the conflict is not one of God's freedom, human contingency and necessity, nor of preserving the gratuitousness of the beatific life. Rather, it is how *natural* this fundamental relationship is between God and the human person, though in no way rendering the person naturally blessed. Thus, the dynamism for the Brabantine contemplative—as it was for many contemplative theologians in late-medieval Northern Europe—revolved more around ideas of relationality and autonomy and their lack of mutual exclusivity between God and the human person.

## E. CONCLUSION

Speaking of the condemnation of Fénelon's *Maximes* amid both its ecclesial and social context, Louis Dupré interestingly summarizes this unique and highly influential moment in the history of Western Christian spirituality and the modern fate of mystical theology specifically when noting:

And yet, one cannot escape a certain discomfort in reading theories in which everything is 'pure' and the imperfect but commonly attainable is barely granted a right to exist. In the end, the 'heresy' of Quietism may have consisted in nothing more than the all-too-deliberate decision to leave the ordinary. It is a heresy which it shares with its natural adversary, Jansenism, but one which has prevented neither movement from training some of the most spiritual minds of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Jansenism and Quietism should be seen as attempts to perpetuate the Christian spiritual tradition in a culture that was breaking away from the basis of that tradition, rather than as separatist drives.<sup>107</sup>

As it is well known within a contextual-fundamental theological standpoint, amid various societal pressures, the theological option of discontinuity and in turn, seeking out a more "pure" tradition, religious identity and communal praxis is a well-known strategy that the Church has employed at various times in her history. And yet, it is often less-acknowledged that the search for a more 'pure' and less "contextually-contaminated" tradition is an endeavor that itself is always-already contextually mediated. In endeavoring to defend the mystical theological canon from repeated attack and derision via the disinterested love of *pur amour*, Fénelon cannot help but in some sense reconstruct a tradition for which, if we contrast him with Ruusbroec, shows himself in key areas to be in greater discontinuity with that same tradition. A discontinuity, which we can in part attribute to Fénelon himself, as we have shown in this analysis, all the while equally realizing a certain inevitability that such was bound to occur. For in short, amid its seeking for greater 'purity' and, in following Dupré's assessment—the intended return to an earlier, mystical theological tradition that was quickly departing—the fascinating works of Fénelon and others in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century school of French Spirituality generally attest to the departing of the "createdness" of the world itself

---

<sup>107</sup> Dupré, "Jansenism and Quietism", 141.



that facilitated mediation between the anthropological and the theological. While in its place, we can see modernity's familiar construction of nature, the world, the *mathesis universalis* and its *natura pura*.<sup>108</sup> In a felicitous reference, Frans Jozef van Beeck provides a fascinating note on Pierre Cardinal de Bérulle's relationship as a spiritual advisor to René Descartes:

The Christian affirmation of God's incomprehensibility has even less in common with René Descartes' resolve to prescind from the Christian faith in order to attempt, by dint of sole reason methodologically applied *more mathematico*, to place God outside the reach of all skeptical and atheistic doubt and denial. The result of his reasoning was an abstract God, whose transcendence in relation to the universe was shorn of all immanence, and thus became a matter of mere remoteness. No wonder that this God was to turn out, ultimately, to be nonessential to the world. What makes all of this doubly disquieting is the fact that Descartes' personal intentions in undertaking this line of argument *were entirely pious*, and that the spiritual director who encouraged him to pursue it, Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle, had a reputation for saintliness.<sup>109</sup>

This remarkable quote alone should make one reconsider "piety" as purely a "private" affair. Hence, we can well summarize that while the various shrewd, political maneuvering in Fénelon's political and ecclesiastical controversy remains but a fascinating, historical curiosity, the effects and long-standing influence of *pur amour*, however, remains strongly with us today. For in short, by seeking to distill various 'mixed-loves' to love's more original, pure essence, Fénelon's *pur amour* brings together a convergence of various ideas that I contend not only are replicated in various modern approaches to love. Furthermore, such convergences are in turn replicated in more postmodern discussions on the gratuity of the *pure gift* and its [im]possibility.

Recalling Pattison's reformulation of the pure gift and the four conditions of its [im]possibility, we can now schematically map these criteria to the various pertinent themes concerning what we have seen in Fénelon and *pur amour*. (1) The first condition, *gratuitousness*: "[...] that the giver should not give so as to impose on the recipient" accords well with theme of hope and its "mixed", selfish motives, from which Fénelon strongly distinguishes from his conception of *pur amour*. It is this strict separation made between hope and the singularity of *pur amour* that Fénelon's adversary, the Archbishop of Meaux, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet repeatedly cited as negating the Christian theological virtue of hope in one's salvation. Recalling Bossuet's charge that *pur amour* none other annuls the Christian virtue of hope in salvation is a charge that has become recast and reiterated in Postmodern discussions on the anticipation of the gift as precisely demoting the gift—in its purity—into an economy of exchange. Hence, expelling the very gratuitousness of the gift is none other than the expelling of the gift itself. (2) The second condition, *anonymity*: "the giver would have to conceal himself". The logic here concerns maintaining the anonymity of the giver "as such", lest one receive a certain consolation in the giving itself, and thereby once more condition the gift, doing away with its gratuitousness and instead, situating it within an economy of exchange. Such a logic is directly implicated in Fénelon's own "five types of love", that have as their gradation competing selfish and selfless motives that ultimately leads to *pur amour* itself as *distilled* from any and all self-reflexive motives. (3) The third condition, *other than a gift*: "the gift would have to appear as other than a gift in order not to become an obligation or debt". In this, we see Fénelon's strident defense

<sup>108</sup> See generally Louise Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>109</sup> Frans Jozef van Beeck, *GE*, §66, 4, a, 78.

of the then well-known, controversial theme in various mystical literature in 17<sup>th</sup> Century France: namely, the “impossible demand”. Pushing the boundaries of such self-less love, enthusiastically even entailing one’s annihilation, Fénelon actively maintains that those who practice *pur amour* would continue to do so, (as the popular maxim goes) *even when suffering eternal damnation, if such would be pleasing to God*. The impossible demand as a hypothetical, yet seemingly necessary test case in determining the radical selflessness and aporetic logic of *pur amour* is similarly inscribed within postmodern definitions of the gift as a distinct, self-referential logic, foreign to any sense of extrinsic horizon as none other than a reduction to its economy of exchange. (4) Finally, the fourth condition, *forgetfulness of the gift and its debt*: “The recipient would need absolutely to forget the gift”. This forgetfulness of the gift, and ultimately the self as well, amid passively receiving and contemplating God and God’s grace is repeatedly thermalized by Fénelon. This is explicitly explored in terms of the simplicity of *pur amour*, infused contemplation and its anonymous, passive reception as occurring *without a trace*. The utter passivity and “quietism” of acquired contemplation—away from any semblance of its infused and miraculous character—and combined with its explicit, apophatic character, are themselves thinking patterns that are replicated in the postmodern anonymity of the gift and its pure givenness as a givenness, “without a trace”. That is to say, the [im]possibility of the postmodern gift refuses to become reified as a ‘thing’ and thereby in turn, recognized ‘as such’ as a gift that would place an obligation upon the recipient to return such a gift and thus, compromise its pure gratuitousness.

Following, therefore, this conceptual mapping and the reading of the gratuitousness of Fénelon's *pur amour* and its “impossible demands” with that postmodern discussions on the [im]possible gift and its phenomenological givenness, in the following chapter, we now turn to a more direct engagement between Jean-Luc Marion and Ruusbroec over the question of the [im]possible itself.

## CHAPTER VII

### ABIDING IN MINNE'S DEMANDS. PART III— ENJOYING THE [IM]POSSIBLE WITH JAN VAN RUUSBROEC AND JEAN-LUC MARION

His Spirit draws us inwards to love Him according to His worthiness. His worthiness demands our spirit to love without measure, for He Himself is without measure, for He loves us with Himself as He is. And His minne is so terrible, and so magnetic, and so all-consuming of everything that it touches that if we feel this [*ghevoelen*], which is above reason, then our minnen is modeless and without manner.

[A]lsoe trecht ons zijn gheest inne hem te minnen na sine weerdicheit. Ende sine weerdicheit eyscht onsen gheeste minne sonder mate, want hi es zelve zonder mate ende hi mint ons met hem zelve alzo hi es. Ende sine minne es soe gruwelijc ende soe intreckende ende zoe verterende al dat zy gherijnt; ende daer wi des ghevoelen, dat es boven redene, daer es onse minne wiseloes ende zonder maniere.<sup>1</sup>

#### §1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY REVIEW

In my ongoing retrieval of the fourteenth century Brabantine contemplative, Jan van Ruusbroec and his understanding of love, or *minne*, and situating such a retrieval within contemporary discussions over love in theological and philosophy of religion quarters, I must equally bring into consideration that which *minne* presupposes, so as to gauge its *theological relevance*, *accountability* as well as its *contextual plausibility*, as a *fundamentally meaningful* retrieval. Hence, I have contended that the contemporary reception and possible critical retrieval of Ruusbroec hinges more upon the plausibility of his mystical anthropology of mutual indwelling and the various consequences stemming therefrom, more so than the question of 'mystical experience' as a determining criterion of legitimacy and hermeneutical engagement. Here, the argument is maintained, that the question over the *possibility* of "mystical experience" as passive and immediate, is itself a discourse that inescapably displays the underpinnings of its autonomous, modern subject. Which, in the tradition of the Enlightenment, is certainly discontinuous with pre-modern thought. Rather, so as to gauge, in fundamental theological terms, the contextual plausibility of retrieving Ruusbroec in terms of *continuity*, one must contend explicitly with Ruusbroec's distinct theological anthropology and the primacy it holds towards relationality as a constructive/critical interlocutor amid current efforts in rethinking human relationality.

In what follows, these perspectives are in part strengthened by the French phenomenologist and philosopher of religion, Jean-Luc Marion, who in search for a more robust and radically pure sense of thinking the radical alterity of God, maintains that phenomenologically, "Transcendence—the concept will not take us very far, nor truly 'beyond'."<sup>2</sup> In phenomenological terms, transcendence is defined as that which surpasses intentional consciousness, yet is regarded as never apart from such consciousness. Hence, it inexorably remains dependent upon human

---

<sup>1</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll. 805-810.

<sup>2</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God" in *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry*, (eds.) John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007) 17-43, 17.

consciousness and is thus enclosed within an immanent frame. Instead, in calling upon the aid of the *docta ignorantia*, Nicolas Cusanus in his article, “The Impossible for Man—God”, Marion suggests that we consider the proper region for the *possibility* of God's transcendence as beginning precisely wherein we as humans encounter barriers that cannot be transgressed—that which remains inescapably *impossible for us*. Without condition and measureless, the infinity of God's transcendence is precisely upheld in terms of *radical possibility*, the “impossibility of impossibility, and therefore his possibility.”<sup>3</sup> As a kataphatic statement unflinchingly maintaining God's incomprehensibility, this affirmation of God thereby entails the impossibility of God's phenomenalization. An impossibility, which “has meaning only for us, who alone are capable of experiencing the impossible.”<sup>4</sup> Radical possibility thus endures for God, while for us as creatures, God remains the impossible phenomenon, since God, as God, cannot be intuited in space and time, nor conceived as such.

And yet, while Marion clearly restores a more rigorous and radically pure approach to transcendence, from a (mystical) theological stance, his account is constructive, yet insufficient on its own. For it is not only how we are to conceptually affirm the transcendence and greater dissimilarity of God as radically other. Instead, the mystical theological tradition of Ruusbroec precisely inquires, in an equally robust, *immanently participative frame*, how are we to *receive* and *respond* to, doxologically *praise* and ultimately *love* such a radically other God within history and its concrete particularity, amid our relations to God and others. In short, it is precisely a question of the enduring role of the *economy of salvation* in its mutuality to the asymmetrical priority of doxological givenness. For what is *impossible for man*, which, in theological terms is uniquely and most perfectly expressed in the Incarnation—'wherein God, remaining God, became man'—can at the same time be said to be *likewise impossible without man*. That is, in the Incarnation's prolongation of the "whole Christ"<sup>5</sup> [*Christus totus*] in its ecclesial and personally deified ends: 'so that we might become God'. And this, a more robust and *dynamic immanence*, is continuously supported by Ruusbroec's mystical anthropology of mutual indwelling, which likewise underlays the very dynamism of minne itself.

---

<sup>3</sup> Marion, “The Impossible for Man—God”, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> In this regard, I am highly indebted to the excellent thought of the Belgian Jesuit, Emile Mersch. See generally, Emile Mersch S.J., *The Whole Christ*, trans. John R. Kelly S.J., (Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Company, 1938) 438-439. Speaking on the "whole Christ", Mersch summarizes his views in the following: "[I]t concerns the divine life which is communicated to us in the unity of the Christ Mediator, and the prolongation of the mystery of the Incarnation in the whole Church by means of grace and the divinization of the faithful [...] therefore, Christianity consists in a single doctrine, but a complete doctrine, of the whole Christ, God and man, Head and members. All the life of the Church has its source in the Incarnation, the virtue of which extends to all men."



Figure 3 Rogier van der Weyden Annunciation Triptych-Center Panel (1432)

In terms of receiving and responding to God, with whom “nothing will be impossible” the Incarnational, Marian narrative of the Annunciation remains paradigmatic.<sup>6</sup> This is seen both in terms of illustrating the dynamism of Ruusbroec’s thought, as well as the radical divergence and “difficulty” that Marion himself rightly acknowledges that this narrative poses in terms of his highly apophatic, asymmetrical thought. Namely, for Marion, Mary’s *fiat*—‘Be it done to me according to Thy word’<sup>7</sup>—is viewed not so much as an exemplary *act* of faith itself— *fides qua creditur*; an act that likewise unveils creation’s “native attunement” and dynamic openness towards God, as seen in Mary’s exemplary response. Instead, Marion will avoid all forms of nature’s dynamic openness to participating in God’s grace and instead, as the unseen and unanticipated “event of... *advent* “, asymmetrically and unilaterally opens onto the *fides quae*. Namely, “In *what* therefore does she really

<sup>6</sup> For a reading of the potential influence that Ruusbroec played on the famous Flemish Primitive painter Rogier van der Weyden, See Edward Beckaert, “The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting: Exploring the Spiritual Affinity between John of Ruusbroec and Rogier van der Weyden”, *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 82, 4 (2011), 333-392. Beckaert highlights the then novelty of situating the Annunciation motif specifically in Mary’s bedroom chamber, arguing that “Rogier van der Weyden was possibly inspired by the opening verses of *The Spiritual Espousals*, in which Ruusbroec describes the Incarnation as a marriage between Christ and human nature.” (374) See also Jan van Ruusbroec, *Die Geestelike Brulocht*, Opera Omnia III, ed. J. Alaerts, introduced by P. Mommaers, trans. H. Rolfson (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 1988), Bk. 1, ll. 5-29. See also the theological aesthetics of Alejandro García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 19: “Mary’s *fiat*, her saying ‘yes’ in human freedom, was also a saying ‘yes’ to the Glory in all creation. Mary’s appropriation of Glory reveals both the natural and human capacity for Original Gift. Mary’s Magnificat, in turn, reveals the human role in and for all creation, i.e., the human capacity for praise. Mary’s *fiat* and Magnificat discloses the incarnations’s implications concerning human praise. The mystery of the incarnation depends on the mystery of human freedom [...] A confidence in human freedom [...] [that] became shattered under the influence of the severity of the Reformation’s *sola’s*; *sola fides, sola Scriptura, sola gratia*. Mary, in the Roman Catholic Tradition, articulates the conviction that *fides* is as well a *fiat*, not simply reception but reception appropriated and returned as response.”

<sup>7</sup> See Lk 1, 38b.

have faith?"<sup>8</sup> To which Marion replies: in God's unwavering fidelity itself. "The point is not to acknowledge simple omnipotence".<sup>9</sup> That is, the efficiency and *act* of God's power and might, which Marion himself is explicitly trying to avoid by elevating the primacy of possibility over that of actuality.<sup>10</sup> Later on, we will explore in greater length the basis for such views. Yet for now, Marion reads Mary's assent as one of "hav[ing] faith in God's good faith."<sup>11</sup> This echoes the well-rehearsed neo-scholastic argument, whereby such assent is in God and His Revelation "who can neither deceive nor be deceived." Thus, by way of Mary's consent to God's fidelity, in Marion's reflection, the carrying out of the [im-]possible (i.e. virginal birth) "open[s] up a proper possible *for God alone*—the Incarnation".<sup>12</sup>

The contrasts are immediately evident for the Brabantine contemplative, whereby in first reflecting upon Gabriel and his greeting—affirming Mary as "full of grace"—Ruusbroec characterizes the utter sapiential dimension of Mary's response as an exercise in humility, such that "God lifted her up in the highest, then she put herself lowest".<sup>13</sup> Ruusbroec's provocative, "ecclesiotypical" sense of creaturely *mutuality* likewise unfolds in his explicit, "Christotypical" Mariology of co-redemptrix, "mediatrix" and "advocate"<sup>14</sup>—poignantly reflected in his explanation of Mary's *fiat* as having "*pleased* the love of God [*bequam der minnen gods*] so well that it sent Christ into Mary's chamber, who redeemed us of all affliction. Behold thus we are taught by Mary and by the angel, how we have received the Son of God in our nature."<sup>15</sup>

Hence, this is to say that in terms in Marion's 'impossible' and the inseparable possibility that emerges from this impossibility—namely, human redemption from affliction in Christ as a further partaking in both His nature and thus, our own—well demonstrates, in a contemporary contextual setting, the dynamism of Ruusbroec's mystical anthropology. That is to say, an anthropology, which in turn underlies his equally dynamic understanding of *minne*. Utilizing Marion's language of 'impossible-possible', *minne*'s dynamic unity is here affirmed in two primary modes: (1) asymmetrical, gratuitous love in all its graciousness and radical alterity, (2) yet mutually reciprocal,

---

<sup>8</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 34.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> See Marion's reference to Heidegger's inversion of metaphysics privilege of actuality over that of possibility, "The Impossible for Man—God", 31. See also Marion's own distinction of possibility and actuality as guiding his distinction—which for many become a somewhat moot point—between phenomenology considering the "possibility of revelation, while theology considers "revelation as historicity", in "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Summary for Theologians", in *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 279-296, 293.

<sup>11</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 34.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*, ll. 568-569.

<sup>14</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Van Seven Trappen*, ll. 469-490, esp. 483-490: "[F]or she is Mother of all graces and of all mercy, and she is our advocate and our mediatrix between us and her Son; and He cannot refuse her anything that she desires, for she is His Mother, and sits at His right hand: Queen crowned with Him, Lady, and powerful in heaven and on earth, above all creatures the highest of all, and the nearest of all to Himself. This is why we are to thank and praise Him for the great honor that He has done His Mother and that of all of us, in human nature." "[W]ant si es moeder alre gratien ende alre ghenaden ende si es onse advocaet ende onse middelere tusschen ons ende haren sone, ende hi en mach hare niet ontsegghen dat si begheert, want si es sijn moeder ende sitd te sijnre rechter ziden, coninghinne met heme ghecroent, vrouwe ende mechtegh in hemel ende in erde, boven alle creatueren alre hooeghst ende alre naest hem selven. Hier omme selen wi heme danken ende loven van der grooeter eeren die hi ghedaen heeft sijnre moeder ende onser alre in menscheleker natueren."

<sup>15</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*, ll. 577-580 (my emphasis).

demanding and often characterized by an unlimited, voracious desire. Or, as in the Annunciation, while safeguarding the gratuitousness of the Son's Incarnation, the humility of Mary's *fiat* is recalled by Ruusbroec as having mutually *pleased* [*bequam*] God's minne in such a manner that it *freely compelled* God's gracious and redemptive act, "sen[ding] Christ into Mary's chamber". Herein, one can say that for Ruusbroec, a lot hinges on such *pleasure* in both bearing witness and attesting its full adequacy—theological, as well as phenomenological—in conveying this profound, yet subtle balance between its gifted character, as asymmetrically gratuitous, while equally noting pleasure's mutual reciprocity of purified eros and the endless, desirous abandon of her *fiat*.

Considering such *pleasure*, this introduces us to a third mode of minne, namely Ruusbroec's reflections upon loving contemplation as a *modeless*, abysmal enjoyment—or the "touch of the Holy Spirit" [*gherinenne des heilichs gheests*].<sup>16</sup> Similar to the profound approach to "pleasure" as none other than upholding the delicate balance between the asymmetrical gratuitousness of God's grace, with that of the mutual reciprocity of the creature's unyielding desire, Ruusbroec will often appeal to the more technical language of "modelessness" [*wiseloos*] as demonstrative of this tension. Herein, Ruusbroec states, "mode[s] cannot attain to modelessness" for they are "two things that never shall be one, for they must remain distinct from each other". Yet in a highly dynamic way, much like his Mariology, Ruusbroec equally clarifies that "The one [i.e. 'modes'] may not drive away the other ['modelessness']"<sup>17</sup>, a critical point that underscores the following reflection.

## §2. SUSPENDING THE ECONOMY

Thus, it is only fair to admit that even among Christians that breaking up or dislocation of wisdom [...] is increasingly taking place [...] It is true that there always remains to very pure and lofty souls the resource of disregarding all of this, of escaping upwards as it were into the hope of obtaining to mystical union. This indeed is the supreme gift, the supreme realisation; but in relation to wisdom it is a beyond. Besides, even here it is difficult not to feel a certain apprehension, for should not holiness and mysticism (which are not the same but have between them a most complex relationship) have a sort of human foundation of natural wisdom and morality? And where this foundation is threatening to collapse, is there not a danger of an element of error or at least of illusion finding its way into this most pure and lofty work?<sup>18</sup>

Christian Mysticism, like much of religious faith within modernity in the West, has suffered from many divisions. In the above quote from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century French Existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel, we here see a variety of divisions mentioned, a result of which Marcel broadly characterizes as the "breaking up or dislocation of wisdom". Among these divisions, we see asceticism and mysticism (when mentioning the complex relationship between 'holiness and mysticism'), as well as the absence of a view of mysticism that accords with a philosophical foundation of "human" or "natural wisdom and morality". Let us recall that Marcel is a philosopher and not surprisingly, within a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western European (and especially French) philosophical context, when reflections veer towards that which is broadly termed as "mystical", such veerings had often occurred far more frequently in literary and philosophical contexts than they had in theological

<sup>16</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll. 762.

<sup>17</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll.247-251.

<sup>18</sup> See Gabriel Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, trans. Manya Harari (London: The Harvill Press, 1954), 55.

ones. To us today, this may seem in part odd and fairly curious, yet in more ways than one, it simply highlights another division implicit within Marcel's text: the division between mysticism and theology. Or conversely, the near total absence in contemporary reflection of what has traditionally been termed as mystical theology.<sup>19</sup> And yet, how can we account for this seemingly massive lacuna within theology proper, while at the same time well-note the sustained reemergence of interest in mysticism within various ecclesial, academic and societal contexts today? While certainly, we can in part attribute such a reemergence to the very obliqueness and frequent imprecision of what it is that we are commonly referring to when speaking of "mysticism" or "spirituality".<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, I think that Marcel has a very acute sense of our contemporary situation in noting (albeit, a half-century earlier) the dissolution and "dislocation" of wisdom that is operable today, "even among Christians", as fundamentally linked with a somewhat spurious and illusory presentation of mysticism. "Mysticism",<sup>21</sup> is here understood as too easily transcending (i.e. disembodied) as well as too privatized and individualistic. Herein, such 'mysticism' easily mistakes the unspeakable for the idiosyncratic; or the "desire for alterity", as none other than the plastic, thinly abstract and tirelessly banal consumer capitalist narratives of identity and desire; or furthermore, a banal escapism that is divorced from the creaturely, the publicly accountable, the immanent. That is, in fundamental and theo-anthropological terms, when mysticism—much like grace—no longer accords its asymmetrical gratuitousness with an equal and inseparable sense of created mutuality, of what is fundamentally

---

<sup>19</sup> In support of this general historical and theological assessment, See generally Mark McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). See also the International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria (2011)*, nr. 86-99. ITC, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles, and Criteria* (March 8, 2012), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_doc\\_20111129\\_tologia-oggi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_tologia-oggi_en.html). as accessed on 04.11.13. Here, the International Theological Commission's most recent text aims to correct legitimate theological pluralism from illegitimate specialization—no longer able to be mutually enriched and sufficiently conversant with other distinct theological areas—by way of a renewed stress upon the dogmatic, Trinitarian and Christological foundations of 'unity in theology'. In this sense, the ITC saw fit to include discussion upon mysticism and theology's *sapiential* character. And while adequate discussion was made in affirming the necessity of combining, for example, kataphatic and apophatic manners of speaking of God (see nr. 97), as a fruit of the mystical theological tradition, nonetheless, in the remaining sections of this document, mysticism retains a certain spurious stereotype, suspect of its theological credentials, as nothing other than a personal and decidedly private form of piety that must remain distinct and not to be confused with 'public' forms of theological reflection (See esp. nr. 92)

<sup>20</sup> In particular, I am thinking of Cardinal Newman's offhanded remark that mysticism "begins in mist and ends in schism".

<sup>21</sup> While I will maintain that this spurious form of mysticism is distinctly pronounced within modernity, there are nonetheless very evident, historical precedents that have gradually led to this common understanding. In a fascinating historical citation that announces the increasing divisions between speculative theology and mystical theology, See St. Francis De Sales' masterful *Traité sur l'amour de Dieu*, trans. V. Kerns (London: Burns & Oates, 1962) 217-220, 218-9 wherein the "Gentleman" doctor of the Church identifies Mystical Theology as "another name for prayer" as he writes: "But what do we talk about in prayer? What is our topic of conversation? God, Theotimus; nothing else. After all, what does a lover talk about but his beloved? Prayer and mystical theology, therefore, are identical. Prayer is called theology, because it deals with God as speculative theology does; only there are three differences [...] First of all, speculative theology deals with God as the supreme being—the divinity of the supreme goodness; mystical theology deals with Him as supremely loveable—the supreme goodness of the divinity. Secondly, speculative theology is concerned with God and man, mystical theology with God alone. Thirdly, speculative theology leads to knowledge of God—turning its pupils into learned scholars and theologians; mystical theology leads to love of God—turning out intensely affectionate lovers [...] Prayer is called mystical, because of the hidden nature of the conversation: God and the individual speak heart to heart, and what passes between them can be shared with no one else. So personal is lovers' talk, it has no meaning outside the two who engage in it."



human and "natural", it then either becomes somewhat violent in its fideistic, two-tiered "extrincism". Or, because it fashions itself as rarefied and extraordinary, it fails to possess any intrinsic linkage to either our common sense of humanity nor any theological account of Revelation. Thus, by way of its sheer marginalization, it alone accounts for its current "dislocation" within theological reflection. Which is a bit of a roundabout way to say that such a supurious "mysticism" understood as such, is indeed (and correctly so) seen not to be properly theological.

However, such a critique is still a bit too easy. Instead, in a more nuanced and theologically profound manner, a way in which to account for mysticism's own dislocation from modern theological reflection is to consider another division that has plagued modern theology, what the late Dutch Jesuit theologian Frans Jozef van Beeck argues:

The Reformation's decision to replace *doxology* with *soteriology*—the doctrine of humanity's sin and its salvation by divine grace—as the focus of the Christian faith, at the expense of (a) humanity's consciousness of its radical participation in the inhuman universe and its silent doxology, and (b) the Great Tradition's stress on the *imago Dei* as the heart of humanity's abiding vocation to mediate between God and the cosmos [...] <sup>22</sup>

For van Beeck, the loss of such a doxological vocation summarizes, what has contributed to another equally important loss or dislocation within Christian theology, namely the near total absence of theological exemplarism, seen instead at interminable odds with the modern consciousness of humanity as innately historical: "[T]he resulting loss of the deeply traditional Jewish and Christian understanding of creation as eternally and ideally pre-existent with God (specifically in the Torah, in God's Wisdom or the divine *Logos*) and thus, as inalienably loved by God" <sup>23</sup>

While the description here is inescapably broad and general in presenting the modern theological separation of doxology and soteriology, as well as the similar forgetfulness of the Tradition's earlier regard for theological exemplarism, what I would like to stress at present is that one cannot simply retrieve the *purity* of these ideas <sup>24</sup> over and against their historical discontinuity from ongoing theological reflection. To do so, would be to once more, albeit unwittingly, imitate a more supurious form of "mysticism", by attempting to reinsert such intrinsic and "inalienable" ideas by way of imposition that is totally alien, disembodied, non-historical, extraordinary and utterly extrincist. Rather, for the possibility of such a retrieval itself to be both *meaningful* and *fundamental*—one which recognizes both the inalienability of such perspectives in their enduring relevance, as well as various intellectual and historical discontinuities that make a simple return both impossible and crudely ideological. Such retrievals, instead, must be incarnated, which in Marcel's own very profound reading of the times, he argues:

[B]y what is only seemingly a paradox, the practical and the metaphysical problems merge into one. I mean that it will not be enough to exhume this or that general principle once elucidated by a secular thinker or a doctor of the Church; such a principle will be valuable towards reconstruction only if it becomes incarnate, and this kind of incarnation [...] can

<sup>22</sup> See Frans Jozef van Beeck S.J., "Trinitarian Theology as Participation", Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall S.J., Gerald O'Collins S.J. (eds.) *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: University Press, 1999), 295-325, 321.

<sup>23</sup> Frans Jozef van Beeck S.J., "Trinitarian Theology as Participation", 323.

<sup>24</sup> See supra our discussion of Fénelon in this regard, "Chapter 6 Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part II—Pure Gift and *Pur Amour* François Fénelon and the Rethinking of Love's Demands Beside the Gratuitous Gift"

only take place at the humblest and most intimate level of human life: the level at which a few men of good will meet to work at a common task.<sup>25</sup>

*Common*, or in Jan van Ruusbroec's middle-Dutch terminology, "*ghemenye*", can equally be said to be in many ways (though not exclusively) synonymous with what Marcel is referring to with wisdom and its contemporary dislocation and disolution.<sup>26</sup> Equally so, with regards to van Beeck and his reflections upon modern divisions within religious and theological reflection, as the prospects of retrieving Ruusbroec, by maintaining that which is "common" offers in principle a profoundly stimulating retrieval in constructively reengaging with these distinctly modern, conceptual divides.

The wealth of the Brabantine contemplative's perspective and its contemporary relevance was earlier recalled by David Tracy, who in contrasting the German Dominican Meister Eckhart's radically detached apophaticism of a "Godhead beyond God", instead finds himself, "in Christian theological terms, more with Jan Ruysbroek than with Meister Eckhart."<sup>27</sup> The eminent retrievability of the Christian mystical tradition, especially "and above all, Ruysbroeck"<sup>28</sup>, is mainly due to what Tracy rightfully gauges in Ruusbroec as critically aiding us today in *relocating* the reconstruction of such modern divides and "dislocations", by way of direct appeal to the synthesis of Ruusbroec's mystical theology and his "direction for understanding the Christian God in terms of both *spirituality and theology*."<sup>29</sup> Such a location, a *where*, is none other than the unending dynamism of a relationality, which for Ruusbroec, is best described by the "common life" [*ghemenye leven*]. Which again, Tracy states:

[C]ontemporary Christian theologians are attempting, now in contemporary terms, to relearn [...] the need for a fully mystico-prophetic contemporary Christian theology where the mystically transformed self, reflecting on the profound implications of the one God as essentially Triune, returns to the world free for life in all its earthiness and all its search for justice and love.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 55-56.

<sup>26</sup> If anything, such a dislocation is analogously relayed in the historical evolution of the term of "*ghemenye*" itself, aptly denoting in modern Dutch, "*gemeen*" is something which is "nasty", "mean" [*boosaardig*] "wretched" or "malicious" [*laag, verachtelijk*]. Evidently, while such connotations are far from Ruusbroec's understanding, a certain semantic continuity is nevertheless present in so far as reinforcing that that which is "common" is by no means "luxurious" nor "privileged". If anything, by way of semantic and linguistic evolution, perhaps modern Dutch is indicating precisely wherein to reclaim such an understanding, in and amid a sensitivity for the marginalized and a more profound degree of "commonality" that underlines pleas for solidarity.

<sup>27</sup> See David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1990), 91.

<sup>28</sup> Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, 103.

<sup>29</sup> Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, 91 (my emphasis).

<sup>30</sup> Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, 82-83. See also *Mysticism and Social Responsibility* in Frans Jozef van Beeck, *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology*, Volume 2/4B. *The Revelation of the Glory*. Part IVB. *The genealogy of Depravity. Moral Living in God's Presence* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001) §148, 4, 87-8. By engaging Ruusbroec's thinking of "common life" [*ghemeyne leven*], van Beeck asserts that "In Ruusbroec's mind, the theonomous life is nothing if not socially engaged, even if the particular shape which this social dimension will take is as unpredictable as the gift of the explicitly theonomous life itself." Here, van Beeck is recalling Ruusbroec's dynamic thinking of union with God, *ghemeyne leven* and particularity, such that by living a more common life of deepening in union with God and others, one becomes more distinct and particular.

Here, the dynamic synthesis of Ruusbroec's minne as *ghemeyne leven*—one in which sees minne's asymmetrical gratuitousness equally entailing the mutually insatiable, erotic demands, or the reciprocity of economy—is inseparable from its view of God's grace and our liturgio-doxologic praise. This dynamism is strongly contrasted by Marion's distinct approach to a univocal understanding of love.<sup>31</sup> In its avoidance of an economy and exchange, while preferring the asymmetry of the saturated phenomenon absent of any and all demand, Marion's phenomenological approach to love has been variously criticized as joyless or a love-less and "chauvinistic" understanding of love itself.<sup>32</sup> Staying clear of the cultural wars and predictable feminist critique, I have stated the position that the absence of reciprocity and possessiveness in Marion's reflections upon love is due in considerable part to the continuing legacy of François Fénelon's *pur amour* and the replication of many of its foundational tenets within contemporary, postmodern approaches in thinking the *pure gift*. This absence of economy, reception, return and reciprocity—as fundamentally lacking in Marion's erotic phenomenon—can well explain its linkage with his phenomenology of the gift and more profoundly, the frequent charge as lacking a sufficient ethical dimension.<sup>33</sup> Here, we can attribute this precisely due to his very asymmetrical thinking of the gift, secured by way of the possibility of a *pure gift*, which, as totally gratuitous, foregoes any degree of economy and reciprocity, demand or exchange. In short, the saturated phenomenon of the gift is utterly doxological, performative—as well as possesses characteristics that are in short, spuriously "mystical". While at the same time, Marion argues for the possibility of a pure, asymmetrical gift and its givenness, precisely by way of a radical negativity in our ability to receive and respond to the gift as such. Rather, it is and thus remains, an "impossible gift", purely gratuitous and free from any and all demands, return, or mutual exchange. It is, in short, despite Marion's frequent reference to Dionysius Aeropagite and the Greek Patristics<sup>34</sup>, a very modern suspension of the economy (following van Beek's characterization) between doxology and soteriology—that is, between givenness and return, between *exitus* and *reditus*.<sup>35</sup> Despite this divided perspective and my sustained critique, Marion's contributions are nonetheless quite valuable, especially in returning us to a very robust sense of transcendence and its view of 'experience', as seen in terms of the "impossible possible".

---

<sup>31</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, (trans.) Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 215-222, 217: "Love is said and is given in only one, strictly univocal way. As soon as one multiplies it into subtle and differentiated acceptations, to the point of equivocality, one ceases to analyze it better: one dissolves it and misses it entirely....A correct thinking of love is marked by its capacity to sustain for as far as it is possible the essential univocality of its one way."

<sup>32</sup> See Jonna Bornemark, "The Erotic as Limit-Experience: A Sexual Fantasy" in *Phenomenology of Eros*, (eds.) Jonna Bornemark & Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, SÖDERTÖRN PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES 10 (Södertörn: Södertörn University, 2012), 247-266.

<sup>33</sup> See Brian Robinette, "A Gift To Theology? Jean-Luc Marion's 'Saturated Phenomenon' in Christological Perspective" *Heythrop Journal* XLVIII (2007), 86-108.

<sup>34</sup> See Tamsin Jones, *A Genealogy of Marion's Philosophy of Religion: Apparent Darkness* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> See Robinette's apt reference to Gustavo Gutiérrez in this regard: "Mystical language expresses the gratuitousness of God's love; prophetic language expresses the demands this love makes. The followers of Jesus and the community they form—the church—live in the space created by this gratuitousness and these demands. Both languages are necessary and therefore inseparable; they also feed and correct each other." *On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 95, as quoted from Robinette, "A Gift To Theology? Jean-Luc Marion's 'Saturated Phenomenon' in Christological Perspective", note 68.

A. LOVING KNOWLEDGE

Amid this discussion of Marion and *the question of God's [im]possibility*, my overall critique of the phenomenization of God and its purported value surrounding the "possibility of mystical experience" as both "passive" and "immediate"—over and beyond the theological critique of its historical discontinuity—receives a strong philosophical support from Marion, which I will soon explore more explicitly. But first, to be clear, in no way am I arguing against the richly prevalent, 'experientially' felt dimensions generously attested to within mystical theological texts, and in particular, those of Ruusbroec. "Feeling" [*ghevoelen*]<sup>36</sup> is unambiguously a multi-faceted, central mode of reflection for Ruusbroec upon the mystery of God's grace.<sup>37</sup> And yet, Ruusbroec's *ghevoelen*, stemming from the primacy of our relationality to and natural desire for God and His grace, is certainly *contra* various Modernist positions that upheld mystical experience in tandem with the "turn to the subject". These latter historical developments have contributed to theology's frequent understanding of 'mysticism' as extraneous to, and at times mutually suspicious towards the nature of revealed, Christian faith in the former's own emphasis upon the subjectivity of "religious" or "mystical experience" as somehow "adding to" the *depositum fidei*.

Rather, I would like to suggest that Ruusbroec's *ghevoelen* can well be seen in the *vernacular* mystical theological tradition as a *variation* of the "traditional Scholastic notion of connatural, or sympathetic knowledge".<sup>38</sup> What, in modern theological terms, Pierre Rousselot termed as "loving knowledge" [*la connaissance amoureuse*]<sup>39</sup>—as stemming from Gregory the Great's own well-known admonition, *amor ipse notitia est* [love itself is knowledge].<sup>39</sup> For Rousselot, such loving knowledge constitutes the *entirety* of the creature's fundamentally *dynamic relationship to God*. A dynamic relationship, which a generation later would be historically *ressourced* by Henri de Lubac's famously controversial *Surnaturel* and his account of St. Thomas' *desiderium naturale visionis beatificae*. Herein, Rousselot writes that the "[I]ntelligence itself is the expression of a natural appetite [...] [as] every *affective habit* define[s] a *vision of love* [...] reason itself is nothing other than a pure love

---

<sup>36</sup> On this point, it is necessary to state that 'ghevoelen' is often misleadingly translated, though not always, as 'experience' in some of the critical editions in the Opera Omnia series.

<sup>37</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Boecksen der verclaringhe*, ll. 304-310, 323-328: "As long as man continues this exercise, then he is able to contemplate and to feel [*ghevoelne*] union without intermediary. And he feels the touch of God in him that is a renewal of his grace and all his virtues. For you must know that the grace of God flows down to the lower powers, and touches the heart of man, and from that comes heartfelt affection [*liefde*] and sensitive desire for God [...] And for this reason man must at times pass through this bodily feeling to a spiritual feeling which is rational, and through the spiritual feeling pass to a divine feeling which is above reason, and through this divine feeling sink away from himself into a feeling of motionless beatitude." "Alsoe langhe alsoe de mensche in deser oefeninghen blivet, soe es hi hebbelec te scouwene ende eninghe te ghevoelne sonder middel. Ende hi ghevoelt dat gherinen gods in hem, dat ene vernuwinge es sijnre gratien ende alle sijnre doghede. Want ghi selt weten dat die gratie gods dorvloeit tote in die nederste crachte ende gherijnt des menschen herte. Ende daer af comt heteleke liefde ende ghevoellec lost te gode [...] Ende hier omme moet de mensche overmids dit lijfleke ghevoelen biwilen doreliden in een geestelec ghevoelen, dat redelec es; ende overmids dat geesteleke gevoelen doreliden in een godlec ghevoelen, dat boven redene es; ende overmids dat godleke ghevoelen hem selven ontsinken in een onbewechlec salech gevoelen."

<sup>38</sup> Pierre Rousselot, *The Eyes of Faith*, trans. Joseph Donceel, introduction John M. McDermott, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990) 16.

<sup>39</sup> See generally, Pierre Rousselot, "Appendix 2. The Formal Identification of Love and Understanding in William of St. Thierry", in *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution*, trans. Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 223-234.

of Being."<sup>40</sup> He then later on adds "Thus the rectitude of our intelligence, when it knows with certainty, comes entirely from the fact that God has inspired it with a natural inclination to the First Truth, that is, to Himself insofar as He is the End of all spiritual beings. Because of the inclination intellection is natural to us, and when truth dawns on us, we experience pleasure."<sup>41</sup>

For the Brabantine contemplative's views of minne as a "loving knowledge", as well as the enjoyment [*ghebruken*] of knowing that stems from its fundamental naturalness, such views are clearly and repeatedly seen in Ruusbroec. Noteworthy in this regard, in *De vera contemplatione*, Ruusbroec ends his treatment upon contemplation [*scouwen*] with a long presentation of minne as "perfect[ing] a genuinely contemplative life"<sup>42</sup> whereby "all the faculties of the soul answer and say to one another: 'Let us love the fathomless love [*grondelose minne*] which has loved us eternally."<sup>43</sup> In a similar vein, Ruusbroec in *Vanden seven sloten* further explains this dynamic orientation and persistent endurance between knowing and loving as equally and ontologically indicative of the inherent dissimilarity and relationality between Creator and creature in the following:

Should knowledge and love [*minnen*] perish in God, so also would perish the eternal birth of the Son and the gushing forth of the Holy Spirit, as well as Trinity of Persons; and so there would be neither God nor any creature, and that is altogether impossible and an insane stupidity (even) to think (of it). For the loveliest and noblest thing that God made in heaven and on earth is the ordering and distinction [*onderscheet*] of all creatures [...] according to his hunger, thirst, and craving after God. It is according to this same that he may feel [*gevoelen*], savor, and enjoy [...] Just as the stars of heaven differ from one another in brightness, in loftiness of their positions, greatness of their size, and in their powerful workings on all creatures here below, so also there exists a distinction in all who love God: in clarity of understanding, in loftiness of life, in greatness of love, and in the power of the works flowing out (from them).

Want verginge kinnen ende minnen in gode, soe verginghe oec die ewege geboert des soens ende uut vloete des heileghen geest; ende alsoe verginge driheit der persoene; ende alsoe en ware noch god noch creature: dat altemale onmogeleec es ende ene verwoedde sotheit te peinsene. Want dat scoenste ende dat edelste dat god gemaect heeft in hemel ende in erde, dat es ordenen ende ondersceet in allen creaturen [...] na dat hem hongert ende dorst <ende> gods gelust, daer na mach hi gevoelen, smaken ende gebruiken [...] Ende geliker wijs dat die sterren des hemels ondersceet hebben in clærheiden, in hoecheiden van state, ende in groetheiden van mate, ende in vermogenden werken in allen creaturen die hier beneden sijn, ende alsoe es oec een ondersceet in allen den ghenen die gode minnen: in clærheiden van verstane, in hoecheiden van levene, in groetheiden van minnen ende in crachte van uut vloeyenden werken.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the advances seen in various theological scholarship in thinking this dynamic relationship between love and knowledge, in a far more nuanced manner, the continuing, modern legacy of 'mystical experience' remains prevalent. Such views are evidenced in the otherwise superb historical theological scholarship of Rob Faesen. In his article, "What is a Mystical Experience?"

<sup>40</sup> Rousselot, *The Eyes of Faith*, 52.

<sup>41</sup> Rousselot, *The Eyes of Faith*, 54.

<sup>42</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, 1, ll. 542-543: "[...] een ghewarich scouwende leven volmaect [...]"

<sup>43</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, 1, ll. 560-562: "Ende alle die cracht<e> der zielen, si antwoorden ende spreken onderlinge: 'Minnen wij die grondelose minne die ons eewelijcke ghemint hevert.'"

<sup>44</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vanden seven sloten*, ll. 700-720.

History and Interpretation"<sup>45</sup>, Faesen generally presents his views upon the unique, extraordinary nature of mystical experience, in the tradition of the *Ruusbroecgenootschap*, as both "passive" and "immediate". Herein, the primary difficulty that I have with this argument is two-fold. (1) The implicit argument presented is that by recognizing, and thereby valuing the 'experiential' dimension amounts to legitimizing them as "mystical" texts. Such an approach primarily renders these texts as "mystical literature" moreso than "mystical theological" treatises.<sup>46</sup> Herein Faesen argues that:

First, as I have already emphasized, we are talking here about an *experience*, which is, obviously, different from, for example, a thought, a reasoning, a memory, a fantasy, an observation [...] On this point, the texts describing a mystical experience are very different from other texts which, for example, present the exposition of a religious doctrine. Explaining a doctrine is something other than describing an experience.<sup>47</sup>

As a generous reader (who is by no means neutral, nor impartial), such a description of course does not exclude doctrinal, theological reflection. Nevertheless, the point emphasized is that while texts such as Ruusbroec's are by no means lacking in theological content, they are in fact largely absent of speculative and doctrinal reflection that was unquestionably more pronounced at the various Cathedral schools at this time. In this perspective, I would argue that the synthesis of love and knowledge in a figure such as Ruusbroec remains unheeded, preferring instead to appeal to the experiential dimensions of such mystical texts that can account for its distinct character.

Consequent to this approach to mystical theological texts seen more along the lines of 'mystical literature' (2) is the view that as 'immediate' and 'passive', "mystical experience can be specified by *the 'object' of the experience*".<sup>48</sup> For Faesen and his primary scholarship upon late-medieval mystical texts in the Low Countries, this 'object' is of course the Trinitarian God, as reflected upon in the Christian mystical tradition. However, the (unintentional) removal of mystical theological texts from their broader theological moorings excludes more speculative and internal constructive/critical theological input. Which, in view of the *unity* of theology—as derived from the person of Christ and the hypostatic union, fully divine, fully human—would rightly call into question any and all appeals of *passive, immediate experience* without first necessarily welcoming a variety of philosophical and theological perspectives (dogmatic, fundamental, historical, ethical, pastoral, ecclesiological, liturgio-sacramental, etc.) in better accessing the total repercussions of such a claim. Undoubtedly, the longstanding historical "divorce"—intensified by nominalism, and sealed by 17<sup>th</sup> Century Quietism—between theology and spirituality cannot be underestimated, as Faesen's esteemed mentor, the late Belgian Jesuit Albert Deblaere declared.<sup>49</sup> By heeding the irrefutable historicity of such a divorce, I would once again argue that it is precisely in the *theological retrieval* of figures such as Ruusbroec, which not only assists contemporary theology reconstruct such modern divides. Yet furthermore, such a reconstruction must come from within a renewed appreciation and recognition of mystical theology, *as properly theological*. In which case, I would suggest, amongst

---

<sup>45</sup> See Rob Faesen, S.J. "What is a Mystical Experience? History and Interpretation", *Louvain Studies* 23 (1998) 221-245, esp. 225.

<sup>46</sup> See "Introduction" for my appeal in treating mystical texts precisely in terms of "mystical theology".

<sup>47</sup> Faesen, "What is a Mystical Experience", 225.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> See Rob Faesen, S.J. "Albert Deblaere on the Divorce of Theology and Spirituality", Faesen R. (ed.), *Albert Deblaere, S.J. (1916-1994) . Essays on Mystical Literature, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*, 177, (Leuven: Peeters, 2004) 407-425.

other things, entails a more sustained reflection upon the synthesis of love and knowledge in Ruusbroec's mystical theology and its broader implications. As David Tracy notes, heeding such a synthesis can indeed assist our contemporary "direction for understanding the Christian God in terms of both *spirituality and theology*."<sup>50</sup>

Turning once again to Marion and his views upon the [im]possibility of God and His phenomenalization, it is not so much the particularity of religious identity that is called into question, yet the necessary delimitation of the knowable 'object' as stemming from none other than the *a priori* conditions of experience itself that are rigorously challenged.

### §3. MARION AND THE [IM]POSSIBLE

#### A. THE [IM]POSSIBLE QUESTION OF GOD

Jean-Luc Marion's essay, "The Impossible for Man—God" can well be seen as a mature work by the French radical phenomenologist, revisiting themes in his earlier works (such as *God Without Being* as well as *Being Given*), while 'impossibly' crossing the Rubicon once more (*pace* Falque), by returning to a more explicit, theologically informed reflections. Most notable in this regard are publications such as his *Erotic Phenomenon* (2003/ ET 2008) and *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine* (2008/ ET 2012).<sup>51</sup> No longer is Marion insisting upon the *neutral* status of his phenomenological reflections in relation to the purely philosophical *possibility* of Revelation. Rather, after years of continued defensiveness, Marion's rhetorical position has evolved alongside his philosophical position, with a more forceful response towards transcendence in terms of the *impossibility of God*. To avoid any unnecessary confusion, Marion asserts that "[B]y recognizing God's privilege—*God, and God alone, lets himself be defined by impossibility as such*."<sup>52</sup> Herein, Marion claims that in spite of such "impossibility", we cannot deny the paradox that both culturally, as well as in the history of philosophy, "The question of God has the characteristic feature of always making a comeback, of being incessantly reborn from all attempts to put it to death, in theory as well as in fact."<sup>53</sup>

Rather, Marion argues that taking seriously the "impossibility of God has meaning only for us".<sup>54</sup> Here, Marion takes the position that the "impossible" is a concept that is (in this case, unlike the univocity of love) *not univocal*. Rather, the *impossible is only possible for us* within an immanent

---

<sup>50</sup> See *supra* note 27.

<sup>51</sup> During a Q&A session at his Soesterberg lecture at Radboud University Nijmegen, 10-10-2010, a question was addressed to Prof. Marion, asking to help clarify his perceived relationship between metaphysics and revelation, between philosophy and theology. Marion thereby publicly acknowledged that while there was indeed a clear distinction for him 20yrs ago, things however have become increasingly unclear since within his phenomenological works. For Marion, the "opposition" had become dropped, via the saturated phenomenon, and yet, he then rejoined in claiming that we should nevertheless endeavor to "re-open" the distinction. As the *a priori* itself has been abandoned, philosophy itself can no longer decide 'what is rational'. Therefore, it is no longer clear to Marion whether or not he is doing phenomenology, theology, or both.

<sup>52</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 25.

<sup>53</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 24.

<sup>54</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 28.

horizon, whereby we experience the radical possibility of the "impossible". As an example, Marion cites this possibility of the impossible in the natural events of our birth and death in its concrete facticity. "Birth, or rather *my birth*" Marion will argue, "precedes any thought of my own [...] [as well as] all possibility as defined by concept and representation."<sup>55</sup> That is to say, the event of one's birth—the radical possibility of the impossible—is fundamentally prior to any and all interpretation or conceptualization that we may provide. Rather, it is a *factual, ordinary phenomenon* that is thoroughly "saturated". Relating this experience of the impossible back then to the question of God, Marion's position mitigates against any and all psychological and/or sociological reductionist views of our "need" for God. Such reductionistic views, Marion persuasively argues, can not explain how the "question of God survives the impossibility of God"<sup>56</sup>. Rather, such impossibility gives a positive determination to God re the question of God itself. A question, that in part asks, "how the thought of the impossible remains, in the end, possible."<sup>57</sup>

Critically, while Marion's thinking on [im]possibility counters more reductionistic views, it similarly initiates (unforeseen?) problems that were earlier discussed in terms of his strongly asymmetrical approach to creation and Incarnation. More specifically, as evidenced by the event of my birth as the experience of the radical possibility of the impossible, Marion will likewise apply this position of radical possibility to creation itself. For creation itself, starting from the factual and the concrete, "always and only with my birth", is understood as arising out of the [im]possible event wherein "we receive ourselves".<sup>58</sup> Such a factual, common experience thus gives "access" to constructively and conceptually reflect upon the question of God and its intimate relation to us, as created. And yet, precisely due to this access, as emerging from a view of radical [im]possibility, such a heteronymous account of the creature in no way shows any form of *intrinsic*, "native attunement" towards, nor any sense of *desiderium naturale* for God Himself. For such a latter view would recast the creaturely within a certain intrinsic, dynamic tension of heteronomy and autonomy. A *counterweight*,<sup>59</sup> for which Marion's project—in securing the radical possibility of *pure* transcendence—simply cannot balance by way of creaturely response. Instead, the elevation of unlimited radical possibility, as over against actuality, in theological terms prohibits a view of created nature as prefigured by grace, as well as its graceful reception of the Incarnation. Rather, by way of the [im]possibility of my birth, Marion is here (unintentionally?) radically discarding a view of creation's *potentia obedientialis*—an integral historical, philosophical/theological thesis that was hard won by Roussetot, Blondel, as well as De Lubac and others in the following generation of *ressourcement* theology—and instead, by way of seeking a radically *pure* transcendence, is equally

---

<sup>55</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 32.

<sup>56</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 24.

<sup>57</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 24-25.

<sup>58</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 33.

<sup>59</sup> See supra "Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part IV—Common Love and the Univocal" wherein I treat specifically this radical "disequilibrium". A reading that in fact Marion himself puts forth in *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012) 269, as he describes divine grace such that: "Filled with God, I undergo the impact of a weight oriented upward, while filled (in fact, stuffed) by myself alone, I undergo a weight oriented downward. Grace, in other words, the love come from God with the aim of returning me to him, exerts a *counterweight*, a weight that ascends, an uplift and an upbraiding."



initiating a philosophical return of a radical *extrincism*<sup>60</sup> operative under terms such as the "event of creation" and its "impossibility".

Constructively, however, Marion's thinking upon the [im]possible does indeed evidence a development of his overall thinking of givenness and the "saturated phenomenon". In an introduction to the 2003 collection of essays, *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*<sup>61</sup> Marion deliberately and fittingly signals (given the nature of the publication upon "mystics") this forthcoming development by first pleading that "we must never despair of reason".<sup>62</sup> Rather, "we must have faith in reason to make thinkable what, without the patient labor of the concept, would have remained unthinkable."<sup>63</sup> Marion's confidence in the possibility of reason should always be viewed in tandem with his well-known "saturated phenomena". That is, the very possibility of reason largely attests to the belief that various phenomena, precisely due to their excess of given intuition—rendering asunder the *adequacy* of our available concepts—are not themselves "irrational". Yet any form of philosophical realist optimism is undercut with a *mea culpa* uttered in view of Port Royal, such that "we are unable to be rational enough to produce concepts matching the intuition that is nevertheless given."<sup>64</sup> Our persistent failure to be reasonable enough, Marion later on clarifies in "The Impossible for Man—God", is largely due to our turning away from the *question* of the [im]possibility of God by way of an anthropological reduction, "seek[ing] an answer outside of the question itself."<sup>65</sup> That is, we idolatrously and reductively seek an answer in ourselves, and not in God and His primacy. Which paradoxically (as we shall soon see), it is precisely by not turning towards God and His primacy—by way of a radical phenomenology in its privileging of the donative and the [im]possible, over against the certain and the actual—that Marion will argue results in creating "idols of myself".

Such a paradox generally shows the contours of a natural, created relationality between Creator and creature, albeit more so in terms of an *a posteriori* than the creature's *intrinsic* orientation, or "natural desire" as earlier discussed. However the extent of the saturated phenomenon (in explicit theological terms) shows, in the adventitious event, an overwhelming absorption of nature by the donative givenness of grace, leaving only a "negative certitude" more so than a presupposition and perfecting of nature [*gratia non destruit, sed supponit et perficit naturam*]. This in turn characterizes Marion's thinking of [im]possibility and its lack of univocity, entailing that the "impossible delineates only a region of finitude—namely ours—and indicates this region alone."<sup>66</sup> While for God and amid the unbridgeable distance of His radical dissimilarity, not only does the impossible hold no "sway over God"<sup>67</sup>. However, shorn of a sacramental worldview naturally oriented towards facilitating the asymmetry of grace alongside the redemptive economy between God and creation, for Marion, "God begins where the possible *for us* ends, where what human reason

---

<sup>60</sup> For a concise exposition of "extrincism" and its coinage by Blondel, See Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics & History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Illtyd Trethowan (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 226-231.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Kessler, Christian Sheppard (eds), *Mystics: Presence and Aporia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>62</sup> Jean Luc Marion, "Introduction: What Do We Mean By 'Mystic'?", in Michael Kessler, Christian Sheppard (eds), *Mystics: Presence and Aporia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 1-7, 6.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Marion, "What Do We Mean by 'Mystic'", 5.

<sup>65</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 25.

<sup>66</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 27.

<sup>67</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 28.

comprehends as *possible for it* comes to a halt".<sup>68</sup> And yet, given his earlier admonition that saturated phenomena are themselves not 'irrational' entails that the [im]possibility of God does not annul the very possibility of the *question of God*. Rather, the [im]possible functions as the very "threshold, beyond which the question posed *can actually be about God*—transcending, by the same token, what does not concern him in the least."<sup>69</sup> That is, Marion argues that the radical [im]possibility of God correspondingly entails a blithe indifference to "impossibility" itself. However, such indifference is not translated into a nominalist form of Enlightenment Deism, as it is *in the question of God itself* and its erotic, unyielding resolve—"always making a comeback"—wherein genuine contact between transcendent and immanent orders converge, "in theory as well as in fact".

## B. THE [IM]POSSIBLE PHENOMENON OF GOD

As earlier argued, for Marion the "impossible" is by no means a univocal concept. That is why, by way of shorthand, I refer to this concept as bracketed—the [im]possible—as succinctly denoting the heteronymous dissimilarity of God; the [im]possibility of God for us. Which in turn, as a form of radical negative certitude that announces the complete caesura between God and creature, the [im]possible possesses an equally radical denomination for God: the 'impossibility of impossibility'. This is another way of affirming the *radical possibility* of God, entailing that the possibility of God remains radically indifferent to impossibility as such. Albeit radically apophatic, the two orders of transcendence and immanence nonetheless do converge—"in theory as well as in fact". In "theory", such a convergence is precisely evidenced in the irrepressibly recurring *question* of God and the aporia of the impossible refusing to collapse in upon itself.

While in terms of "fact", similar to his thinking upon the concrete event of one's birth, Marion insists upon the primacy of phenomenological donation as none other than according the historical facticity of Revelation and the Incarnation as a concrete, historical reality. This position thereby grounds and sets in motion an 'infinite' hermeneutics as a necessary, though secondary discourse. Recognition of this view builds upon, while repositioning certain theological critiques of postmodernism's turn to religion as a reinstatement of Enlightenment natural theology, of a "religion without a religion". Which is to say, a religion of utter indeterminacy that is absent of *particularity* and historically-concrete truth claims. Rather, specifically in the case of Marion, recognition of the role of the primacy of the *factual givenness* of Revelation, to which his radical phenomenology seeks to open itself towards, is positioned to offer a more balanced theological assessment of *particularity*, rather than attributing such an assessment solely upon a reading of his radically apophatic thought. This is to say that for Marion, particularity is indeed concretely ensured, first and foremost, as something *given*, rather than something *seen*, produced or interpreted as such.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 25.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid*, (my emphasis).

<sup>70</sup> See Lieven Boeve, "Negative Theology and Theological Hermeneutics: The Particularity of Naming God." *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture*, 3 (2)6.6 (2006), 1-13 and his excellent critique of the "pure transcendence" and Postmodernity's "religion without a religion" precisely in terms of a refusal of incarnational particularity and its view of kataphatic religious language as "contamination". See also his critical response to Richard Kearney in very similar lines in "The Particularity of the Hermeneutics of God. A Response to Richard

Returning to the initial starting point, how then can such a radically apophatic approach to God's pure transcendence as [im]possible nevertheless explain the question of God as continuously reemerging? Herein, we can see that an equally important innovation that Marion's saturated phenomenon provides for (especially for mystical theology) is his stress upon the *historical facticity* of Revelation and the priority of its heteronomous givenness. In general, this position reinforces the view that such saturated phenomenon are neither private, nor are they necessarily rare, despite the dazzling brilliance of Revelation, which Marion himself has repeatedly argued is the ultimate case for the saturated phenomenon. Rather, Marion correctly maintains the view that such saturated phenomena "are not so rare", yet are indeed *common*.<sup>71</sup> And as I have repeatedly argued in other contexts, such a "common" orientation, distinctly for mystical theology, is indeed a much needed corrective in better securing its validity and integrity as a theological sub-discipline. In contrast, that is, to founding its legitimacy over and against the supposed *rarity* of "infused" or immediate and passive mystical experiences, which I have argued, has led to the privatization and marginalization of this distinct branch of theological reflection and praxis.

This "common designation" is implicit in Marion consistently taking aim at the very presuppositions that ground a more radical hermeneutics. Marion phenomenologically (as well as theologically) maintains that we do not linguistically "constitute" these saturated phenomena that escape our rational conceptualization. The task of the givenness of an *infinite* Eucharistic hermeneutics remains only insofar as to ensure an interpretative "plurality". In the interest of doctrinal orthodoxy, particularity and historicity, such a position maintains that we are given and receive ourselves by way of such saturated phenomena. As given, we do not in any way possess conceptual mastery over the saturated phenomena, as evidenced by the plurality of such an 'infinite hermeneutics'. And while Marion's phenomenological position contra a more radical hermeneutics is well known, it is often overlooked that Marion himself will join this position to an adamant adherence to the utter givenness of Revelation by way of its historical facticity. Hence, the interpretative plurality of hermeneutics no more than demonstrates the continual "luminous darkness" of our failing concepts, thereby signaling somewhat of a 'purified transcendence' and singularly apophatic, universalizing tendency. The utter *particularity* of Revelation and the concrete of Incarnation are nonetheless secured by this equal stress upon historical facticity, as well as the very *public* nature of the saturated phenomenon, secured in terms of its common designation.

In turn, as I have argued in the brief excursus on "loving knowledge", there is a need for mystical theology, as a *theological* sub-discipline, to indeed establish greater legitimacy amongst various related discourses so as to better substantiate its distinct theological claims (most notably, as it pertains to deification) and modes of reflection. As Marion attests, the saturated phenomena are not themselves 'irrational'; it is rather we ourselves and the status of current philosophical discourse as not 'rational enough' to patiently produce concepts that adequately reflect *what* has nonetheless been given by these saturated phenomena—namely ourselves. In this regard, Ruusbroec similarly will speak of that which is "above reason, yet not without reason" [*boven redene maer niet sonder*

---

Kearney's God-who-may-be." In: Boeve L., Schrijvers J., Stoker W., Vroom H. (Eds.), *Faith in the Enlightenment? The Critique of the Enlightenment Revisited*. (Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2006), 327-339.

<sup>71</sup> See supra, ' §2.Suspending the Economy'.

redene]<sup>72</sup>, which implicitly entails the necessity to engage in philosophical reflection in both upholding the enduring value of "mediation", as well as to properly substantiate what we mean when we discuss that which is given to understanding specifically in terms of "unknowing": that which "reason can neither comprehend nor understand".

Herein, we explicitly encounter Marion's critique of claims of mystical "experience", understood as the "immediate" and "passive" experience of God as objectivizing and idolizing what amounts to the radical alterity of God and His transcendence as [im]possible. Here, Marion clarifies that the terms themselves—"possibility" and "impossibility"—first and foremost "refer to experience", namely to the *a priori* conditions of experience itself, what it permits and excludes—"therefore, to what *may* or *may not* appear and let itself be seen, the phenomenon."<sup>73</sup> For Marion, he maintains that there is "no intuition at my disposal" of God and His phenomenalization that is "susceptible to be experienced within the parameters of space and time".<sup>74</sup> Hence, in terms of the immediate and passive experience of God is nothing other than an [im]possible phenomenon. Marion clarifies that such a condition does not rest upon "any doctrinal preference nor on any arbitrary negativity"; rather, it emerges from the "simple possibility" of God and His impossibility for us.<sup>75</sup> Here, the "most speculative theology agrees with the most unilateral atheism" Marion recalls, in that if the eternity and infinity of God is to be radically possible and not subject to finitude and its 'impossibility', "then there can never be any intuition of God".<sup>76</sup>

In this regard, as an aid to understanding the thrust of Marion's phenomenological argument, it is helpful to recall the ramifications of what "possibility" itself more generally signifies, so as to better assess its critical function. Earlier on in Marion's phenomenological turn, in an essay entitled, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A summary for Theologians"<sup>77</sup>, Marion provides a general, systematic account for his well known provocative thesis of *God without Being* as securing and more specifically orienting his later foray into phenomenology in particular. While I will not presently consider this essay at length, it is nonetheless quite instructive, especially in view of Marion's more recent, historical critique of the question of Being (*metaphysica specialis*) in positioning the *aporia* of St. Augustine as having come before such metaphysics. As Marion undoubtedly casts himself by assuming the mantel of continuing the historical lineage of the great Latin Father, this precisely entails somewhat of a blurring of lines between grace and nature, between theology, philosophy and

---

<sup>72</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht*, b, ll. 1481-1487: " In the unity of spirit, in which this vein wells, one is above activity and above reason, but not without reason; for the enlightened reason, and especially the faculty of loving, feels [*ghevoelt*] this touch [*gherinen*], and reason can neither comprehend nor understand the mode or manner, how or what this touch might be. For this is a divine activity, and the origin and irruption of all grace and of all gifts and the last intermediary between God and the creature." "In eenicheit des gheests, daer dese adere walt, es men boven werken ende boved redene, maer niet sonder redene; want die verlichte redenen, ende zonderlinghe de minnende cracht, ghevoelt dit gherinen, ende redene en can niet begripen noch verstaen wise noch maniere, hoe ochte wi dit ghrinen si. Want dit es een godlijc werc ende oerspronc ende inval alre gracien ende alre gaven, ende dat leste middel tuschen gode ende de creatuere."

<sup>73</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 20-21.

<sup>74</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 21.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> See Jean Luc Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A summary for Theologians", Angus McGeoch (trans), in Ward, G. (ed), *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 279-296.

history such that we can neither "approach" St. Augustine—and thus, in turn, Marion as well—in exclusive terms as either a philosopher or a theologian.<sup>78</sup> To do so would both result in a historically-contested, dubious caricature, Marion argues, as well as inscribes us specifically within a predetermined *metaphysica specialis* itself. That is, conditioning the [im]possible univocally, by way of the possible itself.

Marion's argument against metaphysics can be approached by way of his then nascent thinking of [im]possibility, as that "which renders 'metaphysics' intelligible also enables us to imagine that it might become impossible. The delimiting of the possible necessarily implies these two postulates [...] The overlapping grounding of onto-theology offers a working hypothesis for the historian of philosophy—and, in my view, the most powerful one. It also enables us to understand why we have been able to talk of the 'end of metaphysics'", as Marion recalls Nietzsche's critique of philosophy "as a Platonism to be overturned and subverted, [which] in fact fits in perfectly with the Heideggerian hypothesis."<sup>79</sup>

More concretely, this entails that for Marion, his positioning of a radical phenomenology and the impossibility of impossibility—hence its possibility as a "going beyond metaphysics"—is "no longer limit[ed] to sensible intuition, but admits all intuition that is primarily donative."<sup>80</sup> Two principal consequences of this unlimited, radical phenomenology and its approach to the [im]possible God—*contra* core concepts within metaphysics and ontology—are as follows: the (1) primacy of possibility over and against actuality; (2) the primacy of donation over and against "certainty as a privileged mode of the truth".<sup>81</sup> Marion will reiterate this first consequence in the "The Impossible for Man—God" in historical terms as none other than a contrast between Aquinas and the primacy of *actus essendi* with that of Nicholas van Cusa and his thinking of *possest*. Herein, Marion clearly sides with the German cardinal in drawing out the Creator-creature distinction as one centered "less by act (relative to essence) than by the privilege in God of possibility, of the possibility of actualizing infinite possibility [...] in short, by an uncreated possibility."<sup>82</sup> Hence, in view of God's pure transcendence by way of radical uncreated possibility, we are thus reminded of how such a strong asymmetrical view is then related to the creaturely as an adventitious event, as seen in our opening discussion of the Annunciation.

In terms of the second consequence, Marion familiarly argues against idolatry in the form of conceptual objectivation—"that which the *ego* defines according to the limits of what it sees"<sup>83</sup>—which he considers as neglecting the [im]possibility of God and His "privilege" in "*lett[ing] Himself be defined by impossibility as such*".<sup>84</sup> First of all, Marion recalls a central thesis of *God without Being*, that is the idol and the icon, such that "the concepts that I assign to God, like so many invisible mirrors, send me back the image that I make up for myself of divine perfection".<sup>85</sup> Not only is this

---

<sup>78</sup> The extent to which the *aporia* of St. Augustine and its continued lineage as countering the charge of a philosophical return of a certain extrincism remains to be explored.

<sup>79</sup> Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology", 282.

<sup>80</sup> Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology", 286.

<sup>81</sup> Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology", 287.

<sup>82</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 29.

<sup>83</sup> Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology", 287.

<sup>84</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 25.

<sup>85</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 22.

idolatrous to God and His [im]possibility, but furthermore, they are equally "idols of myself". This horizontal critique of idolatry is then extended more broadly to the a priori conditions of modern science and rationality. By marking the "primacy of the knowing mind over what it knows", Marion recalls that according to contemporary scientific rationality, "no phenomenon can be given to knowing, or be admitted into the limited field of knowledge, if it does not accept being made into an object".<sup>86</sup> And not just any type of object, yet a distinctly *possible* object, which indeed underscores Marion's *univocal ontology* that situates such a clear and distinct 'object' as one amongst the many. Yet wherein are we to situate the "possibility" of such an object, especially in view of the claims of *passivity* of immediate, mystical experience?

Recalling both Kant and Husserl, Marion will precisely define a phenomenon according to the "adequacy of an intuition (which gives and fulfills) to a concept or meaning (which is empty and to be filled and validated)."<sup>87</sup> "It matters little", Marion will then elaborate, whether this adequacy is achieved inductively or deductively, since the crucial stress of his phenomenology of givenness argues that either way, this adequacy is "internally conjugat[ed]" within the givenness of the phenomenon itself, without resting upon an extrinsic hermeneutical horizon as *limiting* its phenomenological constitution as such.<sup>88</sup> To support his radically apophatic stance, Marion in turn notes the congruence between the epistemological a priori with that of the general conditions for experience itself. "Stated succinctly, we only know objects; our experience applies only to objects because it fixes the a priori conditions of their possibility as its own."<sup>89</sup> Thus, from a rigorous phenomenological perspective, claims to 'experience' inherently and inescapably objectivize the given intuition, matched with the adequacy of its concept.

Avoiding reductionism, and in the interests of positively affirming the radical possibility of saturated phenomena itself as "incomprehensible" (rather than the immanetization of such incomprehensibility, or 'mystery', as contingent upon our lack of comprehension), Marion also rightly notes that the "history of spirituality" both affirms this incomprehensibility, as well as tells a different story. That is, it attests to "encounter[ing] phenomena that cannot appear according to the a priori conditions that a finite mind imposes on experience—and yet, undeniably, do appear."<sup>90</sup> Amid this incongruity, there is no phenomenological *adequacy* between the given intuition and the available concept so as to render intelligibility. For example, in recalling the "dazzling", blinding white light on Mt. Tabor, as celebrated in the Feast of the Transfiguration, Marion approaches these instances of Revelation's historical facticity as evidentiary of the saturation of intuition to the point of unintelligibility. Which in turn, preserves an uncrossable distance as intrinsic to the saturated phenomenon. Marion sees this instance of the Revelation of Christ's divine glory as instituting an impossible caesura, such that in feebly attempting to apply a concept to the given intuition, "Peter could only chatter about three booths, because 'he did not know what to say'." (Mk 9, 7)<sup>91</sup> In view of this von Balthasarian approach to glory, Marion's major innovation in thinking the saturated phenomenon is the manner in which it acts as a corrective to the objectivizing and delimiting views

---

<sup>86</sup> Marion, "What Do We Mean by 'Mystic'", 2.

<sup>87</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 21.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Marion, "What Do We Mean by 'Mystic'", 3.

<sup>91</sup> See Jean Luc Marion, "They recognized Him; and He Became Invisible to Them", trans. Stephen E. Lewis, in *Modern Theology* 18:2, April 2002, 145-152, 147.

inherent in Modernity's turn to the subject. Herein, Modernity's view of "mystical experience" is sufficiently problematized by the saturated phenomenon in the latter's privileging the primacy and excess of God's asymmetrical revelatory givenness. A givenness, which for Marion, is such that it leaves its "gifted" [*l'adonné*] "overwhelmed, dazzled, and submerged by his glory," such that "we no longer see anything. The light plunges us into blackness—with a luminous darkness."<sup>92</sup>

Rather, in order to safeguard the primacy, alterity and the excess of such intuition, Marion argues that such intuition none other than *saturates* the otherwise limiting concept itself, thereby resisting the adequacy of both the constitution and synthesis of given intuition and concept itself. That is, it refuses phenomenalization itself. There is always *semper maior*, which in turn, "defies the possibility (and all impossibility)"<sup>93</sup> of its *existence* as such. Herein, recalling Marion's initial argument against transcendence as never apart from immanence, a view which "will not take us very far, nor truly 'beyond'"; being as a horizon or transcendental, Marion argues, and in turn, the questioned "existence" of such saturated phenomena similarly does not offer a privileged access to the question of the [im]possibility of such a phenomena itself. For existence, Marion argues, imposes upon the saturated intuition to such a degree as to delimit its saturation itself. Or conversely, the question of existence as assigning an *adequate meaning* to the saturated phenomenon itself is seen by Marion as domesticating and hence, robbing it of its alterity itself.

### C. THE IM[POSSIBILITY] OF A DYNAMIC METAPHYSICS?

Similarly, the [im]possibility of such saturated phenomena engenders an *infinite Eucharistic hermeneutics* precisely given its excess and incomprehensibility. Nonetheless, the [im]possibility of such phenomena should also be regarded "seriously as a positive concept".<sup>94</sup> And by 'positive', Marion means phenomenologically adequate, as well as theologically kataphatic. Likewise, by way of Marion's appeal to the end of metaphysics, the radical *purity* of God's incomprehensibility is seen not only as adequate and legitimately kataphatic. But furthermore, the saturation of our concepts, by way of God's incomprehensibility is likewise contextually suitable or appropriate. For the grand hermeneutic of the 'death of metaphysics' largely entails, as a result of radical cultural pluralization, "that we can no longer take for granted that our metaphysical concepts may outline the possible pattern of the intellectual and real world."<sup>95</sup>

While Marion's rigorous defense of a radically pure transcendence indeed problematizes, amongst other things, claims to 'mystical experience', nevertheless such a position, in a (mystical) theological angle, remains insufficient. Briefly, by following David Bentley Hart's theological aesthetics<sup>96</sup> and his plea for a dynamic retrieval of *analogia entis* (Przywara)<sup>97</sup>, Hart announces a fundamental distinction, "nothing less than the difference between two ontologies", between the

---

<sup>92</sup> Marion, "They recognized Him; and He Became Invisible to Them", 148.

<sup>93</sup> Marion, "What Do We Mean by 'Mystic'", 3.

<sup>94</sup> Marion, "What Do We Mean by 'Mystic'", 4.

<sup>95</sup> Marion, "What Do We Mean by 'Mystic'", 4.

<sup>96</sup> See generally, David Bentley Hart, *The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>97</sup> Herein, I am undoubtedly indebted to my dear friend, Philip Gonzales and his ongoing retrieval of Przywara's *analogia*.

philosophical *predication* of divine attributes (*metaphysica specialis*) and the theological *praise* of the divine names.<sup>98</sup> By this, Hart generally understands the modern metaphysical aspiration of predication—to which Marion repeatedly takes aim at—as nothing other than a "univocal" ontology, which understands being as nothing but the bare category of existence, under which all substances (God no less than creatures) are severally placed".<sup>99</sup> Such an undifferentiated, univocal ontology is thus set in contrast to what Hart generally pleads for in the retrieval of analogy and a "metaphysics of participation, according to which all things are embraced in being as in the supereminent source of all their transcendental perfections".<sup>100</sup> Herein, such a participative, theological naming is viewed as intrinsically analogical. That is, analogy's intrinsic acknowledgment that the transcendentals instantiate an "abyss between God and creatures" that both praises and names, yet in no way conceptually confines God's greater alterity, nor ensures God's infinite transcendence intrinsically upon the transcendentals themselves.

In part, what Hart's critique largely raises once again is the question of how to approach to this "abyss" between God and creature. While for someone like Ruusbroec, out of theological orthodoxy, the abiding otherness and greater dissimilarity between Creator and creature is consistent and clear. And yet, the uniqueness of his radically mutual participative thought likewise maintains that "[t]he one may not drive away the other". While for Marion and the Cartesian basis for his default view of metaphysics, the seeming benefit of such univocity is that it allows a "direct proportionate similitude...with far greater certainty"—albeit, a *negative certitude*—as well as far less "ambiguity".<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, so as to preserve God's greater alterity—and not lapse into idolatry—Marion is *compelled* to phenomenologically and theologically depict (as earlier discussed in The Annunciation narrative) God's adventitious otherness as "over against" creation in a "dialectical opposition".<sup>102</sup> Such an observation well accords with what was earlier termed as the radically *pure transcendence* of the gift and its "suspended economy" that permits approaching "otherness" solely in terms of gratuitousness that is purely asymmetrical, while entirely absent of either mutuality nor economic return. While as a strong alternative, Hart's retrieval of analogy maintains that the transcendentals, *contra* Marion, do not limit God's radical alterity precisely because of the analogical structure of being itself. Of course, Marion is fully aware of Hart's general critique, as seen in the former's admission that the "Transcendentals, of course (as opposed to predication by categories) do not speak of God as belonging to genus", though such a difference, Marion will insist "does not suffice to set it free, since it remains coiled within the chasm of essence and *esse* and therefore definitively within the horizon of being."<sup>103</sup> While for Hart, his dynamized view of analogy puts forth the more distinctly theological participative view that "*In him* we live and move and have our being. Every creature exists in a state of tension (as Przywara likes to put it) between essence and existence, in a condition of absolute becoming, oscillating between what it is and that it is."<sup>104</sup> Herein, taking serious such oscillation refuses the analogical "abyss" between Creator and creature to resolve itself in terms of a two-tiered, "naïve 'natural theology'". Rather, one could say that such theological

---

<sup>98</sup> See David Bentley Hart, "The Offering of Names: Metaphysics, Nihilism, and Analogy", in P.J. Griffiths, R. Hütter (eds.), *Reason and the Reasons of Faith* (New York—London, T&T Clark, 2005) 255-291, 255-256.

<sup>99</sup> Hart, "The Offering of Names", 256.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Hart, "The Offering of Names", 256.

<sup>102</sup> See Hart, "The Offering of Names", 285-286.

<sup>103</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 18-19.

<sup>104</sup> Hart, "The Offering of Names", 285.



naming attempts to safeguard such oscillation, or *desire*, precisely as stemming not from a lack, yet as continuously inclined and oriented towards the creature's relationality with God as *semper maior*. That is, a participation, or "being wrought" and "undergoing" the loving otherness of God—perspectives, with which we shall once again turn to Ruusbroec.

#### § 4. MINNE—MODES AND MODELESSNESS

Primary argument has been sustained in previous essays by exploring the strengths of Ruusbroec's theological account of minne—its asymmetrical gratuitousness, mutual reciprocity and the voracity of its unquenchable demands—as a theologically relevant, textually accountable, as well as a contemporaneously plausible rendering of love. I have done so, in contrast with a more radically pure, transcendent and singularly asymmetrical account in Jean-Luc Marion's thought. Secondly, I have argued that a hermeneutical theological engagement with Ruusbroec's minne is best encountered with recourse to his mystical anthropology of mutual indwelling, wherein as creatures created *in* the Image of God and *unto* His Likeness, such an exemplarist and historical dynamic (or maintaining the economy between the doxological and soteriological) underpins and informs Ruusbroec's mystical theological reflections upon minne itself. Time and again, the revelatory communication of God's minne—within the Trinity of Persons, gushing out, or "overflowing" [*uutvloeyen*]<sup>105</sup>—within creation is depicted as a gratuitous gift of God's self, which for Ruusbroec is met by a fundamental openness—or to use Ruusbroec's terminology, nature's 'inclining' [*neygen*]<sup>105</sup>—towards God. Creation itself, which includes a view of humanity as a fundamental unity, as well as our human nature bear out, in exemplarist terms, this natural union with God :

We are all one life in God in our eternal image above our createdness. We are also one humanity, which God has created, and we are one human nature, on which God has impressed His image of threeness and which He has taken on out of love, so that with us He is God and man. This is something that all human alike receive, both the bad and the good; for this is the nobility and greatness of our nature.

Wij zijn alle een leven in gode, in onse eewighe beelde boven onze ghescapenheit. Wi sijn oec een menscheit, die god ghescapen heeft, ende wi sijn eene menschelijcke natuere, daer god zijn beelde der drieheit inne ghedrucht hevet ende die van minnen ane ghenomen hevet, alsoe datti met ons es god ende mensche. Ende dit hebben alle menschen ghelijc ontfaen, quaede ende goede, want dit es edelheit ende hoocheit onser natueren.<sup>105</sup>

Joined to the nobility of our common nature, as human *persons*, we are equally created *unto* His likeness. Within history and our diverse cultural contexts, for Ruusbroec, we are uniquely and individually created in terms of *receiving* such an Image, as well as responding (or not responding) virtuously, ethically, with charity, faith and hope—actions with which we uniquely "cleave" [*aenleven*] to such an Image. And this cleaving is nothing other than a question of redemption and the economy of salvation. Hence, this dynamic unity of both the asymmetrical and mutuality of minne ultimately seeks to convey both the gratuitousness of God's love for creation, while depicting the openness to respond to such love is itself fundamentally natural, as supported by Ruusbroec's mystical anthropology of mutual indwelling. In this regard, the eternal dynamism of minne—as both

---

<sup>105</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll. 733-739.

gratuitous gift, yet nonetheless reciprocal, demanding and voracious [*ghierighen/oerwoet*—is so because it fundamentally mirrors ourselves, both *in* the Image and *unto* His likeness. The dynamism of minne accords with who we are and our fundamental, creaturely inclining towards both God and others. And since it is creaturely, we can speak of this dynamism of minne in terms of various modes [*wise*] of loving God and others: charity, or active love; affectionate love [*liefde*]; voracious yearning [*eros*]. As well, we can speak of such creaturely *minne* in terms of its various manners [*maniere*]: gratuitous gift, reciprocal and mutual demands. These diverse modes and manners of minne are themselves indispensable, since the praxis of minne is in part, creaturely. That is, by way of our fundamental union and relationality with God, humanity's equally fundamental otherness [*anderheit*] to God and personal distinction [*onderscheet*] emerge in accord with the manner in which we live and bear out the likeness of such an Image. Here, the critical importance of the unending praxis [*oefinghe*] of minne's distinct modes and manners reflects one of the fundamental convictions of Ruusbroec's mystical theology: that deepening in our union with God and others accords with who we fundamentally are as creatures. Or, as van Beeck argues in specific reference to Ruusbroec's thought that well accords with his own formulation of "native attunement", the Dutch Jesuit argues that human integrity "turns out to be union with God, and this union turns out to be reunion".<sup>106</sup> And thus, by way of a *creatio continua*, the praxis of such minne—according to diverse modes and manners—renders us more and more distinct and particular as human persons, as "[E]ach is dedicated to God and cleaves to Him to a greater or lesser degree according to his hunger, thirst and craving after God."<sup>107</sup>

However, there is another mode of minne, that which is "super-essential" [*overweselijc*] for us, while *weselijc* for God and is thus entirely the work of the Holy Spirit that is itself modeless—the contemplation [*scowen*] or enjoyment [*ghebruken*] of God. As it was briefly previewed in Ruusbroec's reflection upon the Annunciation and the "pleasure" [*bequam van minne gods*] that resulted from Mary's *fiat*, such modeless enjoyment is still marked by a sense of continuity and mutuality within an anthropological view.<sup>108</sup> And yet, it is an entirely gratuitous and uncrossable barrier, or in Ruusbroec's terminology—"modeless" [*wiseloes*] that is itself transcendent and radically other. It is *over-weselijc*, which given our fundamental union and created relationality with God, can in turn be said to be *weselijc*, in so far as it itself is *over-weselijc*.<sup>109</sup> In turn, with Ruusbroec's typical, proto-phenomenological acumen, we can more generally speak of the suddenness or event-like character of joy that no action on our part can anticipate or mechanically bring about. And it is with this in mind that Ruusbroec will write, in *De vera contemplatione*, that "mode cannot attain to modelessness".<sup>110</sup> Rather, they are "two things/That never shall be one/For they must remain distinct from each other".<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> See Frans Jozef van Beeck, *God Encountered II/I*, §90, 3, 251.

<sup>107</sup> See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Vanden Seven Sloten*, ll. 711-712: "Ende alsoe es oec ygewelc toegevoecht ende aneclevende ane gode min ende meer: na dat hem hongert ende dorst <ende>gods [...]"

<sup>108</sup> See my discussion on Ruusbroec and "natural contemplation" [*natuerlijc scouwen*] that guides this discussion of the "continuity" of such gratuitous contemplation—i.e., minne—as met by a fundamental openness, as evidenced within, what Ruusbroec argues are some of our natural inclination.

<sup>109</sup> For a further discussion on this reading, See generally Louis Dupré, *The Common Life: The Origins of Trinitarian Mysticism and its development by Jan Ruusbroec* (New York: CrossRoad 1984).

<sup>110</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll. 247: "[...] wise en mach onwise niet verhalen."

<sup>111</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll. 248-250: "Wise ende onwise dat sijn twee/ die nemmermeer en werden een/ want si moeten onderlinghe versceden bliven".

And so, the fundamental question, once again, is to consider how these two distinct understandings of love—Ruusbroec's minne and Marion's saturated, erotic phenomenon—respond to this impossible border. What, for Marion remains [im-]possible, for Ruusbroec remains equally "distinct from each other", though the Brabantine quickly adds that "the one may not drive away the other."<sup>112</sup> For Marion, given his read upon the history of modern metaphysics' "perfect hegemony"—treating God as *causa sui* and the transcendentals as "establish[ing] God's transcendence, but at the price of giving it a definition."<sup>113</sup> For Marion, this modern history narrates the height of conceptual idolatry, which ever since his early days he has steadfastly affirmed the necessity to move away from such totalizing thought requires a radical and *pure* differentiation between that which is impossible and possible. While for Ruusbroec, the threshold between modes and modeless minne is none other than abiding within the impossible demands of Christ's love—impetuous, at times voracious and ultimately, an *erotic impossibility* wherein "there remain for us hunger and thirst and eternal lust to follow the One, to reach the One who is without measure; this is impossible for us. This is why we must [...] strive and always remain hungry and thirsty in our work."<sup>114</sup> In short, we can only begin to appreciate Ruusbroec's reflections upon being "wrought" by the Holy Spirit and the modeless enjoyment of minne when we first recognize the utter impossibility from which such modelessness emerges. Not, as Marion would have it, as a pure differentiation and *conceptual* separation, yet that which Ruusbroec eloquently reflects upon as the "exhaustion of minne" [*utminnen*]:

And between unity with God and otherness that we ourselves are, there lives our eternal exhaustion in loving [*utminnen*], in which our blessedness consists. For the Spirit of God demands of our spirit that we exhaust ourselves in love of Him. And our spirit wants to give itself over, and be one love with God. But exhaustion in love and otherness between us and God are eternal works that we cannot control. This is why we have to eternally remain created creatures in ourselves. We are to exhaust ourselves in love in the Holy Spirit, who has eternally loved us; and we shall exhaust ourselves in giving to our heavenly Father, who has created us in our beginning; and we are to exhaust ourselves in living in the eternal Wisdom of God, in which, without beginning, we are eternally imaged. And by means of these three points, we have a flowing out of ourselves and a flowing inwards into God, and a flowing-back into ourselves. And these works are always renewed without cease.

Ende tusschen eenheit met gode ende anderheit die wij selve sijn, soe levet onse eewighe utminnen, daer onse zalicheit in gheleecht. Want die gheest gods eyschet onsen gheeste, dat wij ons utminnen in hem. Ende onse gheest wilt hem selven laten ende eene minne sijn met gode. Maer utminnen ende anderheit tusschen ons ende gode, dat sijn eewighe werken, die en connen wij niet verdriven. Ende hier om moeten wij eewelijc in ons selven ghescapen creatueren bliven. Wij selen ons uut minnen in den heiligen gheest, die ons eewelijc ghemint hevet; ende wij selen ons uut gheven in ons hemelschen vader, die ons in onsen beghinne ghescapen heeft; ende wi selen ons uut leven in die eewighe wijsheit gods, daer wi sonder beghin eewelijc inne ghebeelt sijn. Ende overmids desen drie poenten hebben wij een uutvlieten uut ons selven ende invloeyen in gode ende weder vloeyen, in ons selven. Ende dese werken vernuwen altoes sonder onderlaet.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll. 250-251.

<sup>113</sup> Marion, "The Impossible for Man—God", 18.

<sup>114</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll. 797-800: "Nochtan blivet ons hongher ende dorst ende ewwich lust den gheenem te hervolghene <ende> den ghenem te gherykene die sonder mate is, ende dit es ons onmoghelijc. Ende hier omme moeten wij crighen, ende altoes hongherich ende dorstich bliven eewelijc in onsen werken."

<sup>115</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 2a, ll. 517-530.

A. CONCLUSION—UNDERGOING MODELESS ENJOYMENT

As it has been argued, 'modelessness', for Ruusbroec, can be spoken of in similar terms of Marion. Namely, as an "impossible-possible", or [im-]possible. It is, like joy, inescapably tied to the gift of loving. No modes or practices can bring about such modelessness. For when the modelessness of contemplation loses its gift character and is definitely seen as something that is possible for us, then it turns into "deception", a false sense of modelessness—to which Ruusbroec will frequently counter against in citing the errors of the Free Spirits.<sup>116</sup> Here, amid this confusion and fusion of modes and modelessness, Ruusbroec will see the direct linkage with an autotheism and the loss of distinction between Creator and creature. So too joy is lost, amid such confusion. For Ruusbroec, this false sense of modelessness—deemed as distinctly possible for us—Ruusbroec will in turn speak of in terms of a radical sense of negation or nothingness. "[A]nd they say that God is nothing; and that they themselves also are nothing."<sup>117</sup> A pure nothingness wherein distinction, difference and otherness collapse. Here, amid this nothingness, it is conceived where "There is nothing saved nor damned, nothing active or inactive, nothing God nor creature, nothing good nor evil. See, here they have lost their created *wesen*, and they have become nothing [... ]that God is nothing; and in that nothingness, you find everything."<sup>118</sup> Again, Ruusbroec's fundamental critique here is not so much this radically apophatic language—a language, in which he himself will similarly employ.<sup>119</sup> Rather, it is the view of how difference, distinction and ultimately otherness itself between God and creature *both endure and emerge within the particularity of the image itself*—that which, in citing the Johannine Prologue: "All that is made, is living in God."<sup>120</sup> This is to say, the dynamism and the inseparability between the activity of modes and the gratuitousness of modelessness is continuously stressed by Ruusbroec and subsequently forms the critical test from which he assesses the (il)legitimacy of such modeless contemplation. Seen here in terms of whether or not it affirms our greater particularity, distinction and otherness as human *persons*, or if such modeless contemplation purports to collapse such difference. This relationship equally reflects minne's dynamism as asymmetrical, yet mutually inseparable.

Instead, Ruusbroec reflects upon the [im-]possible crossing of this border as *undergoing* a fundamental, modeless enjoyment, such that "This touching mediates between us and God; we cannot intervene. For we cannot know what this touch is in its ground, and what minne is in itself."<sup>121</sup> Rather, by *undergoing* God's minne—in the tradition of Gregory the Great, *amor ipse notitia est*—

---

<sup>116</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll. 262-264: "For many people are deceived/So that they can find neither contemplation nor modelessness. These people have all sorts of hinderances [...]." "Want vele menschen werden bedrogen/ dat si noch scouwen noch onwise vinden en mogen/ Die menschen hebben alle hinder [...]"

<sup>117</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 2a, ll. 296-297 (with slight modification): "Ende si spreken: God es niet ende si en sijn oec niet."

<sup>118</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 2a, ll. 297-299, 308: "Niet en is salich noch onsalich, noch werkende noch ledich, noch god noch creaturee, noch goet noch quaet. Siet, aldus hebben si huer ghescapen wesen verloren ende sijn worden niet [...] dat god es niet ende in dat niet vindi alle dinc."

<sup>119</sup> See Robertus Faesen, S.J. "Christian Faith, Apophatic Theology and Experience of Transcendence. Some Reflections by Three Medieval Mystical Authors from the Low Countries." In *Religious Experience and Contemporary Theological Epistemology* (eds.) Boeve L., De Maeseneer Y., Van den Bossche S., *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*, 188, (Leuven: Peeters, 2005) 227-242.

<sup>120</sup> See Jn 1, 3-4

<sup>121</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll. 790-793.

Ruusbroec is implicitly clarifying the meaning of such a claim. Not so much in terms of the immanent Trinity. Rather precisely in terms of its economic sense; its meaning *for us*, and reflective of minne's abiding, insatiable eros. Namely, to “comprehend God in an incomprehensible manner” [*gode begripen on begripelijckerwijs*]<sup>122</sup>, such that:

Next, there follows the fourth point: by the touch of the Holy Spirit, we are altogether moved from within, and we receive an insatiable desire and a voracious lust that neither reason nor any creature can restrain or pacify. For the Spirit of God demands of our spirit that we give ourselves totally out of ourselves into God and that we entirely embrace and hold God in ourselves. For we cannot come out of ourselves into God, and lose our createdness; and so we must eternally remain other than God and a created creature. For no creature can become God, nor God a creature. We also cannot comprehend God in us, for He is greatness without measure. We can also neither attain nor overtake, for He is length without end, depth without bottom, height above all that He has created. But what is impossible to us, is possible to Him, for where our spirit and all our faculties fail in their work the Spirit of our Lord works above our faculties and above our works. And there we are wrought by the Spirit of our Lord, and we undergo His works above all our works; and in undergoing, we comprehend Him. In our works we always fail and cannot comprehend Him; and above our works, where He works and we undergo, we comprehend, in undergoing, above all our works. This is what it means to comprehend God in an incomprehensible manner, that is: undergoing and not comprehending.

Hier na volghet dat vierde poent. Uten gherinnee des heilichs gheests werden wij te male beweecht van binnen, ende wij ontfaen een onghespayde begherte ende eenen ghierighen lost, die redenen noch ghene creatuere dvinghen noch saten en mach. Want die gheest gods eyscht onsen gheest, dat wij ons altemale uut ons selven in gode gheven ende dat wij fode alte male in ons bevaen ende begripen, ende dit es ons beyde onmoghelijc. Want wij en moghen uut ons selven in gode niet comen ende onse ghescapenheit verliesen, ende alsoe moeten wij eewelijc een ander van god werden, noch god creatuere. Wij en moghen oec gode in ons niet begripen, want hy es grootheit sonder mate. Wij en moghen den oec niet hervolghen noch herhalen, want hy es lancheit sonder inde, dieptheit sonder gront, hoocheit boven al dat hy ghescapen heeft. Maer dat ons onmoghelijc es, dat es hem moghelijc, want daer onse gheest ende al onse crachte in haer werke ghebreken, daer werct die gheest ons heeren boven onse crachte ende boven onse werken. Ende daer werden wij ghewracht vanden gheest ons heeren, ende wij ghedoeghen sijn werken boven alle onze werken, ende in ghedoeghene begripen wij hem. In onsen werken ghebreken wij altoes ende en connen hem niet begripen, ende boven onse werken daer hy werct ende wij ghedoghen, daer begripen wij ghedoghende boven al onse werke. Ende dit es gode begripen onbegripelijckerwijs, dat es ghedoeghende ende niet begripende.<sup>123</sup>

For Ruusbroec, the impossibility of these demands does not evidence something ruthless or cruel, nor do they evidence an intolerable portrait of a domineering and unjustly insatiable, hegemonic God. Rather, by way of its distinctly 'mutual' univocal love, it is the recognition that God cannot but love us with Himself—the 'charity of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts' (Rom 5, 5). Which, in terms of His utter otherness, Ruusbroec in part seeks to uphold in describing the monstrosity of God's abysmal minne. This utter impossibility is seen in the procession of the Holy Spirit as both from the Father and the Son, as well as its return—in the Son—and towards the Father in the *bande van minne*. Herein, this procession and return directly entails both a radical transcendence and equally radical immanence, both of which are impossible for the creature to comprehend. Rather, such impossibility establishes the setting in which Ruusbroec precisely situates

<sup>122</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll. 781-2.

<sup>123</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll. 762-782.

our undergoing such modeless enjoyment and its incomprehensible comprehension. That is, we comprehend God's radical immanence within us by way of our failure to know Him, which paradoxically spurs further the persistence of our hunger and desire for God. Such is what it means, I would contend, in terms of Ruusbroec's minne, what it in fact means to lovingly comprehend God amid unknowing. It is in our failure to meet love's demands amid love's continuing persistence in demanding more, as well as our craving for Love itself. A persistence that leaves us exhausted in ourselves, while inexhaustably abiding in the Other.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ABIDING IN MINNE'S DEMANDS. PART IV—COMMON LOVE AND THE UNIVOCAL

He has eternally called us, and wants us to open our inward ears and hear the inward speaking of His grace [...]. And He loves [*mindt*] us and has eternally loved us, and He bids us to love eternally in return [*eewelijc weder minnen*]; this is justice. Lover united with beloved: then the scales stand in balance and alike. *Minne is eternal: it begins in God, and touches our spirit, and demands [eyscht] us to love in return.* Thus is love practiced between God and us, like a golden ring that has neither beginning nor end. *Our love begins in God, and in Him it is brought to perfection. He gives Himself in our spirit, and we give ourselves in return in His Spirit:* then the scale of love is stilled; there we bear the image of God in our spirit; and thus we live from God to God, and in God and as one with God. There we are wise merchants, for we have given over our all for His all, and we possess and obtain our all totally in His all. There we are sons, and bear in our spirit the image of God, to which we were made. This life is above order, above reason, and above sense. There we are one with God, without loss or gain.

Ende hy heeft ons eewelijc gheroepen, ende wilt dat wy onse inwindighe ooren ontpluken ende hooren dat inspreken sijnder ghenadicheit [...]. Ende hy mindt ons end hevet ons eewelijc ghemint, ende hy ghebiet ons dat wyne eewelijc weder minnen; dat es gherechticheit. Lief met lieve vereenicht, daer steet de waghe effene ende ghelijc. Minne es eewich: sy behint in gode ende gherijnt onsen gheest, ende eyscht ons weder minnen. Ende alsoe wert minne gheoefent tusschen gode ende ons, als een gulden ring die beghin noch inde en heeft. In gode beghint onse minne ende in hem wert sy volbracht. Hy gheeft hem selven in onsen gheest end wy gheven ons weder in synen gheeste: daer es der minnen waghe ghestilt; daer draghen wy dat beelde gods in onsen gheeste; ende alsoe leven wy uut gode, toe gode ende in gode ende een met gode. Dan sijn wy wise coepiede, want wy hebben onse al am sijn al [over] ghegheven, ende onse al in sijn al te male beseten ende vercreghen. Daer syn wy soenen ende draghen dat beelde gods in onsen gheeste, daer wy toe ghemaecht zyn. Dit leven es boven ordene, boven redene ende boven se. Daer sijn wij een met gode, zonder verlies ochte ghewin.<sup>1</sup>

#### §1. INTRODUCTION

*In inceptum finis est.* Here, the well-known Latin phrase is appropriate in beginning, what the prefatory quote from Ruusbroec announces as the eternity of minne: that 'Our minne begins in God, and in Him it is brought to perfection'. And in like manner, these following reflections will in fact end from where they have started. The passage comes from the collected volume, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, which apart from its well-crafted first text, *De Vera Contemplatione*, can otherwise be realistically seen as various conference notes gathered loosely together in its existing form. While *Beghinen* itself arguably lacks a central, unified composition, the passage above nevertheless nicely encapsulates Ruusbroec's overall understanding of minne. Herein, the fundamental *exitus/reditus* structure of our graced life, 'from God to God and in God and as one with God' is concisely and fully visible in this preceding quote. A fundamental issue thus comes to the fore, one in which is consistent throughout Ruusbroec's texts: how to understand the *univocity* of minne. That is, what the *Magister Sententiarum*, Peter Lombard (1096-1164) himself famously and unambiguously states in Book 1, Distinction 17:

---

<sup>1</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, 2b, ll. 2411-2413; 2414-2429 (slight modification, my emphasis)

It has been said above, and it has been shown by sacred authorities, that the Holy Spirit is the love [*amor*] of the Father and the Son by which they love each other and us. It must be added to this that the *very same* Holy Spirit is the love or charity [*amor sive caritas*] by which we love God and neighbor. When this charity is in us, so that it makes us love God and neighbor, then the Holy Spirit is said to be given to us; and whoever loves the very love by which he loves his neighbor, in that very thing loves God, because that very love [*dilectio*] is God, that is, the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Noted Lombardian scholar Philipp Rosemann observes that not only does the *Magister* make use of predominant Vulgate terms of love such as *caritas* and *dilectio*, yet he interchangeably mentions *amor* as "synonymous", noting that the seemingly "'low', sensual connotations [of *amor*] does not seem to bother him."<sup>3</sup> In addition to this important observation, undoubtedly the most stunning and important claim made however is that despite such terminological (or 'modal') differences, Peter Lombard is not merely claiming a view of human love said to be analogously similar to Divine love. Rather, he goes much further in claiming that when we love both God and neighbor, our love is *univocal*. That is, the profound, scriptural claim (Rom. 5, 5) that the Lombard makes when speaking about human 'love' and identifying it as the '*very same* Holy Spirit [as] the love [...] by which we love God and neighbor.'

Given the historical importance of the *Sentences*, the Lombard's "bold paradox" of univocity was thus an unavoidable segment of theological education for several centuries to come. It stimulated various commentaries, often of which attempted to analogically resolve the relation between the uncreated gift of the Holy Spirit with that of the created gift of human charity. Attempting to clarify how it is that the human love of God and neighbor is in fact the same love by which the Father loves the Son, and the Son the Father, one way in which this was done was scholastically phrased in terms of "procession" and "mission". Here, the Holy Spirit is discussed as an intra-Trinitarian "procession", while economically within creation it is termed as a "*mission* or *donation* [...] by which He [Holy Spirit] is invisibly sent into the hearts of the faithful."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, we can see the question of the Gift and the origins of its importance in this theological discussion. Again, the Lombard himself clarifies his position, arguing that "when this charity is so great in us, that it makes us love God and neighbor, the Holy Spirit is said to be given [*donation*] to us.' Thus, we can safely surmise that it is from this *identity* of the Holy Spirit as the univocal love with which we love both God and neighbor that situates this theological discussion of the gift and how it is given, which is precisely why the Lombard then turns to the question of the Holy Spirit as "Gift" in his following distinction 18 in Book 1 of the *Sentences*.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> See Book 1, Distinction, 17, Chapter 1 in Petrus Lombardus, *The Sentences*. Book 1: *The Mystery of the Trinity*, Medieval Sources in Translation 42, trans. Gulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2007,) 88-97 (my emphasis): "Dictum est quidem supra et sacris auctoritatibus ostensum quod Spiritus Sanctus amor est Patris et Filii, quo se invicem amant et nos. His autem addendum est quod ipse idem Spiritus sanctus est amor sive caritas, qua nos diligimus Deum et proximum; quae caritas cum ita est in nobis ut nos faciat diligere Deum et proximum, tunc Spiritus Sanctus dicitur mitti vel dari nobis, et qui diligit ipsam dilectionem qua diligit proximum, in eo ipso Deum diligit, quia ipsa dilectio Deus est, id est Spiritus Sanctus."

<sup>3</sup> See Philipp W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard* (Oxford: University Press, 2004) 85.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, Book 1, Distinction, 18.

<sup>5</sup> See Book 1, Distinction, 18, Chapter 1 in Petrus Lombardus, *The Sentences*. Book 1: *The Mystery of the Trinity*, 98. Latin text taken from *Opera Omnia S. Bonaventurae*, Ad Claras Aquas, 1882, Vol. 1, 319-321: "Hic quaeritur, cum Spiritus sanctus, per quem dividuntur dona, ipse sit donum, utrum concedendum sit, quod per donum



In distinction 18, chapter 1 specifically, the Lombard makes a very interesting move. By having identified such charity with the Holy Spirit, via the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit as Gift, the challenge that the Master now faces is in maintaining the unity and indivisibility of the Holy Spirit as Gift. Doing so while equally affirming the various, divided gifts with which humans are said to love God and neighbor. Hence, the question before the Lombard equally is one of the univocity of love itself and how it can maintain its claim to "sameness" amid plurality and distinction. Addressing this challenge immediately, Peter Lombard thus asks: "Whether it is to be granted that gifts are given through the gift."<sup>6</sup> To which, the Master then replies, while citing support from Augustine's *De Trinitate*<sup>7</sup> that both the indivisible unity of the gift amid the multiplicity and distinction of gifts given is upheld by the designation of the Gift—that is, the Holy Spirit—as "*common*": "[S]pecific gifts are given to individuals through the gift which is the Holy Spirit, and all who are good have him in common."<sup>8</sup> Thus, it is evident, that by maintaining the position of univocity between human charity and the Holy Spirit, the Lombard likewise opts to stress a *greater continuity* between the Holy Spirit as Gift and the economy of gifts given by the specific designation of this continuity as "*common*". Therein, speaking of the univocal Gift 'commonly' given amid a diversity of gifts, the Lombard argues, best accounts for the Holy Spirit's 'invisible mission into our hearts.' Similarly, by relating these two related designations of greater continuity, the intrinsic logic in the position equally allows for us to better qualify not only the thesis of univocity in Distinction 17, but also qualify that thesis precisely by way of the multiplicity and distinction upheld by such univocity, as stated in Distinction 18.

The Lombard's "bold paradox" of univocity nevertheless had many important detractors. Accepting such a thesis literally, Aquinas himself famously protested, "was tantamount to denying all personal activity in the practice of Christian charity."<sup>9</sup> While Bonaventure's similar analogical stance nonetheless appears to have shifted the gravitas of this debate away from distinction seventeen itself and more towards the Lombard's important linkage with distinction eighteen concerning the question of the gift and its *manner* of its donation as *gratuitous*. A shift, which for Pierre Rousselot in his historical study *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages* concisely states: "And through the second of these locutions [i.e. love as 'gift'] it is continued, in the thirteenth century, in the theory of the early Franciscan School, which makes 'gratuitousness' or 'liberality' the principal perfection of love."<sup>10</sup> Herein, the logic of analogy is deployed by way of distinguishing and thereby isolating the Gift *qua* Gift (the Holy Spirit) from the very creaturely *manner* of its givenness—the manner of Holy Spirit's invisible mission into our hearts. That is to say, the Lombard's 'bold paradox' increasingly appears to

---

dividuntur ac dentur dona. Ad quod dicimus, quia per donum, quod est Spiritus sanctus, singulis propria dividuntur, et ipsum communiter omnes boni habent. Und Augustinus in decimo quinto libro de Trinitate ait: <<Per donum, quod est Spiritus sanctus, in commune omnibus membris Christi multa dona, quae sunt quibusque propria, dividuntur. Non enim singuli quique habent omnia, sed hi illa, alii alia, quamvis ipsum donum, a quo cuique propria dividuntur, omnes habeant id est Spiritum sanctum>>. Ecce aperte dicit, per donum dona donari.

<sup>6</sup> See Book 1, Distinction, 18, chapter 1, Lombardus, *The Sentences*, 98.

<sup>7</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate*, bk. 15 c19 n34: "By the gift, which is the Holy Spirit [given in common to all the members of Christ, many other gifts, which are specific to each one, are shared out. For individuals do not have all the gifts, but some have some, and others have others, although all have the gift itself, that is, the Holy Spirit [...]]."

<sup>8</sup> See Book 1, Distinction, 18, chapter 1, Lombardus, *The Sentences*, 98.

<sup>9</sup> See Piet Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, trans. Georges Dupont (Tournai: Desclee Company, 1969) 88.

<sup>10</sup> See Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution*, trans. Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001) 160.

fade away and in its place, it increasingly becomes a question of both ensuring and approximating the *gratuitous manner* of the gift itself.

However, there is another perspective that certainly demands attention—as echoed by the moral theologian and Leuven Personalist Piet Fransen, summarizing—that while Aquinas' analogy solved the bold paradox in a "masterly way", he did so "from too narrow a point of view."<sup>11</sup> By contrast, while Fransen admits that he too shall "remain true to St. Thomas' fundamental intuition"<sup>12</sup> of analogy, he also addresses the need to *dynamize* this notion, by closely linking it with another historical tradition. A "small minority", to be sure, yet continuously rediscovered, especially in the Low Countries; a tradition that "deliberately based themselves on the teaching of Scripture, or on the doctrine of the ancient Fathers and the mystical tradition of the Middle Ages".<sup>13</sup> In short, a historical linkage that was cemented in an implicit, dynamic reading of the Lombard's Distinction 17, entailing the view that such a *univocal love esteemed, rather than degraded the active and ongoing practice of human charity itself*. However, to make such a claim involves various other contingent ideas, including that of a distinct theological anthropology, both central in framing one's approach to the Lombard's 'bold paradox', without neither giving way to a passive, literal interpretation, nor singularly emphasizing a "narrow" interpretation of the 'created' dimensions of grace by cutting it off from its divine source. While conversely, to lack such an anthropology—as was indubitably the case amid the growth of Nominalism in the following centuries—while equally emphasizing the various Thomistic and Bonaventurian positions of charity's specifically creaturely dimensions—dubiously resulted in created grace indeed appearing more and more as something akin to a "personal possession, some sort of capital that could be treasured up or put to use at will". A distortion, which the Reformers continuously—and at times rightfully—protested.<sup>14</sup>

But first, before we get into these outstanding, historical conflicts and their ongoing relevance, greater attention is needed concerning the specificity of Ruusbroec's own understanding of the univocity of minne. In particular, his understanding of desire [*begheren*] and its relation to the demands of justice within the economic. That is, to 'balance the scales' *in likeness* to the Son. Thus, by better engaging with Ruusbroec's overall synthesis and his own distinctly univocal understanding of minne can we likewise account for how such a love *esteemed* and continuously ignited the more prophetic dimensions of his thought and his frequent social and ecclesiastical critiques. In various critiques Ruusbroec had made in response to a variety of ecclesiastical abuses, the Brabantine contemplative profoundly differs from figures such as Luther in that such abuses are depicted as nothing other than a perversion of our natural desire for God. That is to say, abuses from which an increasing *unlikeness* prevails wherein the scales stand unbalanced and completely dissimilar. In turn, by developing the intrinsic connection between minne's eternalized desire and its unyielding

---

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 97: "We may point out Leonard Lessius and Cornelius a Lapide [... ] During the seventeenth century, we meet two great patrologists, Denys Petau and Christian Thomasius. During the nineteenth century, we have the theologian M.J. Scheeben and the patrologist Théodore de Régnon. At the turn of this [20<sup>th</sup>] century, G.J. Waffelaert, Bishop of Bruges, rediscovered Ruysbroeck, and by his writings initiated a renewal of mystical theology in the Netherlands. These theologians were few and far between, and were as a rule considered unsafe by the professionals of their day. As it happened, their authority and their evidence prevented the doctrine of grace from straying into a blind alley."

<sup>14</sup> Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 89.

demands for justice, we can thereby sufficiently contrast Ruusbroec's account with a more literalist reading of the Lombard's thesis as famously seen in the highly particularized, a-contextual account given by Anders Nygren's *agape* as well as more recently, by the renewed attention to love's univocity in the *erotic* in the Jean-Luc Marion.

Previously, a theological conceptuality of Ruusbroec's *unified* understanding of minne has been presented in such a way as depicting the life of grace (as well as his speculations on a life of glory) and the rhythms of the spiritual life by way of the various manners and modes of minne. For the Brabantine contemplative, his thought succinctly juxtaposes, in a dialectical, erotic unity of tension, a dynamic rhythm of exteriority and interiority (or mediation and immediacy) between God and the human person. Such a dynamic rhythm I termed elsewhere as an 'elegant, dance of grace'; one in which both the Father and Son initiate in the loving bond of the Holy Spirit that proceeds from them both. Wherefrom, the fruitfulness and excess of such a Trinitarian bond is acknowledged as an overflowing [*utevloeyen*] mission within created nature, which is itself intrinsically open to such an asymmetrically heteronymous, yet nonetheless mutual exchange.<sup>15</sup> In turn, I grounded this approach to a dynamized understanding of minne in view of Ruusbroec's theological anthropology of mutual indwelling, an anthropological portrait that resembles minne's dynamism with a similarly dynamic juxtaposition of a universal theological exemplarism ('*in the Image*') with a strongly particular, incarnational, soteriological and historical counter account of the unrepeatable distinction [*onderscheet*] of our moral and ethical life: our works of charity and virtue ('*unto His likeness*'). Herein, such an *exitus* can be seen as the basis of Ruusbroec's early Christian humanism unveiled, such that a furthering of human dignity and particularity proceeds from and hinges upon a fundamental, natural relationality with God. Conversely, it is the inviolability of such a relationship, which explains what Ruusbroec means (in the prefatory quote) when he says that such a unity with God is 'without loss or gain'. But furthermore, in terms of *reditus* and the economy of salvation—a salvific drama that *very much entails either a loss or a gain*—understanding this relational dynamism highlights the residential character or *locus* of minne's strong desire [*begheren*] and the "healing" rather than the "disciplining" of its natural *erotic sense*<sup>16</sup>.

#### A. CRITICAL INTERLUDE: THE BANAL IMMANENTIZATION OF NATURAL HUMAN DESIRE IN CONSUMER CAPITALISM

Briefly, so as to better understand Ruusbroec's portrayal of *begheren* and the intrinsic nature of its "demands", it is important to further emphasize this point by strongly contrasting it with more familiar notions that we have, of what I would argue as the banal gratuitousness of desire today. Herein, I maintain that retrieval of Ruusbroec's regular portrayal of minne's "voracious" [*ghierighen*] desire strongly counters familiar narratives that consumer capitalism provides for us today. That is, the latter's increasingly bald and overt attempts to continuously reinvent, rejuvenate and

---

<sup>15</sup> See supra Chapter 4, "Frans Jozef van Beeck, Native Attunement, and the '*admirabile commercium*'", 3.4.

<sup>16</sup> For this distinction between "healing" our desires, rather than "disciplining" them via the gratuitous, yet reciprocal participation of the divine economy and the radical reinstitution of the works of mercy proper for a "Christian economy of desire, See generally the excellent work of Daniel M. Bell Jr., *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 187-215.

"instrumentalise"<sup>17</sup> our natural desires, manipulating them in an anonymous, consumer marketplace of limited goods, all the while promoting such consumer desire as continuously reflexive and self-seeking. In this familiar, market-based, banal immanentization of desire, the movement of desire proceeds from the subject characterized by a certain lack or privation, while desires themselves—as *desires-of-lack*—are gauged in terms inversely proportionate to the relative scarcity of the object *in demand*. Yet how can we make sense of the unbridled, "*limitless desire*" of consumerism as proceeding from and oriented towards such fundamentally *limited* sources and ends?

Subsequent to this fundamental contradiction of desires-of-lack—one that equally and inescapably belies various degrees of frustration, despair and impossible satisfaction—is the cultural fact that such views have become vastly accepted as intrinsic to the cultivation and formation of consumer desire itself. A concern, Vincent Miller rightfully points out, which likewise implicates Christianity in its own formation of desires as similarly insatiable, yet radically other than consumerism's "limitless desire". Recognition of this basic overlap, however necessarily cautions any form of cultural-based, social-critique from all too easily falling back upon and *exclusively* opposing such an economic order simply in terms of desire's "object" (i.e. the Augustinian dichotomy of the "two cities") without an equal and critical attention to issues of *praxis* and the forming of desire itself.<sup>18</sup>

This dilemma arguably has been exacerbated as the postmodern marketplace is no longer organized by a consistent, rationalistic set of ideological principles (i.e. the Scottish economic tradition of Adam Smith). Instead, it has been repeatedly argued<sup>19</sup> that the rational self-interested *homo economicus* has instead been thrust into the dense pluralism and marketing irrationality of much of postmodern consumerism. An immersion that shows capitalism's amazing degree of elasticity, adaptability and recapitulation, all the while demonstrating it as "endlessly capable of turning critique into a marketing hook."<sup>20</sup> This, Miller contends, is in part due to the "commodification" of religion—one in which attests to the increasing inability within global capitalism for religion to synthesize and integrate everyday life with religious practice and teachings. Such inability is not simply due to the rise in secularism, though this cannot itself be ignored. Rather, it is how religion itself is mediated within contemporary capitalism and its state of affairs wherein consumption, the fluidity of identity and non-committal practices well-mark the anonymous, *singular playing field*<sup>21</sup> of the market. As seen, for example, in the marketing of spirituality today and its self-seeking for meaning, "experience" and "authenticity".

Recently in his work, *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World*, Daniel M. Bell Jr. has provocatively critiqued this common-place understanding of desire as in part, stemming from an implicit, capitalist theology and its historic merger between Luther's nominalist-driven, *Deus Absconditus* with that of Adam Smith's *invisible hand* in the "hidden God of the Free Market".<sup>22</sup> Such arguments can be situated amid a renewed interest in Carl Schmitt's thesis

---

<sup>17</sup> See generally Rik van Nieuwenhove, "The Religious Disposition as a Critical Resource to Resist Instrumentalisation," *The Heythrop Journal* 50 (2009): 689-696.

<sup>18</sup> See generally Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion* (New York: Continuum, 2004) 107.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* See also William Cavanaugh *Being Consumed* (New York: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Herein, I explicitly use a term that Marion similarly uses, and for which I will treat later on in this chapter.

<sup>22</sup> Bell, *The Economy of Desire*, 110-112.

that "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts"<sup>23</sup>, as various theological economic critiques have similarly applied Schmitt's thesis to economic life. Similarly, Bell maps out the reflexivity of postmodernism's fluid, identity construction as situated with reference to the frenzied agony of consumer choice and self-assertion, thereby coming to furnish a space for its reflexivity as rooted in late modernity's continuing project of autonomous individualism. Not only are capitalist narratives of freedom explicitly negative in that they construct "freedom as a kind of private space where the individual can act (or not act, as the case may be) without the intervention of any authority".<sup>24</sup> But furthermore, it endlessly seeks to ensure such a private space of autonomy and identity by way of continuous consumption. Such a formation of desires, I would argue, does not so much *reflect* this 'fictitious, autonomous space', but instead *refracts* the infinitely positive insatiability of our creaturely desires—to which Ruusbroec would more attest of—by way of converting its theo-centric non-possessiveness instead as a seeming paradox of human finitude. How else can we account for such a negative space of reflexivity of the postmodern consumer as a "being of unlimited wants" as nothing other than a perversion that justifies the necessity of unbridled capitalism, its reductive anthropological vision and assertion that: 'Because human desires are unlimited, consumer capitalism and its "complete marketization of life" is therefore necessary.'<sup>25</sup>

## B. COMMON RULE FOR A COMMON LIFE

Although the various mechanisms and social realities of such consumer capitalism that we are awash with are largely particular to our own historical context, the moral dimensions that are inseparably joined to such economic life—to which the Church in her social teaching bears witness<sup>26</sup>—are certainly continuous with Ruusbroec's difficult and tumultuous Brabantine context of mid to late-14<sup>th</sup> Century in the Low Countries.<sup>27</sup> Upheaval and widespread corruption—both in secular and ecclesial contexts—provided ample occasion for Ruusbroec's frequent, prophetic critique that such abuses none other than de-humanize us by way of perverting our natural desire for God—our "taste for God", as he frequently puts it. While continuing a line of thought both from the biblical prophetic tradition<sup>28</sup> and various patristic sources<sup>29</sup>, Ruusbroec's strong critique of various societal abuses of fraudulence and greed<sup>30</sup>, which were likewise mirrored within Church institutions in the

---

<sup>23</sup> See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) 36.

<sup>24</sup> Bell, *The Economy of Desire*, 98.

<sup>25</sup> See Bell, *The Economy of Desire*, 24.

<sup>26</sup> See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, (London: Burns & Oates, 2004) n. 330-335.

<sup>27</sup> See generally Rob Faesen, *Jan van Ruusbroec : contemplatief theoloog in een moeilijke tijd* (Kampen: Kok, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 323-327.

<sup>29</sup> For an excellent article on strong Patristic critiques of usury and interest, See generally Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen, "'That which has been wrung from tears': Usury, the Greek Fathers and Catholic Social Teaching", *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for Twenty-First-Century Christian Social Thought*, (eds.) J. Leemans, B. Matz, J. Verstraeten (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012) 124-160.

<sup>30</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Tabernakel*, Bk. 5, ll. 5449-5458: "Now, greediness, falsity and cunning have multiplied to such a degree that everyone deceives the others whenever he can. For when the greedy person merely has in

forms of usury,<sup>31</sup> simony<sup>32</sup> and the selling of indulgences<sup>33</sup> are in part reflective of a more traditional Christian understanding and its defense of private property and charity. For in brief, such an understanding regards charity not as somehow extrinsically added to the acquisition of wealth (i.e. philanthropy) that likewise can be regarded as perpetuating unjust conditions. Rather, a proper understanding of Christian charity, while always acted upon with moral freedom, is viewed as *intrinsically responsive* to both the poor as "ambassadors of God"<sup>34</sup> and icons of the order of creation.<sup>35</sup> While the reception and distribution of material goods likewise possess an inherent disposition that bears the debt and reciprocal demands of justice inherent within such a graced nature. Hence, in such a view and line with the Tradition, we can well understand Ruusbroec when he states that "Everything that God gives, and everything that one has beyond one's needs rightly belongs to the poor."<sup>36</sup>

I find it highly appropriate to recall the frequency and the distinct nature of the social critique present not only in Ruusbroec's works, yet by various figures from the mystical theological tradition.<sup>37</sup> Herein, the intimate connection between a distinctly univocal, superabundant view of love inseparably joined to the critical consciousness of its moral and social critique to which such an understanding love inspires, for Ruusbroec, stems none other than from his synthesis of *ghemeyne leven* itself. That is, the more one grows in union and likeness to the otherness of God, the more one becomes distinctly human, more particular, as lived out in commitment with and in solidarity towards others.<sup>38</sup> Hence, Ruusbroec will frequently draw the connection between rampant, *external*

---

view temporal gain, he forgets God, and his fellow-Christian [*evenkerstens*], and virtue, and all good that might be his after this time. And from this there comes fraud, that is (false practices) in weights, in measures, in accounting, usury, hoarding, placement, guarantees, borrowing, lending money-changing for profit; and many another falsity that people now practice in business, and in everything people go about doing with each other."

<sup>31</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Bk. 2b, ll. 1543-1561, 1553-1561: "They enrich their family with goods that belong to the poor. They put up with all manner of sins, if only they can thus gain earthly goods. The usurer may offer and serve at the altar, if he has much money to give. When he dies, and if he wants, they will bury him before the altar. People would rather have his money than great penance for sins. Any sinner can remain in adultery and in sin year after year if he pays, depending how rich he is. But if he is going to leave his sins and come to the ways of the Holy Church, then he has to buy it with money or he cannot have it."

<sup>32</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Bk. 2b, ll. 1336-1349.

<sup>33</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Bk. 2b, ll. 1535-1542.

<sup>34</sup> For this much beloved title, See generally Peter Maurin, "To the Bishops of the U.S.A.: A Plea for Houses of Hospitality", *Easy Essays* (Eugene, OR: WIPF & STOCK, 2003) 8-11, 8.

<sup>35</sup> See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 324: "When sought or accept with a religious attitude, poverty opens one to recognizing and accepting the order of creation[....] Poverty takes on the status of a moral value when it becomes an attitude of humble availability and openness to God, of trust in Him. This attitude makes it possible for people to recognize the relativity of economic goods and to treat them as divine gifts to be administered and shared, because God is the first owner of all goods."

<sup>36</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Bk. 2b, ll. 1462-1463: "Al dat god gheeft ende al daer men boven noetdorft heeft, dat es na rechte der armere."

<sup>37</sup> See generally the "retrieval" of mystical theologians, with an implicit reference to Ruusbroec and the 'common life' in Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986) 36-37.

<sup>38</sup> For a distinctly lyrical presentation of this familiar theme of relational identity and modeless contemplation, see Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Bk. 2b, ll. 1187-1193: "I make thee free; remain with Me. Lose thyself in Me, and then thou findest thyself in Me and Me in thee and all the loving spirits lifted up with thee and united in Me. Be free in thyself and be freedom in Me. Be blessed in thyself and blessedness in Me. I give thee simple clear knowledge of Myself in thee and I (also) give thee a fathomless impenetrable unknowing of Myself. Lose thyself and die to thyself in thyself, and be without distinction [*onderscheet*] a simple blessedness with Me." "Ic make dy vri, blive met my. Verliese dy in my, soe vinstu dy in my ende my in dy, ende alle minnended gheeste

abuses within the Church and its flagrant injustices as equally and profoundly blunting the Church's *interior life* and our lived sensitivity towards God's greater dissimilarity and its "spiritual feeling" in the interior stirrings of His grace.

By no means, however, should we be misled by the unfounded claim that Ruusbroec's at times profoundly stark critique of ecclesiastical abuses as somehow lending credence to the thoroughly modern antimony between between Ruusbroec the "mystic" and the ecclesiastical corruption of the "dogmatic" Church.<sup>39</sup> Equally outlandish is the supposition that figures such as Ruusbroec are simply forerunners to Luther himself. Rather, it is just the opposite, as Ruusbroec's continuous societal and ecclesiastical critiques<sup>40</sup> stem not only from his deep commitment to the life of the Church. But furthermore, his ecclesiological thought is to be seen as largely inseparable from his thinking upon the multi-facetedness<sup>41</sup>—both vertically and horizontally—of the *ghemeyne leven* itself. For, as he writes:

Christ with His apostles erected and founded the holy Church in Christian faith; and they have left us a *common rule* as to how we should live [...] The breadth of the rule is all goods common to the poor in need. The height is God loved and practiced steadfastly unto death. This is the rule that Christ taught and gave to those who want to come to Him in His Father's bosom. Those who received the rule of our Lord and did profession in Christian faith are all baptized in His death, purified of sin and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Cristus met sinen apostelen, die fondeerde ende stichte die heilighe kercke in kerstenen ghelove, ende si hebben ghelaten eene ghemene regule hoe wij leven soudē [...] Die breidde der regulen, dat es: al goet ghemeyne den armen inder noot. Dit hoochde, dat es: god ghemint, gheofent, ghestadich al totter doot. Dit es de regule die Cristus leerde ende gaf den gheenen die met hem comen willen in sijns vader scoot. Die de regule ons heeren ontvinghen ende professie daden in kerstenen ghelove, die worden alle ghedoept in sine doot, reyne van sonden ende vervult metten heilighen gheeste.<sup>42</sup>

Herein, such a "common rule", as instituted by Christ and the apostles in founding the Church, with its clear scriptural basis (Acts 2, 44) is quite important insofar as it provides a

---

verheven met dy ende gheeincht in my. Wes vri in dy ende vriheit in my. Wes salich in dy ende salicheit in my. Ic gheve dy eenvuldich clear bekinnen [ende] van my in dy, ende een grondeloes onvervolcht onweten mijns selfs dat ghevic dy. Verniete ende versterve dijns selfs in dy, ende wees sonder onderscheet eenvuldighe salicheit met mi."

<sup>39</sup> See John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, "Mysticism with or without the Church? John of Ruusbroec's Conflict with the Clergy", *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 74.1 (2013), 18-32.

<sup>40</sup> Which appear to become far more pronounced in his later works, especially lengthy sections in *Tabernakel* in which transitions from a general economic critique of unethical business practices of usury and greed within society (See Ruusbroec, *Tabernakel*, Bk 5, ll. 5846-5867) as well as sexual promiscuity, sloth and gluttony (See Ruusbroec, *Tabernakel*, Bk 5, ll. 5892-5923) to a more pointed critique not only the mirroring of such behaviors within the clergy and professed religious within the Church, but at times, the exacerbation of its abuses. See Ruusbroec, *Tabernakel*, Bk. 5, ll. 5963-6184, wherein Ruusbroec at one point is extremely critical of yearly, ecclesiastical courts held in each parish on "public gross mortal sins" whereby those found guilty were required to give money as "penitence [...] for their sins". However, Ruusbroec notes the corrosive legalism of this procedure, whereby the entire matter has become a simple "affair of money" [*omme den penninc*] where he colorfully remarks, "And thus each has what he desires: the devil the soul, the bishop the money, the fool his brief pleasure. See, these are the incomes upon which bishops live with their household." (*Tabernakel*, Bk. 5, ll. 5974-5986, 5983-5986)

<sup>41</sup> See generally Satoshi Kikuchi, "Ruusbroec's Concept of gemeen (Common) Reconsidered" *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, 83.2 (2012), 97-121.

<sup>42</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Bk 2b, ll. 1569-1571, 1574-1579.

foundational standard of moral perfection. Herein, not only did Ruusbroec apply such standards simply and exclusively to those clergy members who professed vows in the counsels of perfection (i.e. chastity, poverty and obedience). Rather, Ruusbroec shows at various times a willingness to relatively apply such standards to laity as well, evidenced for example in his preserved letter to the "Lady widow Mechtild".<sup>43</sup> Hereby, "common" by no means is synonymous with the 'collective sum', thus functioning as a normative descriptor and thereby denoting a movement towards moral laxity. Again, quite the opposite is shown, placing in tension a certain rigorism intrinsic within the demands of the common life, while refusing to associate and identify such standards to an enclosed, spiritual elite. In this regard, it is certainly instructive to see how the mystical theological tradition has strongly contributed and influenced,<sup>44</sup> what *Lumen gentium*<sup>45</sup> would later on seal as the "universal call to holiness". Similarly, the "catholicity" of the common life supports, first and foremost a greater view of the mutuality of those united *in Christ* within the Church, while equally preserving particularity and distinction of their works in responding to such a common rule set down by Christ and the Apostles, as seen in the following :

For the right intention for our life should be mutual minne and fidelity each to the others, and that we should intend and desire God's honor in all our works. And this Christ Himself has taught us by words and works....[and] has ordered unto the glory of God, and to the benefit of all people. That is why it is common to all good Christian people, just as the Mass is, and all the service of holy Church, and also all the good works done in the world. For the priest says his Mass and the farmer sows his grain and the sailor sails the sea; and so each one serves the others. Although the

Want de rechte waeromme ons levens dat soude sijn underlinghe minne ende trouwe ieghewelc toe den anderen, ende dat wi gods eere meinen ende begheren souden in al onsen werken. Ende dit heeft ons Cristus selve gheleert met waerden ende met werken....toe der eeren gods ende tote alder menschen orbore. Ende hier omme eest ghemeine allen goede kerstenen menschen, gheliker wijs dat de messe es ende alle de dienst der heilegher kerken ende oec alle goede werke die men doet in al der werelt. Want de priester spreect sine messe ende de ackerman sait sijn coren ende de scepman vaert ter

<sup>43</sup> See Ruusbroec, Opera Omnia X, *Tweede Brief*, ll. 4-8 (my emphasis): "Together will all those in our monastery who fight with me for Christ I wish you great salvation in the Lord, My Lady, and by the grace of God *and as far as we are able to, we make you a participant not differently from ourselves* in all prayers, masses and good works offered through us by God's benevolence and grace." " Veel heil in de Heer wens ik u, vrouwe, te zamen met al degenen die in ons klooster met mij voor Christus strijden; en met de genade Gods en voor zover wij kunnen, maken we u, niet anders dan ons zelf, deelgenoot aan de gebeden, missen en alle goede werken die dankzij de goddelijke goedgunstigheid en genafe door ons geschieden."

<sup>44</sup> See the following papal encyclical on St. Francis de Sales, Pius XI, *RERUM OMNIUM PERTURBATIONEM*, n. 2-3: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_26011923\\_rerum-omnium-perturbationem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_26011923_rerum-omnium-perturbationem_en.html), as accessed on 4.11.2013:"This work of sanctification is of the very genius of the Church, since she was made by Christ, her Founder, not only holy herself but the source of holiness in others [...] As St. Paul says, "This is the will of God, your sanctification." (I *Thess.* iv, 3) Christ Himself has taught what this sanctification consists in - "Be ye therefore perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (*Matt.* v, 48)We cannot accept the belief that this command of Christ concerns only a select and privileged group of souls and that all others may consider themselves pleasing to Him if they have attained a lower degree of holiness. Quite the contrary is true, as appears from the very generality of His words. The law of holiness embraces all men and admits of no exception."

<sup>45</sup> See Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 40-41: "Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (40), as well as the following statement, which Ruusbroec could have easily written himself, and which distinctly recalls the influence of the common life: "The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory." (41)



works are varied and dissimilar, the fruit of the works is common. And whoever desires most of all the glory of God, and the common profit of humanity shall be rewarded the most by God.

see, ende hier dient ieghewelc den anderen. Al sijn de werke ghedeilt ende onghelijc, de vrocht der werke es ghemeine. Ende so wie dan alder meest begheert de eere gods ende ghemeinen orbore der menschen, hi sal van gode meest gheloent sijn.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, as the "common rule" seeks to synthesize both the active life and the interior life lived in loving obedience to the Church, Ruusbroec's ecclesial thought is equally evidenced by his frequent and strong critique of the "quietistic" tendencies of the Free Spirits. Herein, Ruusbroec often provides a sapiential analysis of their lack of charitable, external works as stemming from a "deceitful inactivity which they themselves feel"<sup>47</sup> the "inactive blind simplicity of their own *wesen*" and its fusion with the "indwelling of God in themselves".<sup>48</sup> The created naturalness and inviolability of such divine indwelling—the principal and abiding source of our human dignity—however becomes disfigured in a "greater unlikeness". As a "hellish fruit", it is at once indicative of a loss of such otherness whereby the restlessness of our graced desires becomes increasingly "fused" with the "wish to become blessed within the limits of their own nature".<sup>49</sup> In such an heterodox understanding, Ruusbroec portrays such a disposition and its frequent, moral laxity not so much as an occasion to "discipline" such wayward desires of the Free Spirits themselves. Rather, signaled by virtue of its desired emptiness or "inactivity" [*ledegheit*], Ruusbroec—in going beyond a 'mere' moral theological description—instead presents such dispositions as an increasing *indifference* towards the more ecstatic and outflowing nature of desire itself. "[I]nwardly assailed by images...they lose their vacant turning-inward in repose and fall into despair".<sup>50</sup> Instead, by the immanentization of such desire and the subsequent desire to be rid of desire itself—'desire' herein viewed as an interruption upon a certain restful, self-sufficiency—Ruusbroec's steadfast critique of the Free Spirits in fact can be reinterpreted as an interesting precursor not only to early-modern views of the self. But furthermore, amid its deep-seated, heterodox aspirations of becoming God—absent not so much of the *gratuitousness* of grace, yet by its complete gratuitousness, to the detriment and *utter lack of relational mutuality, reciprocity and the demands of community*—Ruusbroec similarly critiques the inversion of gratuity and reciprocal demands by what we commonly know of today in terms of the agony of consumer desire. That is, an understanding of 'demands', not as originating in, and destined towards our relationship with God and others, yet as self-reflective and indicative of the privation of the self and its absence of self-sufficiency. In other words, that which is "in demand" is largely indicative of that which one lacks, and thus desires. With such an understanding, the gift and gratuitousness, in turn, loses its asymmetrical primacy and instead, increasingly comes to characterize the negativity of freedom explicitly in terms of the self-interested and non-committal nature of our economic exchanges. This inversion of the order between gratuity and reciprocal demands, amid the promotion of a self-sufficiency that fuses, and thereby relinquishes the

---

<sup>46</sup> Ruusbroec, *Tabernakel*, Bk. 5, ll.5812-5815, 5821-5828.

<sup>47</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia 1, Boecksken der verclaringhe*, ll. 119-120 (with slight modification): "...in de valsche ledecheit die si ghevoelen."

<sup>48</sup> Ruusbroec, *Boecksken der verclaringhe*, ll. 90-91; 93 (with slight modification): "Siet, dese menschen sijn verdoelt in ene ledeghe verblende sempelheit haers eighens wesens"; "[...] ende den inwesene gods in hen".

<sup>49</sup> Ruusbroec, *Boecksken der verclaringhe*, ll. 91-92: "[...] ende willen salech sijn in bloeter natueren."

<sup>50</sup> Ruusbroec, *Boecksken der verclaringhe*, ll. 153-155: "[...] dan werden so verbeelt ende ontsaet ende verveert van binnen, ende verliesen haren ledeghe inkeer in rasten, ende vallen in meshopen".

*dissimilarity* and *particularity* of relationship itself is herein depicted by Ruusbroec in highly precautionary terms:

They are self-willed and subject to none; and this is what they call spiritual liberty [...] For the divine light has not shown itself in their darkness and that is because they have not sought it with active minnen [*werkeleker minnen*] and supernatural freedom. And for this reason they have fallen away from the truth and from all virtues in a perverse unlikeness (to God). For they hold that the highest holiness is for man to follow his nature in every way and to live unrestrained so that he may dwell within in emptiness, with inclined spirit and turn outwards to follow every prompting of his body's desires and appease the flesh, in order that he may be speedily relieved of the image and return unhindered to the bare emptiness of his spirit.

Si sijn eighens willen ende niemene onderdaen, ende dat achten so geesteleke vrieheit [...] Want dat godleke licht en hevet hem niet verdoent in haeren deemsterheit. Ende dat es daeromme, si en hebbent niet ghesocht met werkeleker minnen, noch met overnaturleker vriheit. Ende hieromme sijn si der waerheit ontfallen, ende alle doegheden, in ene verkeerden ontghelijcheit. Want si setten daer in die hoechste heilecheit, dat de mensche in alre wijs sijnre naturen volghe[n], ende onbedwonghen si, alsoe dat hi in woenen moghe met gheneichden gheeste in ledecheit, ende ute keren na lost des lives in elker beweghinghen ende den vleessche ghenoech doen, op dat hi haesteleke des beelds ontcommert werde, ende onghehendert weder in kere in die bloete ledecheit sijns geests.<sup>51</sup>

### C. UNIFY, SO AS TO DISTINGUISH

By strong contrast, rather than mirroring an autonomous subject denoted by a privatized lack by goods themselves deemed lacking and scarce, Ruusbroec depicts minne's intrinsic, insatiable demands—to further taste and thereby know, in a sapiential manner, the Trinitarian God—as an overflowing desire that erupts from the greater dissimilarity between Creator and creature. And yet, in view of minne and the creature's continuous, erotic impossibility to reciprocate, that which it has so immensely and gratuitously been given, Ruusbroec thereby accents a view of greater dissimilarity itself as emerging amid this utter impossibility.

God's minne is voracious [*ghieregh*]. It demands of the soul all that it is, and all that it can do. And the soul is rich and generous, and wants to give everything to voracious minnen that it demands and desires; but it cannot fulfill it, for its createdness must last forever [...] Furthermore, the minne of God is also fathomlessly [*grondelooes*] generous. It offers and shows the soul all that it is, and it wants to give that to the soul all freely. Now the loving soul [*minnende ziele*] is particularly greedy and voracious, and yawns wide, and wants to have all that is shown to it; but it is creature and cannot devour nor grasp the allness of God. And therefore it must yearn and yawn, and remain thirsty and hungry for ever.

Gods minne es ghierigh: si eischt der zielen al dat si es ende al dat si vermach. Ende de ziele es rike ende melde, ende wilt al gheven der ghierigher minnen dat si eischt ende begheert. Maer si en maechs niet volbringhen, want hare ghescapenheit moet eewegh bliven [...] Vooertmeer, de minne gods es oec grondelooes melde. Si biedt ende toent der zielen al dat si es, ende dat wilt si hare al vrilec gheven. Nu es de minnende ziele sunderlinghe gulsegh ende ghierigh, ende gaep wide ende wilt al hebben dat hare vertoont es. Maer si es creatuere ende en mach die alheit gods niet begapen noch begripen. Ende hier omme moet si ghieren ende gapen, dorstegh ende hongheregh eewegh bliven.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Ruusbroec, *Boecksen der verclaringhe*, ll. 131-132; 140-150.

<sup>52</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, ll. 2084-2087; 2091-2097.

Such a forceful passage upon the "failure of minne" and the creature's erotic impossibility, as creature, recalls the general thrust of Ruusbroec's erotic thought—one that seeks to "unify, so as to distinguish".<sup>53</sup> Here too, this distinctly shows that his metaphysical approach problematizes recalling the onto-theological critique inherent in his otherwise unavoidably associated Christian Neo-Platonist views of *exitus* and *reditus*. The fundamental response to such a critique is three-fold: first, the recognition of an eternal otherness and greater dissimilarity between the Creator and creature in the exemplarism of the "image" and the created particularity of "unto His likeness"; a *referential difference* that lies at the heart of minne's robust, erotic sense. Second, and following from minne's intrinsic erotic difference, the onto-theological critique's lack of fecundity is here to be squarely situated within the Brabantine's refusal to cast the creaturely and its historical particularity as simply "contingent"<sup>54</sup> and provisional. Rather, in the economy of grace, the view is precisely held that

---

<sup>53</sup> See generally Henri De Lubac S.J., *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sr. Elizabeth Englund, OCD. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988) 329-333.

Furthermore, I would like to fully recognize—(although *as a footnote* and its poor irony), that in terms of my retrieval of Ruusbroec's *ghemeyne leven*, as one that facilitates a dynamic "double tension"—the very "common" pursuit of thinking itself, as well as the contextual specificity of my work, as unmistakably having its emergence in Leuven. For, in brief, one can summarize the 'double tension' of *ghemeyne leven* as follows: (1) When thought from creation itself and Ruusbroec's theo-anthropology of 'mutual indwelling', "*in the image*", it deploys a thinking pattern from "sameness" that leads to greater particularity (i.e., the principle "unify, so as to distinguish"); (2) And yet, when thought specifically in terms of "unto His likeness", history and the economy of salvation, amid the created order of grace and glory, then Ruusbroec's thought dynamically inverts the former principle, such that his thought proceeds from an asymmetrical givenness, that nonetheless intrinsically demands a mutual reciprocity that is itself an erotic impossibility. (3) Hence, the unyielding dynamism of these inseparable, converging axes, that "cleave to" [*aenclieven*] one another, yet shall eternally remain distinct and other both concretize and implicate the dynamism of Ruusbroec's thinking of *ghemeyne leven*, and likewise minne, as both utterly concrete, yet ultimately modeless and without manner. Specifically, therefore, I fully recognize that William Desmond's "metaxological metaphysics" and his thinking of the "between" is at times lurking and haunting various positions that I am making in terms of Ruusbroec's *ghemeyne* and thus, in the immediate future, clearly demands a more explicit engagement with his thought. See generally, William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 44: "If metaphysical thinking, as I claim, takes shape in the milieu of being, the question of transcendence has nothing to do with a leap out of being into the void, but with the deepest mindfulness of what is emergent in the middle itself. Again, the double meaning of *meta* is relevant. "*Meta*" is being in the midst; "*meta*" is also reference to what is beyond, what is transcendent. Metaxological metaphysics must think the doubleness of this tension between being in the midst *and* being referred by self-transcendence to the transcendence of what is other, what is over and above."

<sup>54</sup> See generally, Joeri Schrijvers, 'Ontotheological Turnings?' in *Modern Theology* 22 (2006) 221-253: "Broadly speaking, the ontotheological endeavour seeks an ultimate reason that can account for the totality of beings. Its point of departure - beings - forbids that ontotheology encounters anything other, at the end of the chain of beings, than a being. Ontotheology proclaims that a being is what it is only insofar as its contingent mode of being corresponds, and is thereby grounded by, the essence of this particular being. This essence of a being, however, stands itself in need of a foundation, since the essence of a being, in one way or another, is dependent upon the (material) existence of the being of which it is the essence (in the same way as one abstracts a unified essence from diverse empirical tables). For this, ontotheology has recourse to God as the one who supposedly un-founded or founded in and through Godself, grounds the essence of beings, by simply thinking them or by creating these (imperfect) beings of which God is said to have the perfect idea eternally. 'God' can thus only appear here in the light of a correspondence theory, as that being, be it the highest, who assures a perfect fit between the essence or the 'being' of a being and the empirical being itself. Ontotheology's obsession with objects decides in advance how God will enter philosophical discourse; historically, God is that infinite instance that grounds and accounts for the contingency of particular beings. This 'God', then, is often modelled after causal and mathematical theories - as much as each house requires an architect as its cause, the totality and diversity of beings requires a 'prima causa', a First Being. God is an

particularity itself is that which emerges from the primacy of relationality to God and others—or, in other words, the *creatio continua* of the world itself, *ex nihilo*. Ruusbroec's theology of minne precisely avoids such an onto-theological charge as his reflections never depart from speaking out from the continual praxis of himself as a lover of God—which is profoundly recalled in the previous quote. Lastly, and subsequent to this more performative stress, God's greater dissimilarity is erotically attested—though by no means contingent upon our response as such<sup>55</sup>—not only by minne's insatiable demands for justice, yet our unavoidable *failure* in 'balancing the scales' (recalling the prefatory passage) and justly responding to God's gracious, salvific love. A failure that continuously regenerates anew the rhythm of the spiritual life—in terms of outward and interior works—as well as predisposes one for the gift of contemplation and its loving perfection as ultimately rendering the praxis of loving God a modeless and mannerless affair of rest and abandon—to be not mine, but His *enjoyment* and *blessedness* [*salicheit*]<sup>56</sup>—amid our continual strivings.

Advancing upon my previous treatment of contemplation as a modeless love,<sup>56</sup> Ruusbroec will occasionally speak of enduring or "striving in failure" as none other than "swim[ming] against the current".<sup>57</sup> Citing one of Ruusbroec's more well-known statements, such a failure occurs within the rushing stream of God's uncreated grace, the overflowing gift of the Holy Spirit itself and its stirring touch [*gherinen*] that likewise demands a return—a demand, which for the creature alone is impossible.

This flowing of God always demands a flowing back, for God is a flowing, ebbing sea, which flows without cease into all His beloved, according to each one's needs and dignity. And He is ebbing back in again, drawing all those whom He has endowed on heaven and earth, together with all that they have and can do. And of some He demands more than they can do. For He shows Himself as so rich and generous, and so fathomlessly good and in this He demands minne and honor in proportion to His dignity [...] and in this all spirits fail; and thus their minne becomes modeless and without manner [...] And therefore, minne always begins again from the beginning, so that God may be loved [*ghemint*] according to His demand and according to their desire.

Dit vloeyen gods eyschet altoes een wedervloeyen; want god es eene vloeyende ebbende zee die zonder onderlaet vloeyt in alle sine gheminde, na elcs behoeven ende weerde. Ende hi es weder <in> ebbende alle die ghegavet sijn in hemel ende in eerde, met al dat si hebben ende vermoghen. Ende selcken eyschet hi meer dan si gheleysten connen. Want hi toent hem soe rijcke ende soe milde, ende soe grondeloes goet, ende in desen toene eyschet hi minne ende eere na sijn weerde [...] ende hier inne faelgeren alle gheeste, ende aldus wert de minne sonder wise ende zonder maniere [...] Ende hier omme wert de minne altoes van[den] eersten begonnen, op dat god ghemint worde na sinen eysch ende na hare begherte.<sup>58</sup>

---

instrument used, by philosophy, to ground finitude and to give reasons for it. God must be a foundation. God cannot be anything else than that instance that saves the finite system from its own contingency and incoherency. And yes, this is what we all call God or, rather, this is what we all called God"

<sup>55</sup> In general, we can attribute such a thesis to Richard Kearney's "anatheism" and the "God Who May Be". See Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutic of Religion*, (Blomington, IN:Indiana University Press, 2001).

<sup>56</sup> See supra Chapter 7, "Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part III—Enjoying the [Im]possible with Jan van Ruusbroec and Jean-Luc Marion".

<sup>57</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vanden blinkenden steen*, ll. 554-555: "[A]ltoes crighen in dat ontbliven, dat es swemmen jeghen strom."

<sup>58</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht*, b. ll. 1147-1154; 1155-1156; 1158-1159.

Herein, the failures of minne and its continual reversion back to its origins, 'beginning again from the beginning' can in no way be accredited to that of the supposed 'finitude of the subject' as we earlier critiqued in terms of consumer capitalism. Nor can its claims to 'eternity'—like the myth of Sisyphus—be reduced to an infinite, horizontal banality of repetitive sameness, as it is recalled by Marion. Later on, I will more substantially turn to Jean-Luc Marion's profound, reinvigorated articulation of the univocity of love later in this essay. Yet presently, it is tremendously helpful to contrast Ruusbroec's reflections of minne's infinite failure with that of Marion's erotic phenomenon, to which I quote at length:

Thus, I will receive myself, in the end, from the other. I will receive my ipseity from the other [...] my flesh in the eroticization of her flesh, and even my own faithfulness in her declaration, 'You truly love me!' But what I never cease in this way to receive from elsewhere I must still and always try to receive at the next moment, and at each new moment thereafter. In order to continue the *same* erotic reduction, it is necessary for us to start all over again from the beginning, unceasingly. We only love one another at the price of a continued re-creation, a continuous quasi-creation, without end or rest. We will only love one another on the condition that we endure repetition and *carry the weight* of the oath, like a rock that is too heavy, back up to the summit of eroticization [...]<sup>59</sup>

Marion here gives a stark portrait of the drudgery associated with the infinite failure between two lovers, from which Marion will phenomenologically attest *the need for a third*—at first, the child, then God—to witness and help bear the weight of such a burdensome oath between two lovers. In Marion's description, this oath requires continual reaffirmation, so as to once again continually ascend 'the summit of eroticization'. A demand, which binds the lovers mutually together in a erotic temporality of fidelity. Such a continual ascending, in turn defines their irrevocable particularity of the lovers as such. Their mutual failure *gives* and bestows upon the other their very particularity, their ipseity as lovers—a banalized infinity that is both strikingly similar, and yet profoundly different to what Ruusbroec here has in mind. The comparison between these two renderings of the infinite failure to *justly balance the scales of love's weight* cannot, however, be simply resolved by a facile account of one being 'positive' or an optimistic account, while the other is decidedly 'negative' and pessimistic. In no way do I intend to insinuate such a reading. Marion himself—and myself in turn—would rightly refuse such a caricature.

Rather, Ruusbroec's paradoxical esteem for the failure of love and its continual return to the beginning—both in grace and in glory—profoundly articulates the primary nature of the demands of minne and its exemplarist basis, to which our equally endless desires are spurred-on, set in motion and regarded as a response. In short, such a profundity is ensured in Ruusbroec's *univocal* understanding of minne itself as a thinking of love's excess. Contrasted by the view wherein the infinite, continual failure of erotic love proceeds from a profound lack, for Ruusbroec, neither the intrinsic demands [*eisch*] nor desires [*begheren*] of God's love and our return—*without confusion, without separation*—can be uncoupled from the other. The refusal of such an uncoupling is akin to the metaphor of the sea, which cannot bear separating either its ebbing out nor its flowing return. So

---

<sup>59</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) 195-196 (my emphasis).

too, the theological conviction that God Himself cannot but love Himself and creation with anything but Himself—"for He loves us with Himself as He is".<sup>60</sup>

## §2. NYGREN'S A-CONTEXTUALITY

Predictably, whenever love is accented in a more "divine key" within a current theological and/or philosophical context, confronting the modern-day influence of the Reformed Swedish theologian, Anders Nygren<sup>61</sup> is largely unavoidable. One "easily receives the impression", Finnish theologian Risto Saarinen remarks, that "Anders Nygren's old vision of eros and agape stubbornly refuses to die. No one agrees with Nygren", Saarinen aptly observes—at least explicitly—though without fail, the "dichotomies he created" persist and continuously reemerge.<sup>62</sup> In fact, historically, such dichotomies extend far beyond Nygren's immediate reach. Nevertheless, Nygren's creative historical "motif" research, in-between both dogmatic and historical theological methods, has had a profound impact upon modern understandings of this "central" Christian idea. That is, Nygren's sharp division between "vulgar" Platonic eros and "heavenly" Pauline/Christian agape has radically set the modern standards for the treatment of the divine character of human loving precisely as an attack upon the importance of contextual difference, human subjectivity and freedom.<sup>63</sup> For Nygren, divine love/agape is a highly particular, distinctly Christian form of loving, in which the Reformed bishop of Lund at one point describes as a

[S]mall stream which, even in the history of Christianity, flows along an extremely narrow channel and sometimes seems to lose itself entirely in its surroundings; but Eros is a broad river that overflows its banks, carrying everything away with it, so that it is not easy even in thought to dam it up and make it flow in an orderly course. When the Eros motif invades Christianity, however, its endeavor is to drive out and supplant the Agape motif [...]<sup>64</sup>

Here, in this *pure* 'small stream' (vividly recalling what we saw earlier in Fénelon's *pur amour*) that always runs the risk of becoming too-contextually contaminated, there are no merited acts of faith and charity as an erotic return and "flowing back" [*wedervloeien*] to God. A position, evidently *contra* Ruusbroec, who insists upon the economy of salvation as the creature's graced *reditus*, in the Son and with the Holy Spirit. But furthermore, in terms of literary metaphor alone, as well as in its theological context, Ruusbroec's minne is likewise entirely other than the trickling, 'narrow channel'

---

<sup>60</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, Book 1, ll. 806.

<sup>61</sup> See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969).

<sup>62</sup> See Risto Saarinen, "Love from Afar: Distance, Intimacy and the Theology of Love", in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, vol. 14, n. 2 (April 2012), 131-147, 131.

<sup>63</sup> Contra Geertjan Zuidwegt, "'Utrum Caritas Sit Aliquid Creatum In Anima': Aquinas on the Lombard's Identification of Charity with the Holy Spirit", *Recherches de Théologie et de Philosophie Médiévales* 79(1), (2012) 39-74, 71: "Peter Lombard's identification of our charity with the Holy Spirit [...] is rooted as well in a profound mystical tradition, reinvigorated by authors like Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry [...]. For Aquinas, however, this position, when rightly considered, 'is rather to the detriment of charity,' precisely because it renders the act of charity involuntary and the human subject a mere instrument of the Holy Spirit." And again, Zuidwegt writes (73), "Aquinas, however, does offer a way forward in thinking about deification. For Peter Lombard, the indwelling of the Trinity comes at the cost of eliminating human freedom", what Zuidwegt later on clarifies (74) as the "Holy Spirit moves us to the act of love", thereby robbing humanity as the sole origin for the act of love itself.

<sup>64</sup> See Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 49-50.

of Nygren's agape, as Ruusbroec's—admittedly, at times woody and largely didactic lyricism<sup>65</sup>, which pales in comparison to his richly textured prose—nonetheless strongly proclaims:

For Minne is an ebbing flood  
And it is useful above all virtues.  
Its activity is a burning glow  
That burns up everything in its encounter.

Want minne is eene ebbende vloet  
ende si es boven alle duechden spoet.  
Hare werc es eene bernende gloet,  
diet al verbernt in hare ghemoet.<sup>66</sup>

For Nygren, the aspiration for any 'ebbing', 'burning' return, is of course, squarely set within the contrasting motif of vulgarized Platonic or purely human eros, one that is original to man (hence pagan and non-Christian) and reflects its anthropological origins in its eschewed desired ends for the good as utterly self-seeking. Interestingly enough, Nygren is well-familiar with the tradition of what he calls medieval "minne piety"<sup>67</sup> as well as its "passion mysticism". Herein, Nygren broadly remarks upon the original development of sensual and thoroughly "secular" courtly literature and its "Minne poetry", while also recognizing the development that these cultural and secular motifs then had upon the then religious understanding of love at the time. Conversely, he contextually recognizes the mutual fecundity that such courtly literature likewise displayed, as it similarly bore influence by "ideas taken over from Christian theology".<sup>68</sup> However, for the Reformed theologian, such mutual fecundity—which indeed, historically is the case for various figures in the Low Countries—is nothing but a red flag, as the

blending of the sensible and super-sensible [i.e. 'spiritual'] which is characteristic of Minne-poetry comes to set its impress, especially in certain circles among the mystics, upon the conception of Christian love, giving it a trait of sensuality which hitherto had been in the main alien to it [...]. The Christian relation to God is now conceived in its entirety as *Gottesminne*, [and the human as] '*die minnende Seele*', can be portrayed as the beautiful queen for whom God and Christ have a yearning desire.<sup>69</sup>

Here, Nygren's generalized understanding of minne and its "bridal mysticism" is roughly accurate, though for him, such historical developments signal nothing but an "enthusiasm" as well as a "reinforcement of the Eros motif, with a certain tendency towards vulgar eros."<sup>70</sup> Here, vulgarity is understood in terms that certainly include, though are by no means primarily moral. That is to say, the "vulgarity" of minne is not exclusively reflective of an explicit sensuality and sense of desire attached to this form of Christian love. Rather, Nygren finds the tradition of minne piety both vulgar and dangerous because it strongly combines a univocal view of love with an "alarming proximity" in its "*love for Christ that [is] all too human*."<sup>71</sup> Hence, unlike the tradition of minne, for Nygren, the univocity of love as divine agape, thoroughly distilled from the contrasting eros motif, entails both a radical a-contextuality and tendency towards "*purity*" in its resistance to cultural contamination, as

<sup>65</sup> Which as an historically speculative aside, such poetry, which abounds at various points throughout his works, was perhaps intended more as a mnemonic device if anything for the lesser-educated portions of his audience.

<sup>66</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, book 2b, ll. 670-673.

<sup>67</sup> See Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 659-664.

<sup>68</sup> See Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 660-661.

<sup>69</sup> See Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 661.

<sup>70</sup> See Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 662.

<sup>71</sup> See Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 664 (my emphasis).

well as a radical dissimilarity of divine agape as juxtaposed against self-seeking natural eros as "all too human".

As Jean-Luc Marion argues, for Nygren, the difference between eros and agape, is not so much in "kind"—what I have termed as the 'manners' [*manieren*] of minne, as gratuitous outpouring and reciprocal demand—yet in the contending motifs of its 'object'.<sup>72</sup> And by object, this entails both its contrasting origins (immanent eros/transcendent agape) and its subsequent movement, from high to low, or vice versa. Hence, one can easily surmise Nygren's 'small stream' of transcendent, divine agape as an overly-spiritualized, a-contextual and highly particular form of univocal love. This is at times represented with the much maligned image of a "siphon" or a "tube" and its naïve literalism, wherein the Holy Spirit is directly and immediately 'poured' into our passive hearts as none other than a fundamental assault upon autonomous, human subjectivity.<sup>73</sup> Here too, as an inheritor of the Reformed tradition and its *sola gratia*, Nygren easily claims agape as "displaying a heavenly character from the beginning; it needs [*contra* eros] no spiritualizing or sublimation to be recognized as divine and heavenly agape."<sup>74</sup>

In keeping with these somewhat cliqué, hardened ecumenical positions, the typical Catholic response to this radically polarized view of divine and human love, it is to react against Nygren's views on several accounts. One counter traditionally upholds a view of *caritas* more in terms of a synthesis that accounts for both love's self-seeking (or 'physical', to use Rousselot's typology<sup>75</sup>) with that of its self-denial (or 'ecstatic' love). A 17<sup>th</sup> Century response is similarly framed—despite the fact that it was an internal-ecclesial controversy—in Bossuet's polemic against Fénelon's *pur amour* as an assault on the theological virtue of hope. Which, for the Eagle of Meaux, the purely gratuitous and "quietistic" aspects of *pur amour* was nothing but an outright rejection of love's more meritorious, self-seeking aspects.<sup>76</sup> Such a response is likewise seen in Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est* (2006), which can well be seen as sealing the Catholic response to Nygren's sharp distinction by what Benedict calls for as a renewed assessment and appreciation of eros, while fully acknowledging its at times marginalized and demoted status during certain historical periods of Christian Tradition. Advancing Benedict's call for reassessing a more visible and assertive account of eros within Christian understandings of love can well situate in part my own theological retrieval of the "alarming proximity" of Ruusbroec's minne and the theological anthropology of its restless stirring—*interior intimo meo*—while exploring the rhythm and synthesis of its various modalities as a unified understanding of love.

Another basic Catholic response to Nygren's divergent motifs is to highlight the absence of a foundational theology of creation—one that is 'natively' oriented to fundamentally receive, respond and *mutually* cooperate with such an asymmetrical outpouring of God's gratuitous love and the drama of salvation. Herein, Nygren's soteriological, purely 'extrinsic', divine 'siphon', in addition to his

---

<sup>72</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012) 272-273.

<sup>73</sup> cf Rom. 5, 5.

<sup>74</sup> See Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 51.

<sup>75</sup> See generally the typology of 'physical', typified by Aquinas, with that of 'ecstatic', as typified by Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry, in Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution*, trans. Alan Vincelette, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001).

<sup>76</sup> See supra Chapter 6, "Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part II—Pure Gift, Pur Amour".



read upon interiority, completely does away with any notion of "creation" and the fundamentally graced-nature of the world, as *created* and its resident anthropological dynamism, seen in terms of *potentia obedientialis*.<sup>77</sup> Such a view of creation and its receptivity, or 'natural desire for God', is of course a fundamental perspective in someone such as Ruusbroec, as particularly reflected in his dynamic, exemplarist thought.

However, while Ruusbroec's minne offers an alternative to more divisive accounts of love that root their high-particularity upon an equally asymmetrical, a-contextual basis, this does not specifically address the question of love's univocal or analogical character. That is, of the uncreated/created nature of such love. In fact, Catholic responses in countering this divisive approach, as typified by Nygren, regularly portray any emphasis upon the univocal, divine character of love and/or grace as indeed an extrinsic imposition and attack upon "history" and the relative autonomy of human subjectivity and the creaturely pursuit of the virtuous good. Hence, such views too hastily become framed within outstanding Reformation/Counter-Reformation divides, such that the more "the Protestants attacked created grace, the more they [Catholic Counter-Reformationists] themselves had to fix their attention on created grace."<sup>78</sup> And yet, the late Leuven Jesuit moral theologian Piet Fransen (†1983)<sup>79</sup> writes, a "small minority among the theologians kept protesting through the centuries"—of which, we can include Fransen amongst these ranks—"against the latter assumption [...] [who] deliberately based themselves on the teaching of Scripture or on the doctrine of the ancient Fathers and the mystical tradition of the Middle Ages."<sup>80</sup> Citing Fransen, we can also enlist in this camp the philosopher of religion Louis Dupré and his long fascination with Christian mysticism as stemming against this 'latter assumption'. Starting with his initial ground-breaking work, *The Other Dimension*, Dupré broadly reads the mystical theological tradition of the West (with strong emphasis upon Ruusbroec) *contra* the "unfortunate" Scholastic "attempts to classify grace somewhere in the Aristotelian category of accident" and efficient causality.<sup>81</sup> Such a position draws from the De Lubac's thesis in *Surnaturel* and the approach to issues of nature and grace as somehow a "gratuitous 'addition' to human nature."<sup>82</sup> Not only does such a mystical approach offer an alternative to the 'fateful separation'—what he would later on develop in *Passage to Modernity*<sup>83</sup>—seen, for example, in the increasing view of 'nature' as an autonomous whole and increasingly 'profane concept'. The traditions of mystical theology are thus read as countering such views by concentrating upon the view of grace's *intrinsic* dimensions, rather than solely as an 'added transcendence'.<sup>84</sup> Herein, the stress upon univocity appears once more, as Dupré notes that "mystically oriented theologians continued to speak" well after Trent, "of an indwelling of *God himself*, rather than a created grace, in the soul."<sup>85</sup> Therefore, to address this counter perspective,

---

<sup>77</sup> See supra, "FJvB, native attunement and the 'admirabile commercium'".

<sup>78</sup> See supra note 13.

<sup>79</sup> In passing, it is affectionately recalled that Piet Fransen passed away on the feast day of the 'admirable' Brabantine doctor himself, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1983.

<sup>80</sup> Piet Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 97.

<sup>81</sup> See Louis Dupré, *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 459.

<sup>82</sup> Dupre, *The Other Dimension*, 460.

<sup>83</sup> See Louis Dupre, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Have, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), esp. 165-248.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*

we now turn more extensively to Piet Fransen and the ongoing, historical legacy of this mystical theological counter perspective.

### § 3. PIET FRANSEN, RUUSBROEC AND LEUVEN PERSONALISM

Coming out of the mid to late-20<sup>th</sup> Century Leuven personalist tradition, the moral theologian Piet Fransen is generally regarded—alongside fellow Jesuits Karl Rahner and his "supernatural existential", as well as Juan Alfaro—for helping coin the idea of a 'fundamental option'.<sup>86</sup> In an early essay "Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace", Fransen speaks about this option as a "fundamental liberty" as well as an "existential and totalizing option" whereby "*I express wholly* all that I wish to be in this world and before God."<sup>87</sup> Herein, such a fundamental option is regarded as *distinct*, yet *inseparable* from what is traditionally regarded as our free voluntarily actions wherein we decide upon specific actions as well as our concrete experiences.<sup>88</sup> For Fransen, such a fundamental option is envisaged as something far more intrinsic and interior than our everyday moral actions, as he at one point describes it as the "soul of our daily actions" or the ground in which this total commitment is inextricably "*implied* in every truly human and free action".<sup>89</sup> Speaking as a Jesuit, and with the unmistakable language of a spiritual director, Fransen is adamant that we cannot isolate such a fundamental option and speak of it directly and concretely "except by a *long process of maturation in time*" as it becomes incarnate in concrete actions "in which man is no longer alone in bearing the responsibility of his life."<sup>90</sup> Rather, concretely discerning such a fundamental option and its *disposition*<sup>91</sup> towards God and others is distinctly personal precisely insofar as it leads us to a fundamental alterity and relational encounter with God's indwelling in the human person. Hence, distinguishing these two primary liberties within the human person is of "capital importance" Fransen writes, "in order to understand human behavior in general, and especially to detect the incidence of divine grace in us."<sup>92</sup>

Once more, we are reintroduced to our theme of *univocity*, this time specifically in the language of divine, or "uncreated" grace as intricately linked to the idea of fundamental option. And yet, such a fundamental option is not to be unilaterally confused with grace itself. Rather, the density of this total commitment is both *fully ours*, and *fully God's*. In Ruusbroec's idiom, the distinction between "natural contemplation" [*natuerlic scouwen*] and the loving gift of graced, "supernatural contemplation", (which he too well makes in his early student work, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven*<sup>93</sup>) in many respects well accords with Fransen's description of the fundamental option. For Ruusbroec,

---

<sup>86</sup> See generally, James F. Keenan, SJ, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 186-188.

<sup>87</sup> See Fransen, "Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace", *Intelligent Theology*, vol. III, *Universal Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969) 7-45, 12.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Fransen, "Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace", 13.

<sup>90</sup> Fransen, "Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace", 16.

<sup>91</sup> I use this word concretely, for in fact, Fransen's thinking of "fundamental option" appears to strongly accord with Rik van Nieuwenhove's general scholarly position regarding "contemplation" more in terms of a moral "disposition" rather than a concrete experience.

<sup>92</sup> Fransen, "Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace", 12.

<sup>93</sup> See my treatment of this issue in the article, "Touching and Being Touched", in *Bijdragen, International Journal in Philosophy and Theology* 73 (2012), 325-336.

such natural contemplation accounts for the human person's natural inclination—apart from distinct actions and external occupations with objects of the world (or 'images')—to turn-inward and rest in its bare, unimaged [*onghebeeldt*] ground. By this mannerless, imageless turning inward (which is to say without any particular technique), Ruusbroec thus depicts human autonomy resting in such a ground as the natural, albeit limited, encounter with God in the human person. Here too, for both Ruusbroec and Fransen, the stirring touch of divine grace is a reality at the "very centre of my personality" and one of "existential density", which "gently urges me, *from inside*, to a fundamental option: this time a supernatural one, because divine, struck in the image of the Son by the seal of the Holy Ghost."<sup>94</sup>

Herein, I deliberately make this connection to Fransen's fundamental option, not only with Ruusbroec himself (which is entirely warranted, as we will soon see) but furthermore, specifically within the language of contemplation and mystical theology as clearly needed to help corroborate—within a predominantly modern, moral theological context—what in fact Fransen is getting at with his idea of "fundamental option". In this regard, primarily as a moral theologian, it is interesting to note how even early on, this idea of "fundamental option" generated significant confusion. Fransen unequivocally states,

Note well: these two forms of liberty *have no separate existence*. We have often noticed that we are not understood on this point. The fundamental option is not one particular action, more important than others, following or preceding the more specialized choice of some concrete action. It is not a matter of determining in the first instance a 'fundamental option', and then freely developing all the concrete implications, as does an architect who first designs the sketch of the house to be built, and then carries out the plan down to its last details [...]<sup>95</sup>

However, Fransen's admonitions seem to have gone unheeded, as the reception of this view of a 'fundamental option' in the years after the Council became increasingly divisive within Catholic moral theology. Attesting to such divisive readings, John Paul II's papal encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1993)<sup>96</sup> presents proponents of a 'fundamental option' largely in a critical light as driving a wedge between the basic, existential decision of fundamental orientation of life itself and the efficacy of specific moral acts. For such a fundamental option, the encyclical states, can be "radically changed by particular acts" and that to maintain such a separation in favor of the greater primacy of the fundamental option itself "thus involves a denial of Catholic doctrine on mortal sin."<sup>97</sup> While the breadth and complexity of the specific moral theological ramifications clearly extends beyond the boundaries of this present work, for Fransen, the central import of this issue—which in of itself, extends beyond moral theology—is unmistakably clear when he states:

If grace is indeed love, then it means freedom. There is nothing so personal, so spontaneous, so free as love. Love is the soul of freedom. But we are able to grasp this only when we do not conceive of grace as a 'thing' in us, some sort of directionless energy. Neither may we think it apart from the

---

<sup>94</sup> Fransen, "Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace", 23-24.

<sup>95</sup> Fransen, "Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace", 12.

<sup>96</sup> See *Veritatis Splendor*, n. 65-70.

<sup>97</sup> See *Veritatis Splendor*, n.70.

divine indwelling. Grace originates from the indwelling, is bred in the indwelling and leads to a more complete indwelling.<sup>98</sup>

Herein, Fransen maintains the central importance of this relational theological anthropology of divine indwelling in his resourcing an older, and more genuine depiction of the *life of grace*, while noting that by the "time of Scotus," and the onset of Nominalism, "the notion of grace had become more like an object".<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, its object status, treated at times exclusively within view of Aristotelian efficient causality, was viewed as an "accidental object", thereby sealing its "extrincist" view of nature and grace. While as a strong precaution, Fransen warns that "no sooner do we detach created grace from the living mystery of the divine indwelling than difficulties will crowd upon us thick and fast. For then we no longer see grace as a life *in* God but somehow as a life *before* God. And thus grace is misconstrued."<sup>100</sup>

Given this strong emphasis upon a theological anthropology of divine indwelling, it should be thus no surprise that this Flemish Jesuit was also, unmistakably, a very keen and perceptive reader of Ruusbroec himself. An influence, unmistakably seen throughout his major works, *Gods Genade en de Mens* (1959) [ET: *Divine Grace and Man*<sup>101</sup>] as well as its further revised 1969 edition, *The New Life of Grace*. In his early essay on the "Psychology of Divine Grace", Fransen acknowledges this profound indebtedness to the Brabantine contemplative wherein concluding his initial section on the "fundamental option" and its strong reliance of a theological anthropology of divine indwelling—a freedom that extends from "the depth of himself, man reposes in the hands of God and God sustains him in existence"—Fransen goes on to boldly attribute his positions as a modern retrieval of Ruusbroec. "In writing these pages we desire nothing more than to express in modern language one of the most profound thoughts of the anthropology of Blessed John Ruusbroec."<sup>102</sup> In turn, we can situate Fransen's retrieval of Ruusbroec in his equally "profound conviction, a conviction shared by most of the north-western European theologians [...] that there is no possibility at all for a sound, religious reflection on dogma without a prolonged and extensive study of the Bible and the Church's tradition."<sup>103</sup> For such a resourcement, Fransen maintains, leaves theologians with a "real renovation of their Speculative Theology, whereas when they shut themselves up in their very learned reflections and speculations, they are left with dreary and empty human abstractions, which convince nobody but themselves."<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Fransen, *New Life of Grace*, 129.

<sup>99</sup> See Piet Fransen, "Sacramental Grace and Divine Indwelling", trans. Kevin Smyth, in Fransen, *Intelligent Theology*, vol. 1: *The Trinity Lives in us and we celebrate that life*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1967) 91-126, 92. See also Fransen, *New Life of Grace*, 55: "Essentially, grace consists in this: that God, the Blessed Trinity, loves us. The trinitarian love consists in the union of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with us....In conformity with the language of Scripture, this union is generally called the divine indwelling....All these various conceptions—divine love, presence, indwelling, image and likeness, sanctification and justification—are simply different approaches [...] to one identical reality: that through grace we share in the divine life."

<sup>100</sup> Fransen, *New Life of Grace*, 113.

<sup>101</sup> Piet Fransen, *Divine Grace and Man*, trans. Georges Dupont S.J., (New York: Mentor-Omega Books, 1962)

<sup>102</sup> Fransen, "Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace", 18, 19.

<sup>103</sup> See Piet Fransen, "Three Ways of Dogmatic Thought", in *Intelligent Theology*, vol. 1: *The Trinity Lives in us and We Celebrate that Life* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1967) 9-39, 11.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*

Given such an indebtedness, the question remains to what extent Fransen's "modern" conceptual framework, in the context of Leuven personalism, could permit a genuine retrieval of Ruusbroec. In this regard, it is important to remember that Fransen was certainly influenced and associated with the theological milieu of Leuven personalism of his day.<sup>105</sup> Though, in view of much its present-day critique for this school of thought as being largely incapable of either thinking a 'relational self' nor adequately responding to an overly-individualistic account of the human person as alien to community—it is therefore quite interesting to hear Fransen relate the social and embodied character of the fundamental option as a "communal philosophy of the person".<sup>106</sup> Similarly, in 1969, Fransen reacts to such views by distinguishing between 'person' and 'personalistic':

Before we pass on to considering created grace, conferred on us by the divine indwelling, we should free ourselves once and for all from individualistic conceptions. We do not say 'personalistic', for that is quite another thing. God's indwelling produces a true solidarity in us, one which achieved its living expression in God's people, the Church, the body of Christ, His Bride in heaven and on earth [...] Our attempt should produce a unified vision of the Church and grace, two inseparable aspects of redemption<sup>107</sup>

Here too, in a similar instance, Fransen draws an interesting linkage between Ruusbroec himself and the well-known theologian of the Mystical Body, fellow Leuven Jesuit, Emile Mersch, when Fransen writes, "Six centuries later, in the Netherlands by the sea, of which Ruysbroeck spoke so willingly, Father Emile Mersch, the well-known theologian of the Mystical Body, renewed the theology of grace and summed it up in the striking title of his article '*Filii in Filio*': grace makes us, each one individually and all in common, 'sons of God in the Son'."<sup>108</sup> While in a chapter entitled "Christian Humanism", Fransen similarly echoes this when exclaiming that in the life of grace, "our newness of life, far from separating us from human kind, intensifies our common human solidarity."<sup>109</sup>

From this brief overview of Fransen's thought and the influence of figures such as Ruusbroec have had upon his thought, it therefore becomes increasingly clear why this Leuven theologian insists that "created grace has no existence as a distinct actuality, but that by its inner dynamism it connects us with the Trinity."<sup>110</sup> To speak as we traditionally do, in terms of a 'state of grace', such a state, Fransen reminds us, is not to be viewed as a distinct 'thing' that can be possessed, wielded and at the disposal of one who either receives or administers such grace. However, Fransen rightly points out that the Church in her history has at times tremendously suffered from a lack of nuance and subtlety and instead often presented a truly "crude notion of what grace is", especially by way of the "miserable traffic in indulgences" that was at the heart of Luther's initial and "justifiable protest", as well as recalling Ruusbroec's own at times severe critiques of similar such abuses.<sup>111</sup> However, we

---

<sup>105</sup> See Francis Colborn SJ, "The Theology of Grace: Present Trends and Future Directions," *Theological Studies*, vol. XXXI (1970) 692-711.

<sup>106</sup> Fransen, "Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace", 17.

<sup>107</sup> Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 58.

<sup>108</sup> Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 38.

<sup>109</sup> See Piet Fransen, *Intelligent Theology*, vol. III, *A Universal Theology*, 101-114, 108. Which, in his "Forward", Fransen writes: "'Christian Humanism' was read to an audience of nuns in New York on the eve of the second Vatican Council. It shows how the 'humanisation' of Christendom was already in the air."

<sup>110</sup> Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 87.

<sup>111</sup> Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 89.

will now see that such protests by no means originated in Luther himself, as Ruusbroec's critiques in ecclesiastical abuse are quite severe at times. Likewise, we will explore such critique precisely as it emerges from and intersects with a univocal view of love, as put forth by Peter Lombard and inescapably colored by the legacy of outstanding (Counter) Reformation disputes.

#### A. MAINTAINING THE DYNAMISM OF UNCREATED/CREATED GRACE

Similar to the previous observation concerning the persistence of Anders Nygren's influence—despite, what Saarinen observes as the fact that 'hardly anyone agrees with him anymore' (which is indeed an interesting remark, especially coming from a Reformed Scandinavian theologian nonetheless)—in the following, we can now more substantially consider the reasons behind this 'stubborn' re-occurrence. In short, as Piet Fransen presents the Lombard's thesis concerning univocal love and the Holy Spirit and its reaffirmation within the mystical theological tradition, consideration of this ongoing legacy cannot bypass outstanding divides between the Reformation and Counter-Reformation and in particular, its views upon uncreated and created grace. For the reception of the *Magister Sententiarum* view that the charity with which we love God and neighbor is none other than the Holy Spirit is indubitably framed by such outstanding conflicts, which are in turn replayed in responses to Nygren's asymmetrical, a-contextual agape.

While proceeding from the bold paradox of the Lombard, Fransen regularly raises the important, yet propaedeutic question of how does one "remain" in a state of grace, for it is "evident that we do not uninterruptedly make acts of faith and charity".<sup>112</sup> In a related context, such a question poses deep relevance to the mystical theology of Ruusbroec, who's thinking of union with God is characterized not in terms of religious and/or mystical experience, the latter of which are generally presented as momentary, successive finite acts. Rather than depicting such a union with God exclusively in terms of a "moral union" comprised of specific acts and "experiences", the views of the Brabantine contemplative in this sense are clearly more ontological, akin to what Fransen denominated as the "fundamental option". That is, as a totalizing commitment and disposition that is distinct from, yet inseparable from our concrete life in the world. Thus, we can speak of such a union, without succumbing to an "overly spiritualized reading", precisely in terms of a *life*. A life, which "without confusion, without separation", continuously demands anew a reintegration into the concrete particular, a continuous life, a *ghemeyne leven*. Thus, created grace is "at once the fruit and the bond of the indwelling" to which Fransen then demands that we thus need a "dynamic concept" to hold in tension with the uncreated life of grace that is, univocally, "none other than God himself".<sup>113</sup>

To arrive at such a *dynamic concept* of the very life of grace, Fransen thus affirms, contra the a-contextuality of Nygren's agape motif, that the locus of such uncreated grace and its creaturely bond is none other than the concrete particular of the world.<sup>114</sup> "We are called to follow Christ in this

---

<sup>112</sup> Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 88.

<sup>113</sup> Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 103.

<sup>114</sup> See Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 330: "The world, where sin and its consequences hold sway, is thus the *place* where grace comes to us, where God speaks to us of love and reconciliation, where, with the Son and

world, in this human situation, as real human beings, brothers and sisters of every man."<sup>115</sup> Such particularity is rooted in the work of redemption that grace impels us towards, while in the spirit of Christian humanism, Fransen repeatedly refers to a central point of Ruusbroec's own thinking upon the intrinsic dynamism of grace:

Now, the grace of God which flows out of God is an inward impulse or prodding of the Holy Spirit, Who impels our spirit from within and stokes it towards all virtue. This grace flows from within, not from without. For God is more inwards to us than we are to ourselves, and His inward impulse, or working, within us, naturally or supernaturally, is nearer and more inner to us than our own work. And therefore God works in us from within outwards, and all creatures [work] from without inwards. And this is why grace and all divine gifts and God's interior speech comes from within, in the unity of our spirit, not from without, in the imagination, by sensory images.

Nu es die gracie gods, die ute gode vloeyt, een inwindich driven ochte jaghen des heylichs gheests die onzen gheest drivet van binnen ende stoecht in alle duechden. Dese gracie vloeyt van binnen, niet van buyten. Want god es ons inwindigher dan wij ons selven sijn, ende sijn inwindich driven ochte werken in ons, natuerlijcke ochte overnatuerlijcke, es ons naerre ende innigher dan ons eyeghen wercken; ende daer omme werket god in ons van binnen uutweert, ende alle creatueren van buten inwert. Ende hier omme comt gracie ende all godlijcke gaven ende gods inspreken, van binnen in eenicheit ons gheests, niet van buyten inder fantasien, met senlijcken beelden.<sup>116</sup>

In this formidably profound passage, we clearly hear the Brabantine contemplative draw from St. Augustine's well-known "*interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*" [higher than my highest and more inward than my innermost self].<sup>117</sup> In this view, God's greater dissimilarity and transcendence is affirmed, not as "standing *outside us*, as one like us; He is *within us*," Fransen writes, while remarking that we must "constantly correct our instinctive way of conceiving God's working in us."<sup>118</sup> Thus, such a corrective view that Fransen favorably retrieves in the work of Ruusbroec's rich theological immanence strongly counteracts views of 'extrincism' that would thereby conflate the *demands* and *debt* of minne<sup>119</sup> as nothing other than a violent and *external* imposition upon the autonomous, human subject. And therefore, in this sense, this is indeed a strong corrective to readings that would otherwise insist that a certain intrinsic violence occurs to the human subject amid discussion of love's univocity as not entirely originating from the self. Rather, as a view of minne's continual desire cannot be uncoupled from the inexhaustible and impossible plenitude of its demands, such demands are instead spoken of in terms of intrinsically impelling us and "stok[ing] it towards all virtue" [*stoecht in alle duechden*]<sup>120</sup>—what Ruusbroec similarly states in another work, that "God's touch, which flows out to us, fans our restlessness and demands our action, namely that we love the love eternal." [*minnen die ewighe minnen*]<sup>120</sup>

---

through the power of the Spirit, we return to the Father in faith and charity. We do so with and in Christ *because Christ Himself has done so.*"

<sup>115</sup> Fransen, *Intelligent Theology*, vol. III, 107.

<sup>116</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Die Geestelike Brulocht*, b, ll. 128-137. See also Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 22. See supra, my discussion of this passage of Ruusbroec and the 'dance of grace' in the chapter, Chapter 4, "Frans Jozef van Beeck, native attunement, and the 'admirabile commercium'."

<sup>117</sup> See Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 6, 11.

<sup>118</sup> Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 132.

<sup>119</sup> See supra, Chapter 1, "A Hunger Unstilled" and the section, 'minne as a modeless practice'.

<sup>120</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 726-727: "Want dat uutvloeyende gherinen gods stoecht ongheduer ende eyscht ons werc, dat es dat wij minnen die ewighe minne."

As a moral theologian, the appeal of retrieving Ruusbroec's theological immanence is evident at this juncture, for indeed it presents a view of moral normativity away from the extrinsic language of "law" and "imperative". Instead, Ruusbroec's intrinsic views enable Fransen to articulate that instead of "binding and determining us to do what is good", the insistence of divine indwelling posits that "As Creator, He stands at the well-spring of our existence, at the point where it flows uninterruptedly [...] He alone can reach our freedom right at its source and yet do it no violence."<sup>121</sup> In this sense, Fransen is indeed sound in his interpretation of Ruusbroec, yet his retrieval at this instance also colludes with a far more modern sense of freedom as equated with moral autonomy, in addition to a view of conscience that is altogether foreign to Ruusbroec in this sense. For indeed, for Ruusbroec, to 'know thyself' and continuously discern "ourselves from falling into grievous sins" we must therefore "turn inward into ourselves [...] and keep our dwelling with God's speaking in us."<sup>122</sup> Herein, while Ruusbroec will speak of this turning inward to the indwelling word of God as an "inleading food [*inleidende spise*] in which God tastes better to him than all things".<sup>123</sup> Yet, he will also equally stress that the cultivation of such a taste will none other than reaffirm that "our life shall be in agreement with holy Scripture and with all the saints. And through love of virtue and real humility we shall desire to be admonished and taught by the Scriptures and all men."<sup>124</sup> Herein, we can say that Ruusbroec interestingly combines this view of divine indwelling with an equal desire in responding to such an indwelling by way of self-negation, virtuous obedience, mortification and self-abandon, which he himself readily admits is "very annoying to hear and know for all those who do not deny themselves completely and do not willingly abandon all of their own selfness".<sup>125</sup>

To understand this, it is crucial to keep in mind that in fact, for Ruusbroec, the divine indwelling (or 'mutual indwelling') by no means foreshadows what we have come to know as the strong modern subject. In fact, it is quite the opposite, as his relational thinking instead points to a very strong non-foundationalist view of the self—accenting not so much Charles Taylor's pre-modern "porous self" set in contrast with modernity's "buffered self" as much as one of internal irruption and erotic instability that is continuously marked by a restlessness of alterity.

However, the greater relevance of this discussion explicitly is the very real temptation to present this understanding of theological immanence, divine indwelling and ultimately, the univocity of love as none other than an occasion to present a very strong, modern subject. One in which is largely guilty of an anthropological reduction that fails to think a theological anthropology based primarily upon the difference and the greater dissimilarity of God and the order of grace to which, gratuitously, we are invited to share in. In responding to this challenge, I have argued at several places that in fact Ruusbroec can critically aid in such a renewed anthropology, both in terms of a

---

<sup>121</sup> Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 132.

<sup>122</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia X, Vanden Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 28-32: "Want zelzn wij staende bliven ende behuedt werden dat wij niet en vallen in groven zonden, soe moeten wij ons zelven leeren kinnen ende ons selfs waer nemen, ende eenvoldich inkeren in ons zelven, ende inwoenende bliven biden insprekene gods."

<sup>123</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 8-9: "[...] ende dien dat woort gods es een inleidende spise daer hem god in smaect boven alle dinc".

<sup>124</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 32-35: "Ende dan sal onze leven concorderen metter heylicher scriftueren ende met allen heylighen. Ende overmids minne der duecht ende rechte oetmoedicheit, zoe selen wij begheren berespt ende gheleert te sine vander screft ende van alle menschen."

<sup>125</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Vier Becoringhen*, ll. 37-40: "Want alle dese dinghe sijn herde verdrietelijc te hoorne ende te wetene alle den gheenen die hem selven te male niet en laten, ende alre eyghenheit haers selfs <willichlijcke> niet en vertien".



renewed approach to relationality, as well as a theology of love, as he situates the otherness and uncreatedness of minne as actively emerging within the very distinction and particularity of individuals in and through our loving works.<sup>126</sup> For Fransen, however, while he too appreciates the Brabantine's dynamic between the gratuitousness of God's grace and our reciprocal, economic exchange as the "finest unfolding of ourselves", the *utter distinctiveness and particularity of minne and its strong, erotic sense underlining the life of grace as a life of continuous demands and desires is surprisingly absent from his retrieval*. Herein, I wish not to simply advance my own overall thesis in my research into Ruusbroec as a counter to Fransen. Instead, by emphasizing divine indwelling's rich, theological immanence amid the strong absence of attention towards minne's characteristic desire [*begheeren*] and its continual praxis [*oefinghen*] in both exterior and interior works, ultimately, the greater dissimilarity and otherness of God Himself becomes eclipsed in Fransen's account. Repeatedly, both in Ruusbroec's speculative thought, as well as, from what we can surmise to be his more practical, spiritual guidance itself, the question of desire itself regularly functions as indicating whether one's love is primarily theocentric, or anthropocentric. The criterion of desire is thus: whether, what we desire is ultimately similar to and coincident to ourselves, thereby ultimately seeking an "end" or a "rest from" such desire. Or, is such desire primarily dissimilar, modeless and irrupting from beyond ourselves and thus ultimately foregoing such rest in view of its incomprehensible and impossible origins and ends itself.

Absent of the utter distinctiveness of minne itself at the very heart of Ruusbroec's dynamic thought, it is indeed evident that *Fransen's personalism* too readily falls into an anthropological reduction in his stress of divine indwelling, which increasingly shows an inability to account for the utter alterity, dissimilarity and gratuitousness of the order of grace and God's love. *For such emphasis is utterly essential to uphold, especially when putting forward a strongly univocal view of love and divine grace*. Such an anthropological reduction dramatically appears, as Fransen exclaimed to a group of religious nuns in New York, on the 'eve of the Council', when he stated: "Supernatural life is, according to Christ's image of it, *the more human as it is the more divine*. Every form of spirituality which estranges us from the common simple duties of humanity is an illusion, an act of dishonesty and insincerity".<sup>127</sup> Hence, as a corrective to this removed and destructive spirituality, Fransen then exhorts: "This is our vocation and calling: to find God in our human life. We have to change it from within, as Christ did, through our full and sincere dedication to all men".<sup>128</sup>

To a significant degree, I would fundamentally join Fransen in agreement with his exhortations and yet, in his language of sanctification and deification<sup>129</sup>, there is a profoundly serious inversion that he makes of Ruusbroec's writings on deification [*overforminghe*] and the common life. Namely, while for Ruusbroec, it is the paradox of deification that only by deepening in a relational, loving union (or 'encounter') with the otherness of the Trinitarian God that one becomes more radically human, radically particular and thereby "common" to both God and others in the world.

---

<sup>126</sup> See e.g. Ruusbroec, *The Little Book of Enlightenment*, II. 163-4. "The impulse of love is always directed to the advantage and the capacity of each and everyone."

<sup>127</sup> Fransen, *Intelligent Theology*, vol. III, 108 (my emphasis).

<sup>128</sup> Fransen, *Intelligent Theology*, vol. III, 109.

<sup>129</sup> See Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, 133: "Properly speaking, we do not receive grace; we do not possess it as something foreign to us, or as something entering into us from outside; but *we are our grace*". Or again, when he claims that not only is there nothing unnatural to the supernatural, but furthermore, "our divinization is also our humanization". (135)

Hence, *there is nothing ordinary about being "common"*. Rather, it is distinctly a mark of holiness. While Fransen insists on quite the opposite, as he writes that it is by one's extensively committed action of freely becoming myself, "that centre of personal *density* in which I am most myself, and, by reason of that, most in God."<sup>130</sup> In various contexts, Fransen will speak of this personal core of divine indwelling in terms of "*density*". Hence, the Augustinian metaphor, "my love is my weight"<sup>131</sup> [*pondus meum amor meus*] returns once again. First off, we see it in Ruusbroec, in terms of balancing the "scales" of God's gratuitous love. Similarly, we see it in the Sisyphean drudgery of Marion's 'oath' and its erotic temporality of banal sameness. And now again, the "density" of such *pondus* takes on a significant new turn in the modern retrieval of these ideas in Fransen. For such an "existential density that these features of the divine image are diffused through all levels of my existence" is at the core of his influential views of "fundamental option". For it is precisely this density that allows Fransen to distinguish such a core as more primary and fundamental to our specific moral acts.<sup>132</sup> While equally important, Fransen contends, it allows for us "to detect the incidence of divine grace in us" as intrinsically linked to the density of this fundamental option. Therefore, for Fransen, working within the tradition of Leuven personalism, the image of "density" becomes one of concentration in one's person itself:

The Relation of God is Love. The image of God in us will therefore also be love: the force of love of God, of others and of myself in God. This fundamental power of love constitutes my person. I am in fact a person because I am spirit. Because I am spirit, I am liberty and therefore love. For liberty is above all a power of spontaneous gift from one person to another, before being choice, election, judgment and free will.<sup>133</sup>

Again, in so many respects, Fransen's writings can well be viewed as significant and contextually appropriate for his time, though we can already see the necessary post-modern counter of difference and alterity (which, in this instance) is a going beyond the tradition of Leuven personalism. Likewise, questions of particularity, contextual plurality and religious identity come to the fore as a necessary counter. Here, Fransen's humanizing principle, in its universal appeal, accords with the ambition for 'unity' that characterized his times, wherein he writes: "Our period looks for totality".<sup>134</sup> Hence, such an impetus is profoundly contrary to older spiritualities that translated sanctity as necessarily entailing a removal from life in the world, as a renouncing of life as somehow "too human". With its call for universal holiness, as rooted in our common baptism<sup>135</sup> the Council has rightfully and strongly corrected such exaggerated views. And yet, amid such a humanizing instinct, it is equally the loss of all particularity that is immediately evident, as a "common life" loses its necessary Incarnational and Trinitarian source and instead, becomes more blandly translated as co-insiding with more universal, human aspirations. Which, as we saw earlier, is far removed from the traditions of mystical theology itself as a major contributor to this view of "common life", understand as the universal call to holiness.

---

<sup>130</sup> See Fransen, "Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace", 11 (my emphasis).

<sup>131</sup> See Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 13: 9.10.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Fransen, *Intelligent Theology*, vol. III, 11.

<sup>134</sup> Fransen, *Intelligent Theology*, vol. III, 7.

<sup>135</sup> See *Lumen Gentium*, ch. 5.

Furthermore, and at a historical remove, when Fransen targets these outdated spiritualities that he seeks to correct on the 'council's eve', predictably, it is the more distinctive elements within such spiritual traditions, such as questions of "sacrifice" and the "redemptiveness of suffering" that are immediately targeted as crudely medieval, offering a far too "materialistic" depiction of grace, as suffering itself is nothing but a "neutral" reality.<sup>136</sup> Hereto, questions such as redemptive efficacy of the Cross, or Schillebeeckx's view of salvation, "despite the Cross"<sup>137</sup> become increasingly framed in terms of the coincidence of grace with the world and its elimination of particularity and otherness in view of of this desire for "totality".

#### § 4. MARION AND THE UNIVOCITY OF LOVE

It is precisely in view of these critiques of an anthropological reduction<sup>138</sup> that we thus now turn to Jean-Luc Marion's asymmetrical thought of *confessio* in his reading of St. Augustine as offering a postmodern corrective view of the "bold paradox" of the univocity of love itself. Concerning various modern and contemporary approaches to the univocity of love, the thought of Jean-Luc Marion and its emphasis upon givenness of the "weight of love" or *pondus amoris* certainly stands out as rigorously provocative. It makes perfect sense that Marion would more explicitly turn to Augustine in his work, *In the Self's Place* (2008/ ET 2012), as he has given various hints throughout the years that the Bishop of Hippo was never too far from his thought on a range of themes.<sup>139</sup> Thus, as Fransen's modern translation of Ruusbroec's thought emphasized a personalist anthropology of "divine indwelling"—a divine core of the human subject, which in turn grounds the freedom and intentionality of the subject's "fundamental option" to respond in its moral and existential character, we see the radical inverse in Marion's approach. Namely, by way of thinking love's radical givenness—that is, its excess and absolute anteriority of its call, that which "comes over me from an other" is thereby primary to the secondary order of one's meaning and intentionality as a response, a "chiasmus"<sup>140</sup>, akin to the opening words at Lauds: "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall declare

---

<sup>136</sup> See Fransen, Fransen, *Intelligent Theology*, vol. III, 108-110.

<sup>137</sup> See generally Rik van Nieuwenhove, "The Christian Response to Suffering, and the Significance of the Model of the Church as Body of Christ", *Angelicum* 82 (5205) 595-609, 601.

<sup>138</sup> For further discussion of this theme, See Chapter 4, "Frans Jozef van Beeck, native attunement and the 'admirabile commercium'".

<sup>139</sup> See generally Joeri Schrijvers, "In (the) Place of the Self: A Critical Study of Jean-Luc Marion's 'Au lieu de soi. L'approche de Saint Augustin'", *Modern Theology* 25 (2009), 661-686. See also his inaugural lecture at the University of Chicago in Jean-Luc Marion, 'Mihi magna quaestio factus sum: The Privilege of Unknowing', trans. Stephen E. Lewis, *Journal of Religion*, 85. 1 (2005), pp.1-24. Or again, Marion's pivotal usage of Augustine's definition of the "visibile/invisible" dimensions of the sacraments that opens onto a phenomenology of givenness in "The Phenomenality of the Sacrament—Being and Givenness", trans. Bruce Ellis Benson, in B.E. Benson, N. Wirzba (eds.) *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010) 89-102.

<sup>140</sup> See Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 22-23 (my emphasis): "What I say I do indeed say in my name, because I say it in my condition and from my situation; but the words to say it do not come to me from myself without another putting them into my mouth. *What I say and what I mean (my intentionality) belongs to me, but that I say it and how I say it (my syntax and my performance) come over me from an other.* My speaking believe itself to have the initiative, and in a sense it really does; but it receives it more that it takes it; it has simply been ignorant of it for a long time because it has not yet heard, in the sound of what it utters, the silent staging that in advance renders it possible. The *confessio* will have no other function than to teach my speech little by little the call from which it comes, without knowing it, as a response. The spoken word is enacted in a chiasmus,

your praise" (Ps. 51, 15). Hence, by way of this *confessio*, Marion's Augustinian commentaries accelerate and further refine his attempt to obliterate any "type of *subjectum*" as autonomous, while positing a contrasting portrait of the gifted [*l'adonné*] creature's endless erotic search for the *place* of the self in God.<sup>141</sup>

Venturing towards such a place, for Marion, is one that attempts to think *after* metaphysical closure and its onto-theological critique (Heidegger) by way of a 'historical' figure<sup>142</sup> (Augustine) who arrives decidedly *before* the distinction between theology and philosophy. Marion exemplifies the clear difficulty Augustine posed within early 20<sup>th</sup> Century debates upon the question of *Christian Philosophy*<sup>143</sup>, such that we do not know when he is speaking as a philosopher or as a theologian (Gilson's critique);<sup>144</sup> or as one who insufficiently fails to distinguish grace from nature (Garriou-Lagrange's critique).<sup>145</sup> In this regard, Marion is in fact making a highly clever argument. Tactically, by way of seeking protection under the mantle of the Latin Father, Marion is thus able to further continue his own position, while deflecting any existing criticism of his phenomenological credentials (if there is still anyone leveling this critique at this point). Equally, while distancing himself from various other postmodern philosophical re-readings of figures such as Paul<sup>146</sup> and Augustine<sup>147</sup>, Marion audaciously sets out to both engage a sufficient range of various historical sources and commentaries, while conceptually undercutting any approach of historical critique. Similar to various philosophical and theological 'mis-readings' that attributes *a fortiori* a metaphysical distinction within Augustine himself, Marion similarly holds that Church historians will often inadequately read his works. In particular, Marion has in mind the *Confessions* and the historian's mistake of assigning it the "status of an autobiography, without worrying about the *autos*, the *self* of the question."<sup>148</sup> Rather, given its *confessional* structure itself and its logic of praise or "*confessio*" (which we will soon explore), such a work—exemplary, but by no means limited to this work alone—is not *about* anything in fact. It does not presuppose a stable reference point, but instead invites performative and participatory readings as *confessional*.<sup>149</sup> Marion will even severely apply this hermeneutic standard of *confessio* in claiming that approaches that do not integrate such a primary "interpretative criterion" of Augustine and in particular, the *confessio* structure of the *Confessiones* are "worth nothing".<sup>150</sup>

---

where my initiative, second as a response still deaf to its question, and a call, so absolutely anterior that it takes a lifetime to finish hearing it for the first time and *as* the first time."

<sup>141</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 312.

<sup>142</sup> See also Marion's earlier essay on "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theo-logy" in Michael Kessler, Christian Sheppard (eds), *Mystics: Presence and Aporia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 38-74.

<sup>143</sup> In this regard, See Jean-Luc Marion, "Christian Philosophy': Hermeneutic or Heuristic?," in F.J. Ambrosio (ed.), *The Question of Christian Philosophy Today*, New York: Fordham University, 1999, 247-264.

<sup>144</sup> See Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 8.

<sup>145</sup> See Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 6.

<sup>146</sup> See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>147</sup> See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Confession of Augustine*, trans. Richard Beardsworth (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>148</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 12.

<sup>149</sup> See Edward Howells, "Appropriating the Divine Presence: Re-reading Augustine's On the Trinity as a Transformative Text." *Spiritus*, 11. 2 (2011) 200-223.

<sup>150</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 36.

Secondly, and more fundamentally, Marion's aggressively tactical approach in turn opens onto the proper "*aporia* of Saint Augustine" as amounting to the question of *access*. Namely, what *gives* access, and furthermore, a *privileged access*, both to Augustine himself and more so, to behold my very own ipseity itself? On the one hand, we see the radical separation and equivocal dimensions in Marion's thought oscillate between the utter facticity of my existence and its manifest distance to the *gifted*, "to the self's place"—the "distance where I see my *self* so to speak come upon me [...] as he who *receives himself*".<sup>151</sup> As Marion boldly proclaims, this certainty of erotic givenness destabilizes the basis of the modern subject seen in Descartes' *cogito* and its unshakable, ontological certainty [*certum est et inconcussum*] such that the "*cogito, sum* is carried away toward the *interior intimo meo*".<sup>152</sup> Conversely, this in turn ushers forth Marion's similar emphasis upon love's givenness as a *univocal, unmediated sameness* deployed under the figure of an *infinite distance* : "as I am (myself, *ego*) that which I seek (the *self's* place), since I am what I love, it follows that I will never cease coming to the *self's place*, to the degree that I bury myself in the incomprehensible into whose image I understand myself."<sup>153</sup> Hence, as these radically divergent poles within Marion's phenomenology of givenness are read in the aporetic shadow of the great Latin Father, he whose thought was "before", and thereby "after" metaphysics, the question that we will immediately address is whether or not the radical difference of the self and its "incomprehensible image" can well indeed maintain the performativity of the *confessio* and its never-ending *desire of lack*. More specifically, does Marion's univocity of love preserve an infinite distance and not forego collapsing a greater dissimilarity between Creature and creature—due, not as a result of some sort of pantheistic fusion, yet by way of banal indifference.

#### A. THE INVERSE OF PRAISE

Marion's extensive engagement with Augustine in his work, *In the Self's Place* can well be seen not merely as an applied historical reading from his previous conclusions in his phenomenology of givenness, yet as a further refinement and continuation of his phenomenological and theological thought. While in the *Erotic Phenomenon*, for example, Marion's draws upon St. Augustine's Sermon 34 in his prefatory remark, "*nemo est qui non amet*"[There is no one of course who doesn't love]. In our introductory essay<sup>154</sup>, we noted how Marion's erotic reduction functions in addressing human "erotic determinacy" in terms of an *impossibility* of our neutrality towards love (and conversely, by way of predication—hate). And yet, in this highly abbreviated quote, we likewise showed criticism towards Marion's highly partial citation of Augustine as encapsulating his then seeming refusal to address, what Augustine himself stated is the "real question": "There is no one of course who doesn't love, *but the question is, what do they love.*" In his recent work, not only does Marion cite the original quote in full<sup>155</sup>, but in turn, he does indeed show a fuller development into the various modalities of loving and their various "objects" that nonetheless accord with one of the principal insights into univocity itself, namely:

---

<sup>151</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 98.

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> See supra "A Hunger Unstilled".

<sup>155</sup> See Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 272.

Such a transcendental determination of love implies that, formally at least, it is put into practice in the same way and according to the same logic, however different its object and occasion appear. Whatever I love, I always love for the same reasons and in the same fashion, which vary no more than love itself ever ceases to love—*dilectio vacare non potest* [love cannot go on vacation].<sup>156</sup>

This development underscores the fact that Marion has made good on several earlier promises in previous works that he currently brings to conclusion. Not only do we see a fuller statement on a rigorous conceptuality of love in the "weight of love" (which we explore later on) originally set out in *Idol and Distance*<sup>157</sup> and in turn given a programmatic basis and demand for conceptuality in the opening essay of the *Erotic Phenomenon*, the "Silence of Love". Similarly, we see a greater expansion and development in his thinking of "praise" and a performative language pragmatics<sup>158</sup>—praise, as a speaking *towards* and in response to an always already anterior call that comes from "elsewhere". The language of praise is thus antithetical to language that is *about* something and the predicative duality of *kataphasis* and *apophasis*, which Marion attempts to either elide, or at least, largely avoid altogether. However, in this case, criticism has been upheld that the very performativity of praise itself is severely lacking and utterly unconvincing (both phenomenologically, as well as theologically) when bracketed from *concrete particularity* that can only also be found and affirmed by a subsequent *kataphasis* as well.<sup>159</sup> In view of this standing critique, Marion has formulated a thorough response by way of the "meaning of praise" in Augustine's *confessio*. A response, to which we now turn.

Marion's hermeneutical engagement with the *Confessiones* begins—as we briefly indicated—with the *aporia* of St. Augustine coming before metaphysical distinction (typified by the categories of "faith and reason", or Theology and Philosophy) and thus raising the question of "access". Hence, by excluding specific theological and philosophical engagement, Marion instead opts for his starting point in none other than a very close, textual account itself. (And in this move, given this "aporia" we can only applaud him for doing so.) By his close analysis, Marion not only refuses routine subdivisions made of the text between that of the autobiographical, the philosophical treatment of time, creation, etc. Rather, Marion asserts a greater unity to the text, noting its thematic organization of each chapter such that it begins and ends in praise. Which in turn, Marion observes that "*confessio* constitutes the first thought of the *Confessiones*, their place and therefore, their starting point."<sup>160</sup> From this, however, Marion clarifies that there is a double movement to the logic and performance of *confessio* in Augustine's thought. That is, not only does *confessio* give an adequate starting point to the text itself, but more broadly, as a "disposition" it *opens up a place* for accessing the self. For Augustine, Marion contends that this entails a double movement of *confessio*. This principally entails

---

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001) 91-102.

<sup>158</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, 'In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology'', in J.D. Caputo and M.J. Scanlon (eds.), *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999, 20-53; "What Cannot Be Said: Apophasis and the Discourse of Love", in K. Hart (ed.) *Jean Luc Marion: The Essential Writings* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) 325-338; "Words for Saying Nothing", *Erotic Phenomenon*, 143-150.

<sup>159</sup> See Lieven Boeve, "Negative Theology and Theological Hermeneutics: The Particularity of Naming God", *Journal of Philosophy & Scripture*, 3, 2 (Spring, 2006) 1-13.

<sup>160</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 13.

a *confessio laudatio*: a praise towards, and in response of the excessive, asymmetrical anteriority of God's call. From which inseparably, corresponds a movement of *inversion*: the *confessio peccatorum*. That is, a confession of sin and *turning away from*, wherein one's self is assessed *from the vantage point of praise*. That is, where I am not and of which I necessarily lack. In recognizing the greater continuity of Marion's thought, it is herein helpful to note that this evaluation of the self, as seen from the place of praise, is itself a theo-logical move, recalling for example the *site* occupied in Marion's earlier work, such as his "Eucharistic Site of Theology"<sup>161</sup>

Secondly, it is in this double movement of *confessio* (of *laudatio* and *peccatorum*) that the "meaning of praise" and its performativity are disclosed. Namely, as the *necessity* of praise when approaching God: "The approach of God can happen only by praise [...] For if praise is not called for, then it is no longer a matter of Him, God. Praising does not designate one speech act among others [...] Praising offers the sole way, the sole royal road of access."<sup>162</sup> Here, while we see that in no way has Marion lessened his insistence upon the *via eminentiae*, to the obvious detriment and abandon of kataphasis. And yet, it is his emphasis upon the necessity of praise and its theo-logical character that evidences a maturing perspective in contrast to earlier thought in its close linkage of conceptual thought—thinking *about something*—to that of a reified idolatry of God's infinite incomprehensibility. This necessity of praise, rather, is set in a clear erotic tone—a necessity, linked not to a principal, yet as an erotic demand. That is, as an irresistible obligation:

For, in contrast to all the other cases in which it is always necessary to measure the degree to which the candidate for my praise deserves it [...] in the case of God the question is by definition no longer posed (if not, it would not be God, but an idol), such that here praising and therefore confessing this praise has nothing optional about it [...] If I did not feel this obligation irresistibly, if it depended therefore on my decision to praise or not, that would signify that in fact it is no longer a matter of God but of another myself, more or less comparable, therefore commensurate to myself—in any case, not God.<sup>163</sup>

Thus, as a double movement and the radical *disjunct* and dissimilarity in its two-poles, Marion identifies the *confessio* as "one single linguistic act"<sup>164</sup> which mutually implies the other. "I can praise God only if I discover myself already a beneficiary of his mercy, therefore only if I acknowledge myself first a sinner against him."<sup>165</sup> Which, given such an inseparability of praise and guilt, Marion does not so much focus upon sinful acts as such nor the propensity towards such distorted love for the "earthly city" as a result of original sin. Rather, it is the limitation of creation its "*finitude*" that alone occasions such a confession: "Therefore, even before confessing my sin, in fact, it is my finitude I must confess, so as to praise God on that basis."<sup>166</sup> Thus, *the creature stands in the inverse of the necessity of praise itself*: "*Inversely*, if I praise and therefore confess God as such, I also recognize myself as such, as creature that can truly neither speak to Him as coequal nor say anything

---

<sup>161</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, "The Eucharistic Site of Theology", in *God Without Being: Hors Texte.*, trans. Thomas J. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995) 139-160.

<sup>162</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 14.

<sup>163</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 16.

<sup>164</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 30.

<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*

whatsoever about him, but that admits him."<sup>167</sup> For Marion, the creature is indeed defined by the inverse of praise that attests to the "incommensurability between God and myself".<sup>168</sup> And yet, as 'one single linguistic act', such an incommensurability sustains the access to either the approach of God and its creaturely inverse as itself, the basis for the *infinite approach* amid distance of the *confessio* itself. That is to say, by refusing a hermeneutic of partiality in selecting themes of either the *laudatio* or the *peccatorum* in Augustine's corpus—a familiar hermeneutical strategy for many Augustine readers that attempt to isolate one separate strand from his thought—for Marion and *his approach to Augustine*, it is the *incommensurability* itself and the creaturely inversion to praise, which Marion roots as the site of *infinite confessio*. Praising God is not to attribute something to Him or *about* Him; rather, it is motivated by the radical caesura and dissimilarity of its inverse. In other words, *we praise that which we are not*. Therefore, it is by maintaining these two terms of *confessio's* singular act that thus combines the asymmetrical anteriority of love's univocal givenness with its indivisible inverse, that of *desire's lack*, which we shall now consider.

## B. DESIRES OF LACK AND CERTAINTY

Principally, Marion develops his position of *confessio* in part, so as to strongly contrast such an Augustinian-based, *confessional* opening to that of Descartes' *cogito* ["I am thinking, therefore I am"]. Not only is such a contrast an obvious one for Marion himself as an eminent Cartesian scholar. Moreover, given the particularity of his reading of Augustine, Marion is thereby compelled to make this strong contrast, since historically, "comparison with Saint Augustine seems all the more inevitable since, in Descartes' lifetime", the strong affinity between the two figures "had already seemed obvious to many."<sup>169</sup> In fact, Marion historically cites that "Descartes takes advantage" of such a comparison to the authority of the great Latin Father, while at the same time, the "banality of 'cogito sum' is "forever widening the gap between his argument and Augustinian reasoning."<sup>170</sup> To understand this principal contrast is none other than to understand the logic of the *confessio* itself. Namely, on the one hand, the Cartesian *Meditations* posits a "'truth so solid and secure' in that it would open an access of the self to itself in and through thought."<sup>171</sup> While conversely, Marion argues (with a bit of a flourish) that "The *cogito, sum* is carried away to the the *interior intimo meo*"<sup>172</sup> by the space accessible through *confessio* such that, in Augustine:

Self-certainty thus leads self-consciousness back to the inner consciousness of God, which is found to be more essential to consciousness than itself. For the *si fallor, sum* ["If I am mistaken, I am"]<sup>173</sup> does not aim at the *ego*, nor does it come to a halt in the *res cogitans*, seeing as the *interior intimo meo* transports it, as a derived image, toward the original *exemplar* [...]. On the

---

<sup>167</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 16.

<sup>168</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *ibid.* And within postmodern reflection as well, a substantial affinity between Augustine and Descartes was similarly made by Lyotard.

<sup>170</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-theo-logy-in Cartesian Thought*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 128-132, 129.

<sup>171</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 57.

<sup>172</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 98.

<sup>173</sup> See Augustine, *Dei Civitate Dei*, bk. XI, 26.



contrary, *si fallor sum* forbids the mind to remain in itself, exiled from its truth, in order to send it back to the infinite original.<sup>174</sup>

Marion is entirely correct to radically insist upon the utter dissimilarity between Augustine and Descartes' respective thought and the grounding of the subject by the 'banal cogito, sum'. However, one can well critically respond to Marion's opposition by inquiring precisely how then does such an *exemplarism* free Augustine from the same principal movements that he rightly attributes to Descartes: namely, that 'access of the self to itself in and through thought'? Is this not a basic onto-theo-logical move that essentializes and grounds the 'contingency of beings' upon the *necessary* ground of God, as the 'exemplarity' of beings' contingency? Similarly, one can likewise make this argument to my overall retrieval of Ruusbroec himself and its concentration of "mutual indwelling" and Ruusbroec's theology of "image and likeness". Which, in this context, it is helpful to recall both its Cistercian and Augustinian roots.<sup>175</sup> Regarding Ruusbroec, I have repeatedly responded to this critique.<sup>176</sup> Similarly for Marion, his response revolves around the question of *desire*. And more specifically, how the opening towards the self, in and through the *necessity* of the *confessio* of praise and its creaturely inverse are themselves, movements that are grounded upon the universal *certainty*, or "first principal" of *desire* itself.

At various sections of *In the Self's Place* and more explicitly, in the chapter "The Ego or the Gifted" do we see some of the most explicit reflections that Marion has endeavored on the question of desire, as principally reflected in his commentarial thought on Augustine. Such themes include: (a) the asymmetrical "weight" of desire, that comes not from me, but "elsewhere";<sup>177</sup> the individuation of desire and its assurance of my particularity;<sup>178</sup> the erotic reduction as the universal desire for happiness and its inseparability from beatitude;<sup>179</sup> and lastly, the non-possessiveness of desire and its anteriority translated not in terms of *Being*, but that of *life*.<sup>180</sup> For Marion, these themes are interrelated—culminating somewhat in the thought of *life* itself—by what he calls the central paradox of desire. That is, desire alone "knows and thinks the *vita beata*" both with "erotic *certainty*" and equally "without any theoretical representation of it".<sup>181</sup> Hence, the very "contradiction" of desire itself is that it roots its certainty within the performance of desire *qua* desire, while equally sustained by the absolute *uncertainty* and ultimately *inconceivability* of its object. The univocal universality of our natural desire for *life*—even more so, for happiness, as the *vita beata* is none other, Marion will argue, a life of *beatitude* and God—is secured precisely *at the cost* of any form of knowing—let alone certainty—of its object itself. The object of certainty is a question of Being itself precisely as that which "neither desires nor could desire"<sup>182</sup>. The architecture of radical apophasis is

<sup>174</sup> Marion, *Descartes' Metaphysical Prism*, 132.

<sup>175</sup> See David N. Bell, *The Image and the Likeness: The Augustinian Spirituality of William of St.-Thierry*, Cistercian Studies Series, 78 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984).

<sup>176</sup> See *supra*, the subsection "Unify, so as to Distinguish", as well as the following chapters: "Abiding in Minne's Demands 1.0"; "Possessing the Unfathomable: Approaching Jan van Ruusbroec's Mystical Anthropology as Responsive to the Primacy and Praxis of Minne"; "'We Shall See God With the Eyes of our Body'. Minne, Mutual Indwelling and Jan van Ruusbroec's Embodied Speculations on the Glorified Body."

<sup>177</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 83.

<sup>178</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 85.

<sup>180</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 86.

<sup>181</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 87.

<sup>182</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 86.

thereby set up (a familiar construction for Marion) as the *guarantor* for a turn towards a universal certainty as the *impossible* object, deployed in givenness that is both anterior to me and my intentionality, coming from "elsewhere", which thereby makes *possible* my desire itself.<sup>183</sup> And yet, Marion deliberately extends these familiar lines within his overall thought, such that as a first principal distinctly other than a conceptual or "theoretical first principle", nevertheless the impossible-possibility of such a universal desire both "assumes and deserves" such a status, "insofar as it is a *desire*, not knowing or comportment."<sup>184</sup> Hence, the *certainty* of Marion's desire indubitably remains a *desire of lack* as the *inverse* of the necessary *confessio laudatio*, is (as we just presented) one that substantiates praise of God primarily due to the "finitude" of the creaturely itself as incommensurable with God.

Interestingly enough, however, Marion secures the universal *certainty* of this [im]possible desire of lack precisely as a *univocal givenness*, which in no sense should be confused with having any "native origins". Rather, the weight of such an [im]possible desire in its utter givenness is asymmetrically anterior and thereby comes upon from "behind me", as stemming "from the *vita beata*, of which it [the *mens, cogitatio*] is ignorant [... ]We should not speak here of a desire (or of a love) *for* the principle, but of a principle of desire—or, better, desire as principle."<sup>185</sup> Marion thus once more extrapolates the givenness of this 'desire as principle' and its native lack in undercutting Descartes' 'banal cogito, sum' and its "unshakable foundation" [*fundamentum inconcussum*]<sup>186</sup> of thought, such that the "*inconcussum* is desire, therefore a *lack*, not self-possessed knowledge."<sup>187</sup> Rather, amid the certainty of this *unshakable desire* of lack, which thinks itself, "while not knowing itself" as anything other than "receiving itself from the one who excited it as desire. For the *vita beata* does not mark an exception to the reception of life but consecrates it."<sup>188</sup> Hence, Marion radicalizes this Cartesian ontological certainty, positing this principle of desire as foregoing both ontological and epistemic certainty and instead, executes it as an erotic reduction itself.

Here, *Marion's approach* forestalls any facile comparison between Augustine and Descartes as the desire-as-principle not only dislodges the latter's 'unshakable certainty' of any ontological and/or epistemic weight, yet it does so *precisely by attesting to the erotic certainty of the self's inaccessibility*. This inaccessibility, Marion will argue, is confirmed amid his repeated appeals to Augustine's well known read of interiority as *interior intimo meo*. Herein, Marion is quite right to take the position that he does, for it is indeed the case that traditionally, various problematic readings of Augustine can well be attributed to a rather deceiving Cartesian influence, which is quite well at odds with Augustine's thought. Interiority, for Augustine, does not refer to an autonomously secured, self-enclosed space, as it does for Descartes. Rather, for the Latin father, interiority points both to a divine indwelling and in turn, a relational opening onto the created world itself.

---

<sup>183</sup> See supra "Abiding in Minne's Demands. Part III" for a fuller reflection on Marion in terms of the "[im]possible".

<sup>184</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 89.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> See also Marion's treatment of 'what is certain and unshakable' in *Descartes' Metaphysical Prism*, 173-175. In brief, Marion argues that for Descartes, the subsistence and ontological permanence of *ego* over against other beings is thus characteristic of an ontological permanence moreso than epistemic.

<sup>187</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 90 (my emphasis).

<sup>188</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 90-91.

However, by accentuating a strong incongruence between Augustine and Descartes, Marion's reading of the *interior intimo meo* itself functions in a very peculiar manner, such that it reflects the radical disjunct and dissimilarity of the *confessio* itself. At first, in the mode of *laudatio*, Marion affirms a perspective such that is regularly found in the *dense personalism* of someone such as Fransen, where Marion states: "From the outset the creation of the ego is thought in the figure of the gifted" such that the "ego comes from the given *self*, and not the *self* from the ego's consciousness."<sup>189</sup> However, the peculiar reading of Marion's *interior intimo meo* then takes the radical *inverse* of Fransen's personalism, such that it dislodges and heightens the incommensurable inaccessibility resident with the self: "From this distance of the given to self from the self there obviously follows a still more radical separation of the ego from what gives it to itself and the *self* to it. Distance, that can be understood [...] as a gap in which I remain on the outside of my own center, cut off by God."<sup>190</sup> In other words, for Marion, recognition of Augustine's *interior intimo meo* secures less an affirmation of "God within" as it is traditionally interpreted and instead, emphasizes far more one's displacement as "myself without"—desirous and lacking. A figure of givenness that points neither to an "imprisoned" and possessive subjectivity, as in Descartes, nor to a rich theological immanence,<sup>191</sup> rather, for Marion, the displacement and non-possessiveness of the *interior intimo meo* points towards *life* and the site of creation. Life, as neither ontologically prior to nor oriented towards the *confessio* of praise and *salvific return*, but a view of creation *a fortiori* that responds to the givenness of the call, while itself incapable of any reciprocal, economic response.

### C. CREATION WITHOUT NATURE

As Marion approaches Augustine's depiction of interiority as precluding any form of enclosed, autonomous subjectivity, Marion will instead read the *interior intimo meo* as indicative of Augustine's *confessio* and its giving access to the self as radically dislodging any form of subjectivity. By way of contrast, Marion will instead point towards the non-possessiveness of *life* as distinctly one of creation. Immediately following, I will thus consider Marion's reading of various cosmological and anthropological lines of thought and their specific convergence in terms of the question of desire and whether or not it retains any sense of 'native origins' and capacity. These considerations are necessary and in turn, preparatory in considering both the creation-based, univocal understanding of love as the *pondus amoris*.

By appealing to Augustine's writings, Marion argues that creation is an "infinite site"<sup>192</sup> of heaven and earth which is itself opened up by the rhythm of the *confessio* itself: the givenness of its anterior call and response, of praise and privation, *laudatio* and *peccatorum*. In this sense, it is contra the Greek cosmos, as creation for Augustine is 'almost never' synonymous with the 'world'.<sup>193</sup> Marion thus presents an interesting alternative approach to Creation, one that fully admits to the rather feebly "inept, or rather in-apt, response" to the ontological question that often obscures the point

---

<sup>189</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 99.

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> See *supra*, "Frans Jozef van Beeck, native attunement and the 'admirabile commercium'".

<sup>192</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 230.

<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*

itself.<sup>194</sup> Marion will first draw upon the Heideggerian critique of Biblical accounts of creation as failing to adequately address the primary metaphysical question—"Why is there something, in general, rather than nothing?" While in a secondary move, Marion positions Augustine as *inverting* such a critique. Responding to Heidegger's principal critique, Marion cites the famous *ohne warum* from Angelus Silesius<sup>195</sup> as itself evidence of an intrinsic theological hermeneutics of faith that blunts such a critique. Creation does not, Marion contends, "respond to the question *why* concerning the world". Rather, in view of Augustine's *confessio*, creation is already the response itself.<sup>196</sup> Subsequently, Marion positions an Augustinian account of creation contra the commonplace notion within Neo-Scholastic Thomism concerning the cosmological proof for the existence of God based upon *motion*. And although Marion does not dwell further upon this contrast as anything other than a "rational cosmology"<sup>197</sup>, which Marion addresses is alien to Augustine himself, it is very important to mention. If anything, because its contrast opens upon the principal theme (that I will shortly also consider): namely, Marion's erotic reduction as leading to the "weight of love" [*pondus amoris*]. It is thus quite helpful to keep in mind the figure of creation, and subsequently, desire, and how they operate in a clear, secondary position to the primacy of love's univocal weight, which Marion considers with admirable clarity: "Motion follows weight, like desire follows love, to the point that the loving drive of the desiring soul becomes the paradigm for movement, even in things."<sup>198</sup>

Hence, as radically other than an ontological cosmology, Marion instead suggests that there is a 'liturgical ordering' of creation that stands prior to any ontology and instead, serves as the site, or place, of the *confessio* itself. Such a view of creation is thereby in accord with Marion's thinking the certainty and possibility of desire and its uncertain and ultimately impossible object. Marion thereby completes, what he set out in discussing the 'desire-as-principle', when arguing that "Creation does not render *confessio* possible [...] but it itself becomes possible only starting with *confessio*."<sup>199</sup> Here, creation is removed entirely of its ontological character, as *a posteriori* of the liturgical itself. Furthermore, Marion evacuates any and all native dimensions of such desire. Marion instead posits the 'unshakable certainty' and universality of such an intrinsic desire for life, beatitude and God, though in no way is this a *natural desire itself*. For, in Marion's thought, if creation was considered in any sense prior to the rhythm of the *confessio* and its liturgical ordering of praise, then the purely asymmetrical and the anterior givenness of such a certain desire would be compromised of its gratuitous purity and instead, would be drawn into the economic, and the prospect of a reciprocal exchange. Instead, the possibility of desire is precisely such that its object remains impossibly incapable for the creature—God as radically [im]possible.

Marion thus shows a rigorous consistency when he likewise inquires of the utter impossibility of thinking of a place, i.e. myself, prior to, as an 'open place for God'.<sup>200</sup> Hereby, the self is radically

---

<sup>194</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 232.

<sup>195</sup> Such as we see in Angelus Silesius' famous epigram, "Ohne warum", *Der Cherubinische Wandersmann* (Augsburg: Presse Druck und Verlags GmbH, 1960) 57: "Die Ros ist ohn warum, sie blühet, weil sie blühet/ Sie ach't nicht ihrer selbst, fragt nicht, ob man sie siehet." See also, Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 233, whereby Marion also directly alludes to Silesius' "without a why".

<sup>196</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 233-4.

<sup>197</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 230.

<sup>198</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 267.

<sup>199</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 237.

<sup>200</sup> See Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 238.

rejected as a *locus capax dei*, and instead, Marion argues that one's *similitudo* resides upon the basis that "I take place in Him".<sup>201</sup> Indeed, in Marion's account, there is fundamentally a lack of space for praise resident within the specificity of creation itself, and in the human in particular, as Marion denies an "opening for us a place to receive God."<sup>202</sup> And as we explored previously<sup>203</sup>, the strong asymmetry and *pure* transcendence thus render Incarnational narratives such as the Annunciation to be 'difficult'. Not only does such a view remove any form of agency or cooperation on Mary's part, obscuring her *fiat* amid such an adventitious givenness. Furthermore, it similarly removes from her—and thus in turn, the Church—by way of a flattened particularity that undercuts the utter receptivity of the incarnational paradox that the Church herself praises amid unknowing: "With what praises to extol thee we know not, for He whom the heavens could not contain rested in thy bosom."<sup>204</sup> Hence, in thoroughly obliterating the natural and any form of native opening or inclining desire towards God, Marion instead situates the place of the self and the site of creation's *confessio* as not in itself, but always already exceeding itself in God.

Marion will in turn similarly apply this same approach to questions of a specifically anthropological nature, while distinctly clarifying that it is on the basis on humanity's *similitudo* as created in the image and likeness, that thus "Man is defined by the very fact that he remains without definition."<sup>205</sup> This is entirely consistent and in keeping with the *dislodgement* and de-centering of the self in Marion's reading of the *interior intimo meo* such that the human is properly non-essentialist—as discarded by the "impracticable" designation as created *in the image*.<sup>206</sup> And instead, is inextricably denoted by a "reference to another to himself, who more intimate to himself, occupies the essential place *on loan to him*."<sup>207</sup> That is to say, an indebtedness (or givenness) that excessively accumulates and can never be repaid. However, there is a dire bleakness in Marion's description that is unavoidable. The human's radical indebtedness and subsequent displacement is coupled with the insistence that it is the "privilege of man" to be without definition. We are given "access" to man's privilege by the logic of the *confessio*, here emphasizing our *similitudo* to God's incomprehensibility, such that the human similarly bears such incomprehensibility. However, the abiding paradox in Marion's formulation—and subsequently, that which preserves distance from collapsing into pantheism—is precisely that which is on "loan to him", as the 'privilege of man' is similarly that which displaces and alienates the human by way of dissolving one's utter particularity. For the *creaturely inverse* of the weight of love and its *confessio laudatio* towards God is seen as a *weight of indifference*. That is, a burdensome weight, which in the following, we can see utterly belies the oppressively fallen weight of the "earthly city" itself.

#### D. THE WEIGHT OF LOVE

Despite my critique of Marion's dire approach to Augustine and his reading of *confessio*—one that maintains distance and foregoes relational collapse between the Creator and creature by way of a certain schizophrenic self displaced and lacking by the *interior intimo meo*—such deficiencies are

---

<sup>201</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 239.

<sup>203</sup> See *supra*, "Abiding in Minne's Demands 2.0".

<sup>204</sup> See, "Matins—First Lesson", in the *Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1952 edition)*.

<sup>205</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 254.

<sup>206</sup> See Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 255.

<sup>207</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 254-5 (my emphasis).

counter-balanced by an otherwise fascinating, constructive and renewed approach towards love's univocity itself. That is, one that matches his earlier, provocative *erotic reduction* with an elegant reading of and rigorous re-conceptualization of Augustine's "weight of love" [*pondus amoris*]. In this manner, Marion lays out the constructive relevance of what specifically the univocity of love specifically entails, in which case he evinces several important developments from his earlier position in the *Erotic Phenomenon* which we shall now explore.

Marion begins by arguing that while Augustine takes over the natural law philosophy of his day in describing love as "weight", the real "innovation of *pondus meum* only begins when Augustine starts not with cosmology, yet the non-ontological plane of *confessio*."<sup>208</sup> Here, as we saw earlier in terms of the *a posteriori* of creation to that of the *confessio*, in a similar manner the laws of motion are in turn presented as coming after the weight of love itself, as was earlier presented contra the rational cosmology of Neo-Scholasticism.<sup>209</sup> Similarly, Marion further solidifies his anthropological claim as to the "impracticable image" of the *imago dei*, such that this image risks resembling nothing. Namely, that the weight of love and its motion is explicitly *set against* the contrasting weight of nature. The weight of love, always anterior in its givenness is thus "directed" towards the "originarily eschatological" designation of creation, such that "This place, for man without definition, is found in nothing less than in the rest of God himself".<sup>210</sup> In Marion's reading, this eschatology is marked by both restlessness and rest, a "principle" in which the *confessio* "has, since the beginning, put into operation."<sup>211</sup> We can understand this eschatological operation of love as set against a competing weight when, for example, Marion adapts Augustine's well-known two loves: of the earthly city and the heavenly city. For that which weighs downward is a love of "nature" and the earthly city, while that which weighs *nothing* is directed towards the heavenly city. Here, grace works as a "counterweight" that is set against the various objects of one's restlessness that weigh down upon the human.<sup>212</sup> Grace thus counteracts and works against humanity's sinful inclinations, while equally confirming that the exitus-reditus structure of such weights is that one's eschatological place is one of return—a place that is impossible for me. In the following Johannine text, Marion refers to Augustine's citation of this text as principally indicative of love's weight and its singular force towards the eschatological [im]possible: 'Nobody comes to me, if the Father has not attracted him.'<sup>213</sup> Here, it is clear that given how such a counter-weight counter-acts the weight of nature, whereby the purpose is by no means to "balance the scales" as Ruusbroec so implores. Rather, in Marion's approach to Augustine, the objective is to fully allow for this counterweight to exert a full disequilibrium, to weigh down and press upon, without the least resistance. Hence, for the human, "to love" is to not prevent nor obstruct, yet permit it to take place.

In summary fashion, Marion concisely defines this weight and the singularity of its exertion as follows: "Love weighs, therefore, with a weight that rises as well as falls, because it exerts a pressure, which pushes only of itself."<sup>214</sup> Here, the volitional aspects of love are not entirely elided in Marion's reading. However, the voluntary by no means intensifies (or de-intensifies) the pressure and the

---

<sup>208</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 265.

<sup>209</sup> See supra. note 193.

<sup>210</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 262.

<sup>211</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 261.

<sup>212</sup> See Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 269.

<sup>213</sup> See Jn. 6, 44. See also, Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 265.

<sup>214</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 270.

*degrees of givenness* of love's weight. *Love happens*, in Marion's approach to Augustine. One cannot so much will to love as one can neither desire an object more or less. In fact, formally speaking, there are in fact no "works" of love in Marion's account—rather, there is a "working upon". In this sense, the volitional in Marion is one of *location*: "At best, he can direct it" in either its theocentric or anthropocentric orientation. The asymmetrical anteriority of love is hence conceptually sealed for Marion as a weight, as that which "pushes, from the outset and forever *behind* me", a weight that knows no impossibility in its "absolute and unconditioned transcenden[ce]."<sup>215</sup>

Arriving upon this concise conceptuality of love as weight, Marion is able to better clarify the specific parameters of what a univocal love entails, such that "[I]t is put into practice in the same way and according to the same logic, however different its object and occasions appear."<sup>216</sup> The difference in love, Marion affirms—and citing agreement with Anders Nygren on this point<sup>217</sup> concerns not so much various "kinds" of love. Rather, it is one of "object", in which Marion applies Augustine's hermeneutic of the two cities and their contrasting weights.<sup>218</sup> And yet, given the strict antinomy between these two cities, their strife amid radical dissimilarity—both in Augustine and in Marion—the challenge that Marion rightly confronts is how to understand the claim to love's univocity "all the while being perfectly capable of being distinguished in different modes."<sup>219</sup> Herein, we very clearly recognize a logical consistency in the univocal, as the same question appears to Peter Lombard in Book 1, Distinction 18, in which he addresses the challenge of maintaining the unity and identity of the Gift (Holy Spirit) amid the multiplicity and distinction of gifts given. However, unlike the Lombard, Marion does not posit a "common" solution to the problem. Rather, he inverts the challenge by inquiring whether or not it is at all *possible* (i.e. any creaturely object itself) to enjoy and take rest in any thing else than God alone. Marion clarifies that what is strictly under consideration is a phenomenological question over "possibility"; it is not a question whether or not such loving enjoyment is or is not morally 'licit'.<sup>220</sup> Here, Marion's familiar construction of God's purely asymmetrical transcendence as a radical [im]possibility reemerges: namely, the 'impossibility of impossibility, and therefore God's radical possibility'<sup>221</sup> Thus, since the question of love and its destination is one ultimately of 'place', Marion opts for a clear, theological prioritization, such that "enjoyment is possible only of God, who alone does not disappoint, because he alone stays in place...".<sup>222</sup>

Subsequent to this asymmetrical prioritization, Marion's construction of [im]possibility appears well-suited in providing a greater philosophical hermeneutic and emphasis upon—and thereby away from its conventional, moral theological stress—of Augustine's similarly well-known 'uti'/frui' distinction.<sup>223</sup> That is, it is only "possible" to enjoy others *propter Deum*, or in view of God

---

<sup>215</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 274.

<sup>216</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 272.

<sup>217</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 272-3.

<sup>218</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 275.

<sup>220</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 276.

<sup>221</sup> See *Supra*, "Abiding in Minne's Demands 2.0"

<sup>222</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 276.

<sup>223</sup> Herein, Marion's reading of the 'uti'/frui' distinction in terms of [im]possibility finds a similar corollary in Rik van Nieuwenhove's reading that Augustine's distinction exemplifies a genuine religious disposition to others and the world as 'non-instrumentalist'. See *supra*. note 17.

and the ultimacy of His place as one of rest. "In all cases it is an issue of love" Marion clarifies, "univocal, declined by its modes, intrigues, and wills. It is never about not loving nor loving only God, but of knowing how to love each and all in the appropriate mode, God and the gifts of God."<sup>224</sup> Here, Marion provides an important adaption and moderated position from his earlier argument in the *Erotic Phenomenon* and its insistence that grounded univocity as consisting of "one way".<sup>225</sup> Instead, Marion now accepts the legitimacy of reconciling the univocal with a "plurality of meanings and modes", as none other than articulating, not so much love's 'one way', yet instead its "singular playing field".<sup>226</sup>

However, as Marion indeed offers a rigorous, constructive re-reading of Augustine's weight of love's and its univocity via phenomenological givenness, the erotic reduction and the [im]possible, its profound hindrance of creaturely estrangement and displacement of the human—resident in the *confessio* and the *interior intimo meo* as rendering one incapable of reception, incapable of action—remains inextricably joined as an obstacle to this otherwise admirable approach. Intrinsic to the rhythm of the *confessio* and the 'unshakable certainty' of its principle of desire is thus deployed in Marion's approach not so much in terms of the transcendentals themselves. Instead, the radical dissimilarity and disjunct between God's incomprehensibility and that of the human's 'lack of definition' thus renders the performative *meaning of praise* indubitably inscribed as a *desire of lack*. Among this 'singular playing field' of love's givenness and the weight of its deployment, the univocal establishes relationality between Creator and creature as one of radical dissimilitude amongst infinite distance. "For I am what I love", Marion first affirms alongside Augustine, yet he alone singularly concludes:

Never will I find the *self's place as an essence*, because an absolute and infinite place can only draw near to the infinite and unbounded. My place, never will I attain it as to a finite essence since it is found unto the image and in the image of the infinite. But of the infinite, I will not become in any way the image, because no image can bind in the absolute. Therefore, my place in God that I love will be accomplished *unto the image* endlessly referred to the infinite [...]<sup>227</sup>

In the approach of praising the infinite givenness of God, the univocal demands a reciprocal like unto likeness so as to 'draw near to the infinite and unbounded'. And yet, the asymmetry of God's infinite place is set *over against* the creaturely finite, such that it disables any form of economic mutuality and reciprocal return. That is, before and approaching such an infinite place, the creature is rendered imageless. Rather, the confessional structure is quite evident in this greater *similitudo* and its endless *referral*, which is at once joined "to the degree that he abandons any likeness to himself"<sup>228</sup> in this collapse of the creaturely. And instead, is measured by "the degree to which I bury myself in the incomprehensible into whose image I understand myself."<sup>229</sup> Again, does Marion's univocal approach necessitate God's asymmetry as over against the creaturely and thereby

---

<sup>224</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 278.

<sup>225</sup> See Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 217: "Love is said and is given in only one, strictly univocal way. As soon as one multiplies it into subtle and differentiated acceptations, to the point of equivocality, one ceases to analyze it better: one dissolves it and misses it entirely."

<sup>226</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 281. See supra, note 21.

<sup>227</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 331.

<sup>228</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 256.

<sup>229</sup> Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 312.



rendering it *imageless*; or is this not rather the 'unshakable certainty' of a desire of lack in its infinite referral as itself the meaning of praise?

And so, by way of a strong contrast that nonetheless retains a great similarity, we thus return back to beginning in once more quoting Ruusbroec amid his own univocal description of minne that nonetheless retains the dynamism resident in mutual indwelling as one of both eternally *in* the image (seen here following in the "third way") and *unto* His likeness of perpetual similarity and dissimilarity (as seen in the "fourth way"):

And now follows the third distinction in feeling, that is that we feel ourselves one with God. For through the over-forming [*overforminghe*] we receive from God we feel swallowed in the fathomless abyss of *our eternal bliss* where we can never again find a distinction between ourselves and God [...] all our faculties stand empty in an essential enjoyment, but they are not reduced to nothing, for then we would lose our creatureliness [...]

Yet at the moment we want to test and examine what it is we are feeling, we fall back into reason and then we find distinction and otherness between ourselves and God, and we find God outside ourselves in the incomprehensible. And this is the fourth way in which we feel both God and ourselves. For here we find ourselves standing before God's presence. And the truth we receive from his countenance bears witness to us that God wants to be completely ours and that he wants us to be completely his. And in the moment we feel God wants to be completely ours, there arises in us a gaping, voracious lust, so hungry, so deep and so empty that even if God gave us all he could, except Himself, we would not be satisfied [...] For we feed on the measurelessness of God which we cannot swallow, and we yearn in his endlessness we cannot reach, and that way we cannot come into God, nor can God come into us for we cannot renounce ourselves in restlessness of minne [...] for minne desires what remains impossible for it and reason bears witness that minnen is right but it can neither advise minnen in this case nor forbid it [...] for God's touch, which flows out to us, fans our restlessness and demands our action, namely that we love the love eternal [*dat wij minnen die eewighe minne*]"

Ende hier na volcht dat derde onderscheet van ghevoelne, dat es dat wij ons met gode een ghevoelen. Want overmids die overforminghe gods ghevoelen wij ons verswolghen in een grondeloes abis onser eewigher zalicheit, daer wij tusschen ons ende gode nemmermeer onderscheet venden en moghen [...] soe staen alle onse crachte ledich in een weselijc ghebrucken, maer si en werden niet te nieute, want soe verloren wij onse ghescapenheit [...]

Maer inden selven oghenblicke dat wij proeven ende merken willen wat es dat wij ghevoelen, soe vallen wij in redenen; ende dan venden wij onderscheet ende anderheyt tuschen ons ende gode; ende dan venden wij gode buten ons in ombegripelijcheiden. Ende dit es dat vierde onderscheet daer wij gods ende ons in ghevoelen. Want hier venden wij ons staende voer die jeghenwoordicheyt gods. Ende <die> waerheit die wij ontfaen uten aenschine gods, die tuycht ons dat god te male wilt onse sijn, ende dat hi wilt dat wij te male sine sijn. Ende inden selven oghenblicke dat wij des ghevoelen dat god te male wilt onse sijn, soe ontsprint in ons eene gapende ghierighe ghelost die alsoe hongherich ende alsoe diep ende alsoe idel is, al <gave god al> dat hi gheleisten mochte, sonder hem selven, het en mochte ons niet ghenoeghen [...] Want wij teren op sine onghetheit, die wij niet hervolghen en moghen. Ende aldus en connen wij in gode comen noch god in ons. Want in ongheduere van minnen en connen wij ons selfs niet vertijen [...] want minne beghert dat haer ommoghelijc is. Ende redene tughet dat der minnen recht es. Maeer si en can der minnen hier toe gheraden noch verbieden [...] Want dat uytvloeyende gherinen gods stoect ongheduer ende eyscht ons werc, dat es dat wij minnen die eewighe minnen."<sup>230</sup>

## §5. CONCLUSION—COMMON MINNE

---

<sup>230</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden Blinkenden Steen*, ll. 684-688;690-692; 695-706; 714-718; 721-723; 726-727 (with slight modification).

As seen in the above quote, Ruusbroec profoundly synthesizes the coupling of both the intrinsic demands and desires of minne and its enduring praxis as none other than the dynamism of mutual indwelling itself. Likewise, Ruusbroec is able at once to maintain *both* the *same origins* of such demands, as well as the fact that our responding desires are themselves creaturely indefinite and distinctly particular [*onderscheet*] in their inevitable failure to satisfy minne's demands. In no way can the naturalness of humanity's desire for God be reduced to an anonymous, magnetic 'tracking device', as Frans Jozef van Beeck once colorfully put it. Rather, it is distinctly '*our minne*' that reflects the uniqueness of encounter. And yet, in view of minne's demands, one's desires are never apart, isolated and self-reflexive so much as they stem from a relational givenness that always already precedes their particularity. As in the above quote, the *exitus* structure of minne is such that 'God's touch flows out to us,' as an implacable, restless stirring or touch [*gherinen*] that similarly demands of our "action". All the while recalling its strong scriptural basis, "[B]ecause God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Rom. 5, 5) While in the freedom of its *reditus* response, our minne indeed retains the particularity of our desires. And yet such a response is always already a graced response. And thus in turn, despite our own unavoidable failures and the impossibility of a just response, these debts are mutually shared in the *whole Christ*, in which the *Body commonly partakes* and is inseparably joined to its Head.<sup>231</sup> It is never ourselves alone, who in 'being wrought' by the Holy Spirit, lovingly respond to such a gracious love. Rather, our love, if we are to be 'wise merchants', deepens in perfection in unity and solidarity with and towards others, as a movement none other than that of the Son's own loving return to the Father, where we become *servi in Servo et filii in Filio*<sup>232</sup> as we 'give ourselves in return in His Spirit'.

This is to say that in the main, Ruusbroec's understanding of minne's univocity—in its created origins; its enduring, everyday individual and communal praxis; and the deified perfection of such love—is that it is one, and the same, mutually reciprocal amid an asymmetrically dynamic, greater dissimilarity between Creator and creature. It is a "double minne"<sup>233</sup> that is both *fully ours* and *fully*

---

<sup>231</sup> See Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 48.

<sup>232</sup> See generally Emile Mersch, *Theology of the Mystical Body*, as quoted from Piet Fransen, *Intelligent Theology*, vol. III, *A Universal Theology*, 92.

<sup>233</sup> See Ruusbroec, *Tabernakel*, bk. 4, 1687-1691; 1697-1703; 1706-1709 (with slight modifications): "In this we are taught that a living, active minne [*werkeleke minne*] shall always mediate between us and God, which shall transform God's free inward-working and our free dedication, into unity. And this minne cannot be idle, for it is practiced between the living God and our living spirit....And this active minne we call charity, which makes our spirit live and grow in grace. This unifying band of charity gives us minne, and demands us to minne. And it is itself minne, for it causes the loving in-spiration [*ingeesten*] between us and God, which always must work. For that mutual in-spiration is our spiritual life, namely our charity, and that is God's minne and our minne collected in one [...] We must give Him all our works, covered over with our minnen, if we want to receive all His gifts covered over with His minnen. And this double minne, thus practiced, that is charity, in which our spiritual life consists." "Hier inne werden wi geleert dat ene levende, werkeleke minne tusschen ons ende gode altoes middelen sal, die goods vrie inwerken ende onse vrie toevoegen enechleke overformen sa. Ende dese minne en mach niet ledech sijn, want si wert geufent tusschen den levende gode ende onsen levenden geeste....Ende dese werkeleke minne heten wi karitate, doe onsen geest leven ende wassen doet in der genaden. dese enege bant der karitaten die gevet ons minne ende hi eischet ons dat wi minnen, ende hi es selve minne, want hi maecht dat minleke ingeesten tusschen ons ende gode, dat altoes werken moet. Want dat onderlinge ingeesten dat es onse gessteleke leven ende dat es onse karitate ende dat es goods minne ende onse minne in een vergadert [...] Wi moeten hem geven alle onse werke overdect met onser minnen, wille wi ontfaen alle sine gaven overdect met sijnre minnen. Ende dese dobbel minne, aldus geufent, dat es karitate, daer onse geesteleke leven inne besteet."

God's—a common love. "This minne that is God is common to us all and to each one in particular and (belongs) totally to those who love."<sup>234</sup> Subsequently, and in accord with the axiom of the deified life [*overforminghe*]<sup>234</sup>—that union with God and others renders one more human, more particular—minne's univocity holds that particularity and distinction are the result of, and not the precondition of loving as relationally common to us all. Minne is thus a *particularizing movement* in its insistence upon the distinctiveness of our charitable works and interior desires precisely because it is *ghemeyne*. It thus reconfigures modernity's prioritization of the self-enclosed autonomous subject, who in turn loves as an extension of their identity itself—or absence of one, as we see in Marion.<sup>235</sup>

Further reflecting upon such a common love in both its universal breadth and its particular, deified, *admirable exchange*, Ruusbroec remarks: "Now we are all merchants by nature" that is, "buying and selling, that is exchanging, giving something good for something still better."<sup>236</sup> For Ruusbroec, recognition of this gratuitous gift of God bestowed upon all of us, by virtue of creating us *ex nihilo* sets in motion the impossible challenge of responding to such a gift. "For the nature of minne is always to give and to take",<sup>237</sup> yet this very impossibility that fuels the irreducible particularity of minne's desire [*begheren*] is at the same time that which invites us to become more fully creaturely, more particularly human by way of becoming further united to God in His loving unity—without difference or distinction [*sonder differentie ochte onderscheet*]. For "giving and taking are *eternally distinct* [*eewich onderscheet*] in the practice of minnen."<sup>238</sup>

Herein, the principle to 'unify, so as to distinguish' is deeply helpful in explaining Ruusbroec's unflinching insistence in maintaining minne's univocity as common. In his rich theological synthesis that is at once rigorously prophetic and profoundly contemplative, Ruusbroec challenges us time and time again as he announces: whether or not, by way of our active loving, our desires, our works, will our human distinctiveness and personal uniqueness emerge from the graced nature of creation itself? Will we respond to such giftedness and "Pay thy debt; love the Love that has eternally loved thee!"<sup>239</sup> Which, in this case, we can see clearly echoes the Lombard's infamous distinction such that, 'whoever loves the very love by which he loves his neighbor,' so too 'loves God'. In the life of grace (and glory), Ruusbroec continuously puts forth the moral imperative of whether or not will we indeed mirror and grow in *likeness unto* and "cleave" to such impossible demands or not. Either way, this economy of exchange in its varied destinations will proceed regardless. In both its daily concreteness and Trinitarian and Christological heights and depths,<sup>240</sup> the width of the common life attests that

---

<sup>234</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, book 2b, ll. 662-664: "[Dat] Dese minne, die god es, die es onser alder ghemeyne ende yeghewelcs sonderlinghe, ende al <ghe>heel die mint."

<sup>235</sup> For specific application of this position, see *supra*, Chapter 3, "We will see God with the eyes of our body",

<sup>236</sup> Ruusbroec, *XII Beghinen*, 2b, ll. 2349-2350 (with slight modification): "Nu zyn <wi> alle coepliede van natueren [...] Coopen ende vercoopen, dat es wisselen, lief om noch lievere gheven."

<sup>237</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, book 2b, ll. 674: "Minnen natuere es altoes gheven ende nemen [...]"

<sup>238</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen*, book 2b, ll. 675-676: "Gheven ende nemen, dat es een eewich onderscheet der minnen pleghen."

<sup>239</sup> See Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia 9, Van Seven Trappen*, VII, ll. 1106-1107: "'Betaelt uwe scoud; mindt de minne, die u eewelec ghemindt heeft!'"

<sup>240</sup> Here too, in an analogous vein, we hear Ruusbroec and the distinct force of the mystical theological tradition and its ardent social critique that flows from its distinct, theological position when more recently, Rowan Williams boldly proclaimed (in 2012, as then acting Archbishop of Canterbury) to the Roman Synod of Bishops: "[C]ontemplation is the only ultimate answer to the unreal and insane world that our financial systems and our advertising culture and our chaotic and unexamined emotions encourage us to inhabit. To learn

while *the economic itself and its impossible demands are inescapable*, the scales of minne similarly deny themselves recompense, as they stand in a suspended balance, eagerly awaiting for our graced return.

---

contemplative practice is to learn what we need so as to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly. It is a deeply revolutionary matter." See Rowan Williams, Archbishop's address to the Synod of Bishops in Rome Wednesday 10th October 2012, <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2645/#sthash.eIFmOB2z.dpuf>, as accessed on 03.01.2014.



## CHAPTER IX

### IN THE PLACE OF CHRIST: RETRIEVING THE LOCUS OF RUUSBROEC'S CHRISTOLOGY WITHIN CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

#### §1. INTRODUCTION—SPIRITUALITY AND ENVISIONING THE PUBLIC REALM

##### A. PROFANE SPIRITUALITY

In a recent thematic edition of *Spiritus* focusing specifically on Christian spirituality within a contemporary European context, Philip Sheldrake assesses Christian spirituality's "most fruitful path" in the immediate future as one marked by resourcing more traditional Christian humanist values and their social engagement, while aiming at a collaborative approach amongst a plurality of spiritualities for a greater "humanization of the world".<sup>1</sup> This position both dialogically recognizes more general assessments on the very fluidity and often ambiguous understandings of 'spiritualities' within contemporary settings, while inserting distinctly public-oriented Christian spiritualities into such social locales. Especially those particularly attentive to their foundational theological, incarnational underpinnings in which "no part of the material world or of human activity is inherently profane, although it may be profaned by sinful human action. The everyday world is an authentic theological *locus*."<sup>2</sup> While drawing heavily on De Certeau in rejecting a "polarization of [the] sacred and profane"<sup>3</sup>, Sheldrake's recent assessment of the fruitfulness of such a Christian spiritual engagement within a pluralistic European social context was voiced in positive reference to Luk Bouckaert's own plea for a humanist-inspired, "profane spirituality".<sup>4</sup>

Both as founder of the Leuven-based European SPES Forum<sup>5</sup> (Spirituality in Economics and Society) and a philosopher and economist by training, Luk Bouckaert's article, "The Search for a Profane Spirituality" explains the frequent intersection and mutual interaction today between economics and spirituality as "linked to the process of globalization deconstructing existing national, ideological and religious boundaries". Which in turn, by virtue of its fluid adaptability, spirituality understood as a "transconfessional good" is poised at responding to questions of "meaning" and "discernment" in a manner far better than more traditionally bound and contextually rooted

<sup>1</sup> Philip F. Sheldrake, "Spirituality in a European Context", *Spiritus*, vol. 11, 1, Spring 2011, 1-9, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Philip F. Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology and Social Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), pg. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Sheldrake, *Explorations*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> C.f. Luk Bouckaert, "The Search for a 'Profane Spirituality'", *Spiritus*, vol. 11, nr. 1 Spring 2011, pg. 24-37.

<sup>5</sup> C.f. <http://www.spes-forum.be/spes/index.php>, as accessed on 06.12.2011.

ecclesiastical participation.<sup>6</sup> How so? Bouckaert claims that the current appeal of spirituality is that it opens up a "free, post-modern space for the personal quest for meaning, connectedness and transcendence" that both draws from, as well as moderates the otherwise excessive positions of both outdated liberal secular viewpoints that conceive of such religious and/or spiritual identities as exclusively private as well as pre-modern, religious exclusivist positions as closed, hegemonic and thus poorly equipped at engaging pressing social demands within a pluralistic context.<sup>7</sup> Claiming spirituality's link as mediating a space wherein the public realm distinctly emerges is primarily explored in economic terms, as Bouckaert argues that spirituality today clearly demonstrates its value within the larger, public sphere as "indivisible" (i.e. non-possessive) and a "public good", especially in terms of its ability to "foster compassion, trust, non-violence, and a sense of meaning and purpose in life."<sup>8</sup> Thus conceived, a "profane spirituality" today is poised at becoming freed from both its privatized sphere and instead, is recognized economically as contributing to a "new type of *homo economicus*"<sup>9</sup> by subverting private/public polarized opposition and instead, integrates such competing interests and demands by virtue of promoting its public character. Critically, what precisely is such a public character that Bouckaert claims spirituality mediates other than a multiplicity of individual pursuits? By this orientation is spirituality transforming public spaces or rather eviscerating them?

While Bouckaert's defense of a contemporary spirituality very much stresses its discontinuous character—as pursued within a secular idiom that resists lapsing back into explicit religious categories—he nonetheless also relies upon a certain level of continuity in his indebtedness to the tradition of Christian humanism and its post-war revitalization at the basis of informing his view of spirituality and its postmodern public engagement. By first distinguishing both the thoroughly Jewish prophetic spirituality of Jesus of Nazareth as well as the Pauline-based, Christocentric spirituality in affirmation of the divinity of Christ and the "exemplary function of his life (*imatatio Christi*)"<sup>10</sup>, Bouckaert draws the link between his current 'profane spirituality' with the modern Christian tradition as institutionally embodying a

more secular meaning of Christian spirituality expressed by the term *Christian humanism*. Its focus is not the worship of Christ and identification with his life and presence but the humanization of the world. A Christian humanist is not looking *to* Christ but is looking *with* Christ at the problems of the world. The Christian humanist's concern is how to realize peace and justice in the world, how to save the planet from ecological disaster, how to restore social trust and communication, how to respect the dignity of life [...] The existing network of Christian organizations in political, social and cultural life is still inspired by this third form of Christian humanist spirituality.<sup>11</sup>

## B. IN THE PLACE OF CHRIST

---

<sup>6</sup> Bouckaert, "Profane Spirituality", 25.

<sup>7</sup> Bouckaert, "Profane Spirituality", 26.

<sup>8</sup> Bouckaert, "Profane Spirituality", 27.

<sup>9</sup> Bouckaert, "Profane Spirituality", 32.

<sup>10</sup> Bouckaert, "Profane Spirituality", 35.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

The implications, however, of such a secular Christian humanist spirituality are quite illuminating when noting the shifting relationality towards Christ—and more specifically, *the place of Christ* amid its public engagement—that becomes operative within its institutional praxis. Such shifts are attested in that any and all doctrinal foundation is intentionally avoided and instead, emphasis is given from the outset of a relational mutuality with the prophetic, ethical vision of Jesus of Nazareth. By situating himself firmly within this tradition, it is indeed curious to gauge more specifically Bouckaert's thinking of spirituality's institutionally-based, public engagement today fundamentally as a pluralistic enterprise, especially when considering an organization such as SPES, rooted as it is within this Christian humanist trajectory, nonetheless opts to "leave the institutional sphere of Christian organizations".<sup>12</sup> By Bouckaert's own reflections, we are given an opportunity to consider such a development, the pressure of which is becoming increasingly common with Christian organizations in Western European societies—at the intersection of both discontinuity and continuity. Not primarily in response to issues of plurality and otherness, nor ideological pressure that marks the contemporary, European public sphere, yet primarily out of pragmatic, economic reasons that arise within its public involvement. Citing the influence of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century French personalist philosopher, Emmanuel Mounier<sup>13</sup> on the identity and mission of SPES, Bouckaert relates a historical example from Mounier's moral commitments to a "more frugal and spirit-centered life" as distinct from those "who celebrate materialism and consumerism" while concluding that such competing values "did not correlate with the distinction between believers and non-believers."<sup>14</sup> In turn, Bouckaert states that "Mounier was convinced that the Christian commitment to the poor and a more just society could only be realized if Christians left their ghettos and searched for allies of good will to overcome the structures of fear, exploitation, and self-interest."<sup>15</sup>

While recognizing the formative influence of Mounier's personalism on SPES, is such a characterization at all contextually relevant today? Instead of being inhibited by an overtly exclusivist, ghetto-mentality, do not such publically-oriented Christian organizations—schools, hospitals, charitable organizations, Christian political organizations, etc.—suffer more from the opposite pressure of maintaining any and all affirmation of particularity in their Christian identity, invariably seen in tension both *ad intra* as well as *ad extra*? Are not the common assessments made by Sheldrake and Bouckaert's otherwise divergent positions of spirituality's distinctly public-vocation in continuity with its Christian humanist values naïvely optimistic? While failing to address the very real institutional pressures that various organizations face pertaining to their Christian identity, it is not at all self-evident that by adopting such a position would be Christian spirituality's "most fruitful path" within Europe in the following decades.

Recalling Bouckaert's description of a secular, Christian humanist spirituality as no longer directed "to Christ", yet "with Christ" and towards the world, by shifting away from a Christocentric spirituality inevitably portrays the latter as dogmatically obtuse that thwarts spirituality's more socially relevant, transformative potential. However, such a position, I would argue, draws spirituality only further afield and mutually impoverishes attempts at renewing its theological engagement with

---

<sup>12</sup> Bouckaert, "Profane Spirituality", 36.

<sup>13</sup> Bouckaert makes several mentions of the principled influence Mounier has had upon the formation of the SPES forum, see especially Bouckaert, "Profane Spirituality", 32, 35-6.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

the mystical/contemplative tradition in view of a contemporary *mystical theology*. Critically, does it not follow that the theological estrangement incurred by such a secular Christian humanist spirituality—admittedly, which is indeed at the heart of many Christian social organizations—has robbed its ability to speak for why it opts to stand "with" Christ in the world in the first place, other than to deflect such pressures as ultimately a question of respecting the heritage of its self-reflexive identity, the benchmark for such discussions today. Subsequently, not only do such responses result in a flattened particularity. Moreso, their social engagement is equally blunted, as the institutional "identity" in question does not affirm *with whom* we are standing with, nor does it answer *towards those* we are committed, as a response to our affirmation. Rather, it seeks to clarify *our own* identities and the collective institutions of which we are apart.

Contextually mindful of both the positive contributions of (Christian) spirituality's role within well-established and emerging, communicative public spheres in fostering new idioms for meaningful expression as well as the institutional pressures that such publically-oriented Christian organizations are now facing, such a critical position that I take however does not implicate me in necessarily adopting a more dualistic, culturally confrontational position. Rather, by admitting of these various contextual difficulties, such challenges illustrate the greater task of thinking concrete particularity as anything other than at the expense of alterity within a fluid, pluralistic social context such as Western Europe today. And yet, such a difficulty of affirming particularity within committed relationality, I would argue is hardly in line with the Christian Humanist tradition itself, especially by one of its earliest proponents, the Brabantine mystical theologian, Jan van Ruusbroec.

Such a perspective extends from current research into the Admirable Doctor and the retrieval of the primacy of Ruusbroec's relational understanding of *minne* within a contemporary, fundamental theological context. *Minne*, a unitive, dynamic concept of love that is differentiated from, yet incorporates dimensions of both *caritas/agape* and *eros*—has a critical potential to both expand and give further depth to our rethinking of love, as well as its distinct promise to do so from the seat of its own embodied primacy. As a unitive concept both "above reason and yet not without reason"<sup>16</sup>, Ruusbroec's theology of *minne*, I propose can enable us to refine, nuance and provide a unique alternative to otherwise polarized, contemporary theological discussions over the competing priorities of *caritas* and *veritas*, resultant in part by the failure to think love beyond what metaphysics has thus divided. While maintaining its unity, love by necessity needs a third term to think such primacy beyond the current impasse between self-possessive and self-denying love. Furthermore, in approaching a 'profane spirituality' no longer directed towards Christ, yet with him and together, towards the world, such a relational shift only further illustrates one of the fundamental challenges in upholding a unified understanding of love today, namely that charity—beyond all moralism, historical redresses of guilt and passionless responsibility—is indeed far more than something we

---

<sup>16</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia 3, The Spiritual Espousals*, (trans.) H. Rolfson, (ed.) J. Alaerts (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 188) b, ll. 1481-1485: "In the unity of spirit, in which this vein wells, one is above activity and above reason, but not without reason; for the enlightened reason, and especially, the faculty of loving [*de minnende cracht*], feels this touch, and reason can neither comprehend nor understand the mode or manner, how or what this touch might be." "In eenicheit des gheests, daer dese adere walt, es men boven werken ende boven redene, maer niet sonder redene; want die verlichte redene, ende zonderlinghe de minnende cracht, ghevoelt dit gherinen, ende redene en can niet begripen noch verstaen wise noch maniere, hoe ochte wie dit gherinen si."



simply "do" as reflective of our self-identity, but it too bears the marks of a loving encounter<sup>17</sup> of the other, of Christ. An encounter that is met in an impossible desire for justice and its demands, from which we cannot but continually flow out towards others without exclusion, gratuitously and seeking nothing back in return.

Currently, I wish to explore Ruusbroec's distinct, mystically-based approach to otherwise traditional Christological themes and their mutual influence at the intersection of *minne*. More specifically, issues of particularity and human autonomy as strongly upheld in the various manners of union with Christ. For in approaching the very particularity of our desirous, loving union *towards* and *in* Christ and the expressions of such an underlying, relational mutuality that *minne* ushers forth, Ruusbroec invariably describes these manners as the following: as mediated with distinction in and through the external activity of our loving; as immediate in the work of our desirous yearning and praise; as well as *without difference or distinction* [*onderscheet*] in terms of *minne*'s loving enjoyment. Accounting for Ruusbroec's at times strong expressions of union language, while equally attentive to the relational alterity that such *minne* entails, it is Ruusbroec's distinctly Christian humanistic perspective that comes to the fore in these considerations, wherein the particularity and autonomy of the human person well-endures such radical language of union and transformation. Thus, Ruusbroec's position emphatically maintains the very humanness of union, rather than a more Eckhartian understanding of union as a full merging wherein all created particularity flows away. The endurance of *minne* and its continual renewal of mutual love refuses easily collapsing distinctions of greater dissimilarity between Creator and creature, while equally admitting of the praxis of such transformative loving "with which we fight against the terrifying, tremendous love of God, which wants to burn up all loving spirits and devour them in its Selfhood."<sup>18</sup> And yet, in the face of this voracious and excessively unrestrained abysmal love [*afgrondiger minne*], so too is there an endlessly gratuitous modality of *minne* that Ruusbroec will also stress, wherein Christ "[W]ants to live and dwell in you; and He Himself wants to be your life, God and man, and be altogether yours, if you want to be altogether His and live in Him and dwell in Him like a heavenly divine human being [*hemelsch, godlec mensche*]."<sup>19</sup> In this way, by precisely integrating more traditional Christological reflections as resourced within their distinctive mystical theological idiom, Ruusbroec's Christology necessarily converges with his mystical anthropology in continual reference to our own deification in Christ as "sons of God, by grace, not by nature"<sup>20</sup>, understood as further redeeming our own human nature and becoming more fully human in and through loving, spiritual praxis.

---

<sup>17</sup> See generally, the Motu Proprio of Benedict XVI, "On the Service of Charity", wherein such an "encounter" is recalled as forming the continual basis of the Church's works of charity, which at the same time distinguishes her from "[...] becoming just another form of organized social assistance." See [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_motu-proprio\\_20121111\\_caritas\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20121111_caritas_en.html), as accessed on 21.01.13.

<sup>18</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, Opera Omnia 8, *Spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*, trans. A. Lefevere, ed. G. de Baere (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 2001) ll. 1818-1820: "Siet, dit sijn de wapene daer wi mede striden jeghen de vreesleke, ongheiere minne gods, die alle minnende gheeste wilt verberren ende verslinden in hars selfsheit."

<sup>19</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spieghel*, ll. 40-43: "Want hi wilt in u leven ende woonen, ende hi wilt selve uwe leven sijn, god ende mensche, ende al te male uwe sijn, eest dat ghe te male sine wilt sijn ende in hem leven ende woonen also .i. hemelsch, godlec mensche."

<sup>20</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Spieghel*, ll. 1884-5: "[...] daer sijn wi sonen gods van ghenaden, niet van natueren."

For He shall show you the way of minne to His Father which He Himself walked and which He Himself is. And in it He shall show you how His Human nature is a worthy offering to His Father. And this human nature He has given you with all that He has suffered, that you may confidently come to court with it before His heavenly Father.

Want hi sal u wisen den wech der minnen te sinen vader dien hi selve ghing ende die hi selve es. Ende daer in sal hi u vertoonen hoe sine menscheit eene weerderghe offerande es sinen vader. Ende dese menscheit heeft hi u ghegheven met al dien dat hi gheleden heeft, dat ghe coenlec daer mede te hove comt vore sinen hemelschen vader.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, Ruusbroec's balanced, integrated approach, I would like to argue, thoroughly challenges both contemporary views on the limiting role of dogma and the legacy of the Christian humanist tradition in particular, arguing instead for a mystical theology that allows us to dwell both *with* and *in* Christ amid the otherwise inaccessibly profound and unfathomable sufferings that He continuously opens access to and bears alongside others within creation and in His Body, the Church.

By raising the challenge previously illustrated of thinking concrete particularity as affirming, rather than excluding radical alterity, such a perspective presupposes a view of Christian spirituality in general, and in particular, the writings of Ruusbroec as indelibly marked by and thoroughly dependent upon its theological basis. By recognizing its theological basis and dependency, Christian spirituality need not however explicitly nor implicitly return us to the presuppositions of the manual tradition as inaugurated by Scaramelli and later on typified by Tanquerey's immensely popular *The Spiritual Life*<sup>22</sup>. Sheldrake himself has argued for the distinctiveness of a contemporary "spirituality" as clearly distinguished from that of "spiritual theology", noting that spirituality today is "not simply the prescriptive application of absolute or dogmatic principles to life."<sup>23</sup> And yet, such an identity in discontinuity, I would cautiously assert is still more shaped by its distinctly *modern* heritage and tradition—as typified by the manual tradition and the discussions surrounding the relations invariably between asceticism, seen as preparatory and theologically-based to that of the extraordinary and overtly experiential character of mysticism. Hence, while this has led many to clearly assert spirituality's autonomy from that of theology, especially in its institutional application and academic study, such counter-movements nonetheless owe much to the modern manual tradition's characterization of "mysticism" by both over-emphasizing spirituality's new self-understanding to the clear detriment of more classical spiritual texts disengaged from their hermeneutically grounded, theologically-engaged religious context.

Readdressing this imbalance may be seen in the fruitful, mutual engagement between Christian doctrine and its speculative, theological reflection with that of spiritual praxis is well attested to in Ruusbroec's overall mystical theology. Such a perspective is readily accessible in the opening sections to a shorter work of Ruusbroec's, *Vanden Vier Becoringhen*, which was a "farewell to Brussels"<sup>24</sup> before leaving for Groenendaal and the Sonian Forest, where he would spend the remainder of his life in the emerging community that would eventually adopt for itself the rule of St. Augustine. Ruusbroec gives a strong portrait in the following citation of his spiritual praxis itself as

---

<sup>21</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spiegel*, ll. 69-73.

<sup>22</sup> A.A. Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*, trans. Herman Branderis (Tournai: ET, 1930).

<sup>23</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History* (London: SPCK, 1995), pp 58.

<sup>24</sup> See Paul Mommaers' Introduction to *Vanden Vier Becoringhen*, Opera Omnia X, Brepols/Turnhout, 223.

both grounded in as well as providing for a mystical theological hermeneutic that receives and evaluates its relationship to its foundational Christian sources:

Whoever is more inwardly inclined to the God's speaking in him than outwardly inclined to the words of man, and rather listens to the word of God to live by than to know, and for whom the word of God is an inleading food in which God tastes better to him than all things [...] that is the one who has ears to hear, for he is able to understand all the truth God is willing to reveal to him [...] For if we want to remain standing and save ourselves from falling into grievous sins we must learn to know ourselves and observe ourselves and turn inwards into ourselves, onefold, and keep our dwelling with God's speaking in us. And then our life shall be in agreement with holy Scripture and with all the saints. And through love of virtue and real humility we shall want to be admonished and taught by Scriptures and all men. And we shall always want to hear and see sound doctrine and holiness of life. These things reveal a good man. For all these things are very annoying to hear and know for all those who do not deny themselves completely and do not willingly abandon all of their own selfness in things present and to come through the practice of mortifying their nature, their flesh and their blood, their senses and their rational activity in whatever way they are admonished, taught and spurred on by God and his holy friends.

So wat mensche die meer inweert neycht tot den insprekene gods dan uurtwert tot den woorden der menschen, ende dien meer lust te hoorne dat woort gods omme leven dan om weten, ende dien dat woort gods es een inleidende spise daer hem god in smaect boven alle dinc [...] dat es de ghene die ooren heeft te hoorne. Want he es hebbelijc alle waerheit te verstane die hem god vertoenen wilt [...] Want zelen wij staende bliven ende behuedt werden dat wij niet en vallen in groven sonden; soe moeten wij ons zelve leeren kinnen ende ons selfs waer nemen, ende eenvoldich inkeren in ons zelve, ende inwoenende bliven biden insprekene gods. Daer zelen wij hooren ende leeren rechte waerheit ende leven. Ende dan sal onze leven concorderen metter heyligher scriftueren ende met allen heylighen. Ende overmids minnen der duecht ende rechte oetmoedicheit, zoe selen wij begheren berespt ende gheleert te sine vander screft ende van allen menschen. Ende ons sal altoes lusten te hoorne ende te siene ganse leere ende heylicheit van levne. Ende dese dinghe toenen eenen goeden mensche. Want alle dese dinghe sijn herde verdrietelijc te hoorne ende te wetene amme den gheenen die hem selven te male niet en laten, ende alre eyghenheit haers sels <willichlijcke> niet en vertien, in jeghenwoordighen dinghen ende in toencomenden dinghen in eender stervender oefeninghen haerrer natueren, haers vleeschs ende haers bloets, harer sinnen ende harer vernuftigher werke na alder wijs dat si van <gode> ende van sinen heilighen vrienden vermaecht, gheleert ende ghedreven werden.<sup>25</sup>

Here, Ruusbroec introduces us to several key elements that highlight the intersection between spiritual praxis and Christian faith that are at the basis of his synthesized, mystical theology. This primarily includes a strong emphasis on the needed basis for distinguishing and privileging an interiority marked by a sustained, desirous affectivity and its willful inclination towards "God's speaking in him [...] in which God tastes better to him than all things", in contrast to being "outwardly inclined to the words of man". Such a perspective by no means devalues our more communal-based relationships with and responsibilities towards others. Quite the opposite is the case, as we shall soon see. For well within an Augustinian trajectory, it is only by first recognizing the particularity of God's primacy and lovingly inclining towards such primacy, a desirous inclining of

---

<sup>25</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia* 10, *Vanden Vier Becoringhen*, (trans.) A. Lefevere, (eds.) G. de Baere, Th. Mertens, and H. Noë, (Tiel: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 1991) ll. 5-12, 28-44.

which admits of difference and distinction, are we then able to respond by a love that *overflows* [*uutvloeyn*] gratuitously and without return.

Ruusbroec expands upon this affective interiority and its desirous inclining by further describing the manner in which this is practiced, highlighting the one who "rather listens to the word of God to live by than to know". Such a *sapiential* emphasis upon which prepares the claim that we will be able to "understand all the truth God is willing to reveal" shows Ruusbroec's orientation towards Christian Revelation, namely that through its lived, loving praxis do we come to further understand Christian faith as a living faith. Interestingly enough, Ruusbroec's thinking of *minne* distinctly comes to the fore, affirming that by virtue of such spiritual praxis of desirous inclining and receptivity to God's interior speaking that we shall be both in "agreement with holy Scripture" as well as the tradition of the communion of saints, having cultivated a genuine taste for "real humility [...] want[ing] to be admonished and taught by Scriptures and all men", rather than primarily wishing to teach others instead. The approach here to "sound doctrine" is affirmed not as a contested object through dispassionate argument, yet by cultivating our very desire for the unfathomable depths of our interiority and God's indwelling in which the soundness of Christian doctrine are rightly affirmed as protecting, giving further access towards as well as helping sustain our taste for this "inleading food". Hence, not only is Ruusbroec challenging the very deductive/inductive typologies in which we traditionally gauge the intersection and relationships with mystical texts and their theological foundations. But furthermore, Ruusbroec openly challenges another well-known typology, that of the three ways of purgation, illumination and union, upon which the manual tradition so heavily emphasizes and its view of moral and dogmatic theology that founds ascetic theology as preparatory for the more extraordinary and explicitly experiential character of mysticism as its result.<sup>26</sup> In a subtle, yet remarkable contrast, while Ruusbroec by no means aims at denying the importance of ascetic practices as such, Ruusbroec rather shows, *a fortiori* these practices of self-denial as more consequential of this more primary, desirous inclination towards God's interior speaking from which such actions are thus seen as responding to this interior calling. While the consequences of this position demands further reflection, in short we can see that not only does Ruusbroec challenge the bases of these well-used typologies, yet he creatively does so in and through an appeal of the praxis of desirous inclination that opens onto and is given further depth by way of its taste for "sound doctrine and holiness of life".

## §2. TOWARDS A DESIROUS CHRISTOLOGY

It is argued that the intersection of Christian doctrine and spiritual praxis within Ruusbroec's writings offer a challenging alternative to certain well-established typologies as typified within the manual tradition. Following from this, the mutual interaction of kataphasis and apophasis—in specific Christological terms at the intersection of both affirming concrete images of His humanity as well as the continuing imagelessness of His divinity—offers a more productive avenue of approaching Ruusbroec's distinct treatment of otherwise tradition-based, Christological formulations. This is

---

<sup>26</sup>c.f. Tanqueray's "Introduction"(pgs.1-27) in *The Spiritual Life* where he clarifies the object and method of "spiritual theology" as specifically determined by both dogmatic and moral theology.

developed in a preserved letter<sup>27</sup> that Ruusbroec addressed to Margareta van Meerbeke, a "rich" Clare nun in Brussels, for whom Ruusbroec had well known, having also composed for her the book *Vanden seven sloten*.<sup>28</sup> The letter comes as a response to a previous visit that he had made to the Brussels' convent, addressing the letter both to Margareta specifically, as a letter of consolation to what he perceived in her as her sadness<sup>29</sup>, as well as to her "fellow sisters, indeed for all men who are willing to hear and learn to avoid sin and live for God."<sup>30</sup> Noting the epistolary form of his address as more than simple literary convention, Ruusbroec instead immediately delivers us to the core of the issue itself in this reflection—namely, the affirmation of kataphatic particularity in view of promoting, rather than collapsing alterity. Or, in this specific instance, transforming our approach to alterity, away from that of multiplicity and towards that which is "common" [*ghemeyne*].

Ruusbroec's letter begins upon somewhat of an urgent tone, arguing that Margareta should remember and keep her religious vows and to "deny yourself out of minne and to abandon yourself into the hands of the Lord [...] possess[ing] him in love with the reverence you have for Him and He in return shall possess you in Minne with all the benevolence with which he pursues you."<sup>31</sup> He then immediately joins the beginnings of his plea with a clear, doctrinal reference to Chalcedon, elaborating her union with Christ as modeled upon and exemplified by the person of Christ himself as both *without separation, without division*: "And nobody shall be able to separate or divide you from Him, or even to create any impediment between you and Him."<sup>32</sup> By first encouraging mutual possession in and through such active love seen as the basis of, and thus wholly consonant with the maintaining of Margareta's religious vows, the Chalcedon language of without separation or division functions as critical reference in this discussion for Ruusbroec's spiritual guidance to both Margareta as well as the other religious in the Brussels' convent. Namely that in the face of factionalism, rivalry and discord within a religious community—of which, Ruusbroec clearly elaborates upon as the "worst evil I know these days among those who should be living the life spiritual everywhere"—Ruusbroec upholds a strong vision of union with Christ and the particularity of its desirous, loving possession as *without separation* that acts as a corrective to any and all "impediments" of which lay at the heart of Margareta's sadness. This in part can be seen in more

---

<sup>27</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Brieven 1*, Opera Omnia X, Brepols/Turnhout, 518-539. For more on Ruusbroec's relationship to Margareta, c.f. Helen Rolfson, "Ruusbroec and the Franciscan Tradition", in *14<sup>th</sup> Century English Mystics Newsletter*, vol. 8, no. 4 (December 1982), pp. 163-173. In this article, Ruusbroec scholar and translator Helen Rolfson situates Ruusbroec's correspondence, as well as his *Seven Enclosures* within a distinct Franciscan tradition in both its literary and religious aspects, likening Ruusbroec's relation to Margareta in a manner similar to that of Francis and Clare.

<sup>28</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, Opera Omnia 2, *Vanden seven sloten*, (trans.) H. Rolfson, (ed.) G. de Baere, (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 1981).

<sup>29</sup> Ruusbroec, Opera Omnia 10, *Brieven* (trans.) A. Lefevere, (eds.) G. de Baere, Th. Mertens, and H. Noë, (Tielt: Lannoo, Turnhout: Brepols, 1991) 1, ll. 8/ \*43-46: "Recently when I was in your convent you seemed a little sad to me. And so I thought you had been abandoned by God or by a special friend you had put great trust in, or that you were tormented by temptations that saddened you from outside and inside, which way ever. That is why I wanted to write you this." "Lestent doe ic in u cloester was, doe docthi my wat bedroeft sijn. En zo dacht il dat gij door God of door een bijzondere vriend, in wie gij zeer veel vertrouwen hadt, in de steek gelaten waart of dat gij gekweld werdt door bekoringen die u van buiten en van binnen op enigerlei wijze bedrukten. Ende hierom wilde ik u dit schrijven."

<sup>30</sup> Ruusbroec, *Brieven 1*, ll. \*67-69 : 'Dit wilden ik schrijven aan u en uw medezusters en ook aan alle mensen die willen horen en vernemen op welke manier zij de zonden moeten vermijden en voor God leven.'

<sup>31</sup> Ruusbroec, *Brieven 1*, ll. 15-16, 18-20.

<sup>32</sup> Ruusbroec, *Brieven 1*, E. ll. 20-1.

exclusive relations grounded not upon self-abandonment in minne, yet more out of a strategic reciprocity wherein "everyone wants to have a staff to rest on"<sup>33</sup> that leads to anything but a view of religious communal life as one *without division*. Ruusbroec writes, "And you shall also feel that you have been exalted by God beyond yourself and beyond all things and that he wants to be your very own. And you will respond to this that you want to be his very own in return, and that you want to be in the lowest place under all creatures."<sup>34</sup> It is thus in this context of both strongly maintaining the significant value of loving desire for mystical union with Christ, as unique, particular and without separation, while recognizing the complicated and fragile state of current religious life (prior, of course, to the monastic reforms of the pre-Tridentine era) as fraught with conflict and competing, ideological interests that Ruusbroec's specific words of consolation emerge:

When you are exalted or raised up by God you must abase and humiliate yourself. For that was the answer the most blessed Mary ever Virgin gave when the archangel Gabriel brought her the message that she would become the mother of God: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord'. And also, when Christ's soul was united with the eternal Word so that he was both God and man, he made himself a servant and submitted himself to the whole world. *And he is not particular to anyone but common to all who desire Him*. And if you also want to be his and not your own, as you promised, you shall be common to all people in their need, and not particular to anyone. That way you shall not be inordinately sad when your friend dies or abandons you for another.

Wanneer gij verheven of opgericht wordt door God, moet gij u zelf vernederen en verootmoedigen. Zo toch ook, toen bericht was door de aartsengel Gabriël aan de gelukzaligste Maria altijd maagd dat zij de moeder van God zou worden, antwoordde zij: 'Zie de dienstmaagd des Heren.' En evenzo [...]Doe die ziele Cristi was gheenicht den ewighen woerde alsoe dat hi was god ende mensche, doe maecte hi hem selven knecht ende onderwerp hem alder werlt. *Ende hi en is nyemant sunderlinghe, met gemeyn enen yegelicken die sijns begeert*. Mer wildi oec sijn sijn ende uwes selves niet, soe als ghi geloeft hebt, soe suldi ghemeyn sijn enen yegelicken in sijnre noet ende nyemant sunderlinge. Soe en werdi nyet onordynierlick bedroeft als u uwe vrient af sterft, of enen anderen verkiest ende u begeeft.<sup>35</sup>

In this intriguing passage, with its strong Incarnational basis, Ruusbroec links both the very particularity and possessiveness of "all who desire Him" as thoroughly in concert with and mutually supporting a depiction of charitable love as "common to all people in their need, and not particular to anyone" as exemplified by Christ. The foundational basis for such a "common" plea is thus none other than the Christological image as mediating these tensions within his very person—*without confusion, without change*—that grounds Ruusbroec's advice, responding both to Margareta's own sadness as well as the threat of internal division and separation within the Rich Clare convent in Brussels. Interestingly enough, in a brief comment in the Introduction to the *Letters* in the critical edition of Ruusbroec's works, we see *in nucleo* the contrary position, namely that of maintaining the opposition between particularity and commonality—and by extension, the place of Christ as consequential to such an understanding—wherein it states that "Ruusbroec wants to make it clear to her [Margareta] that her sadness is the result of the fact that she is not 'common' but 'particular'."<sup>36</sup> While in fairness, no further reflection is given on this comment and therefore we should not deduce too much from it, nonetheless such an opposition shows a tendency towards more of a dissassociative reading, refusing to read both the erotic desirous dimensions of mystical union (in all

<sup>33</sup> Ruusbroec, *Brieven 1*, E. II. 57-9.

<sup>34</sup> Ruusbroec, *Brieven 1*, E. II. 27-31.

<sup>35</sup> Ruusbroec, *Brieven 1*, ll. \*38-42/1-7, my emphasis.

<sup>36</sup> Ruusbroec, "Introduction" to *Brieven*, 478.

of its "particularity") in relation to its gratuitous, communal/social ethical response (as "common") as mutually reinforcing the other. For Ruusbroec, in order to sustain such a continuous, overflowing charitable love, it therefore must be nourished and nurtured by a love that sustains it. More specifically, a love that affirms the very possessiveness and particularity of its mutually-shared desire, while at the same time expressing itself in an overflowing common love towards others from within the "bottomless depths of [its] humble abandon"<sup>37</sup> giving itself without preference and without seeking its return. And yet we can only see these necessary links—of which forms certain core aspects of Ruusbroec's understanding of minne—if we both engage with the very dogmatic positions that underpin Ruusbroec's writings, as well as their spiritual praxis of union with Christ *without separation or division*.

And yet, how do we specifically respond to such a Christological image that both admits of the particularity of our desires, while refusing their possessive exclusivity at the same time? For the tendency to dwell solely on one aspect, to the detriment of the other, indeed forms another "impediment" that otherwise stands in the way of union with Christ without separation nor division. In this current letter, Ruusbroec gives us an example of how best to respond to such linkages, both fundamental to the unicity of minne itself, and its Christological image as *commonly* preserving the autonomy and relatedness of both particularity and alterity with the model of John the Baptist. Ruusbroec writes:

St. John the Baptist left his father and his mother, his father's priesthood that was his right, the honor and riches of the world and fled into the desert [...] And he did not attract anyone to himself but led his disciples and all creatures to God. And he himself did not go there [the 'desert'] because he was afraid of his affection and desire, that he might cling too much to the human nature of our Lord with his senses so that he might be hampered by images in the free and pure ascent of his spirit into God.

Ende hier om liet sunte Johan Baptista vader ende moeder, sijns vaders bisdom, dat hem van rechte toebehoerden, eer ende rijcheit der werelt, ende vloet in die woestijn [...] Ende hi en toech oec nyemant aen hem, mer hi wijsden sijn discipulen ende alle creatueren tot gode. Nochtant en ginck hi daer selven nyet, want hi ontsach sijn affectie ende sijn geluste dat hi te zeer cleven mochte myt synlickerwijs aen die menscheit ons heren, alsoe dat hi gehyndert ende verbeeldet mocht werden aenden vryen pueren opganc sijns geestes in gode.<sup>38</sup>

This is certainly an original portrait that Ruusbroec provides of John the Baptist and it is quite plausible that more is being referred to than simply the prophet, who feasted on locusts and wild honey. For after all, both the Groenendaal monastery itself—located in the Sonian forest, a *northern desert* given its isolation and removal from any and all comforts such that Brussels could give—as well as Ruusbroec himself had St. John the Baptist as their patron saint.<sup>39</sup> Thus, we may safely presume that Margareta too would have easily made similar such connections, in addition to the self-referential implications that Ruusbroec is making with this statement. With these contextual features in mind, Ruusbroec's portrait of his patron saint becomes quite interesting, especially in his thinking of "affection and desire" and the role of the "desert" in the spiritual life. Here, the 'desert' is not to be confused with pursuing a hardened asceticism and abnegation of such a desirous self, yet as imaging the very bareness of human nature that continuously thirsts for God. For in another work,

<sup>37</sup> Ruusbroec, *Brieven 1*, ll. 34 -35: "[...] en ook in u zelf vernederd en neergedrukt in ootmoedige gelatenheid zonder enige grond".

<sup>38</sup> Ruusbroec, *Brieven 1*, ll. 32-34; 36-41.

<sup>39</sup> I wish to thank Prof. Rob Faesen specifically for providing me with this helpful historical reference.

*Mirror of Eternal Blessedness*, of which historical scholarship suggests (though is certainly debatable) was also quite possibly written for Margareta and the rich Clare nuns of Brussels<sup>40</sup>, Ruusbroec clearly and repeatedly refers to the metaphor of the "desert" as describing the desirous core of our human nature and its natural desire for God as a "wild, waste unimaged bareness, which always responds to eternity".<sup>41</sup> In another passage, Ruusbroec also uses the metaphor of the 'desert' and its 'modeless character' as none other than preserving human dignity, created particularity as well as greater dissimilarity to that of the Creator, such that, "If our essence [*wesen*] came to naught, we would not know, or love, or be blessed. But our created essence is to be beheld as a wild, waste desert, wherein God lives who reigns over us. And in that desert we must wander modelessly and without manner."<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, returning back to the letter, it is thus quite consistent and fitting that in this sense, Ruusbroec would link such desire and the desert as not only imaging our own human nature, yet as equally responding to the "human nature of our Lord" and our union with Him. However, as we have repeatedly stressed, for Ruusbroec, to focus simply upon the humanity of Christ creates an impediment in our union with Him, both in terms of *separation* and *division*. For just as John the Baptist did not "attract anyone to himself but led his disciples and all creatures to God"<sup>43</sup> so too are we separated from Christ when focusing exclusively upon His humanity, for Christ "also attracted nobody to Him, for He Himself walked ahead and led His disciples and all creatures to His heavenly Father."<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, while by no means denying our possessive desire for His humanity, Ruusbroec also indicates that such desire alone renders us divided from Him in our inability to "contemplate His high divine nature by His noble human nature interposing itself, creating images for them and coarsening them [...] impeded and assailed by images caused by sensual affection for his worthy human nature."<sup>45</sup>

Contrasting these impediments, Ruusbroec offers both Margareta and the rich Clare's of Brussels a firm alternative image, one in which is responsive both to the very humanity and divinity of Christ himself, while distinctly articulated in and through its primary attention towards spiritual praxis. By this, Ruusbroec firmly articulates his spiritual council that aims at further deepening the Rich Clare's own particular spiritual union with Christ without separation, from which in turn may

---

<sup>40</sup> c.f. Rik van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec: Mystical Theologian of the Trinity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), pg. 24-5: "After his profession in 1350 Ruusbroec wrote the remainder of his works, usually with a female audience in mind [...] The highly attractive work *Een Spieghel der Eewigher Salicheit* (The Mirror of Eternal Blessedness) was written in 1359 with the same Clare nun [Margareta] in mind. It focuses on the role of the Eucharist in the spiritual life [...] The exact status of the work is not entirely clear: perhaps it is as much a letter as a treatise in the proper sense, and therefore it does not have the intricate structure of most of the other major works of Ruusbroec."

<sup>41</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spieghel*, ll. 2065-2066: "Daer en venden wi anders niet dan welde, wuste, onghebeelde bloetheit, die altooes antwerdt der eewecheit."

<sup>42</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spieghel*, ll. 2153-2157: "Ghinghe oec onse wesen te niete, soe en souden wi niet kinnen noch minnen noch salegh sijn. Maer onse ghescapene wesen es an te siene alse eene welde, wueste wustine, daer god in leeft, die ons regeert." Ende in dese wustine moeten wi dolen wiselooes ende sonder maniere."

<sup>43</sup> See supra, note 39.

<sup>44</sup> Ruusbroec, *Brieven 1*, ll. 41-43: "Jhesus Cristus, die levende gods soen, die en toech oec nyemant aen hem, want hi ginck selven voer ende wijsden sinen discipulen ende alle creatueren tot sijnen hemelschen vader."

<sup>45</sup> Ruusbroec, *Brieven 1*, ll. 87-88; 91-94 (slight modification): "Ende doe worden si vermyddelt ende vergravet ende verbeeldet in sijn edel menschelike natuer, dat si nyet verheven en mochten werden in horen geest te beschouwen sijn hoge godlicke natuer [...] om dat si vermyddelt ende verbeelt waren mit synlicker liefden in sijn weerde menscheit."



overflow throughout the entire convent as a corrective to the threats of rivalry and factionalism in view of religious community as a whole, without division. Such a religious ideal, Ruusbroec describes in the following with a fascinating synthesis of Christ's humanity and divinity, the person's outward and inward life and its correspondence to kataphasis and apophasis as a

[...] heavenly life, for Christ lives in them, God and man. And for this reason they live both with images and without. They have the images of the life of our Lord, His suffering and His death and all virtue. And in their spirit they are free and idle and empty of all things. And for this reason they are without images and *overformed* [*over formt*] in divine clarity. And so they can go out and in and find living nourishment always. They go out with the image of the humanity of our Lord in good conduct, holy practice and all virtue. They go in without images with the Spirit of our Lord where they find and possess eternal clarity, unfathomable wealth, taste and comfort more than they can grasp or comprehend.

Dese hebben een hemels leven want Cristus levet in hem god ende mensche. Ende hier om sijn si gebeeldet ende ongebeeldet. Si sijn gebeelt mitten leven ons heren, myt sijnre passien ende mit sijnre doot ende mit allen doechden. Ende si sijn nu los ende ledich [ende ledich] ende ongebeelt van allen dingen in horen geest. Ende hier om sijn si overbeeldet ende over formt in godlicker claarheit. Ende aldus moegen si uitgaen ende ingaen ende altoes levende spise vynden. Si gaen uut gebeelt mitter menscheit ons heren in gueden zeden, in heiliger oefeninge, in alle doechden. Si gaen in beeldeloes mitten geest ons heren daer si vynden ende besitten ewige claarheit, grondelose rijcheit, smaeck ende troest, meer dan si begripen of ghevatten moegen.<sup>46</sup>

## A. CONCLUSION

From the proceeding reflections, the need for a continual balancing between particularity and alterity has been raised if indeed one is to approach such alterity as common as well as retaining the particularity of their own relational loving. This position has been situated within the trajectory of the Christian Humanist tradition and reengaging its challenges today. For indeed, by way of retrieving Ruusbroec's thinking of minne and its relationality—*contra* contemporary understandings of erotic possessiveness—we are invited to critically reflect upon the diminished cultural range of mediating the immediacy of desire within religious categories whereby such an intensely unique, desirous and embodied commitment to the very particularity of Christ understands itself as both particular and mutual, yet by no means exclusive. Instead of tempering or scaling back our desires for Him, so as to 'make room for others' and thereby becoming more *hospitable* towards both Him as well as others—which can be regarded as somewhat of the default position within more 'profane spiritualities' and its neutralizing tendencies. Ruusbroec instead encourages us to think from within such a desirous, erotic particularity that cannot but express itself as common, non-exclusive and common to others, as Christ is towards us.

By this critical retrieval of Ruusbroec's mystical theology and his thinking of minne that privileges claims of relationality as prior to that of identity, the convergence of doctrine, spirituality and the public realm contextualizes the current challenge in affirming the strong particularity of cultural identities, while equally non-possessive. This is to say, an "unceasing" particularity, not at the expense of plurality, yet at preserving and transforming our approach to such plurality as

---

<sup>46</sup> Ruusbroec, *Brieven 1*, ll. 62-72.

inexhaustibly and "indivisibly" that which is "*common*".<sup>47</sup> Therefore, spirituality's current role within public reflections regarding the "common good" has the potential to transform the very manner in which we engage with the public at this very time—transforming both public spaces themselves, as well as how we conceive of the public itself, especially in its current, fluid plurality. By retrieving mystical theological figures such as Ruusbroec within contemporary theological reflection, not only does this continue to challenge predominant misunderstandings of mysticism as inherently private and thus incapable of speaking towards the public at large. Yet it further challenges the continuing legacy of the manual tradition that increasingly isolated mysticism and contemplation as rare and extraordinary to the life of faith itself. Rather, in reflecting upon Ruusbroec's theology of *minne* at the intersection of spiritual praxis and Christological doctrine necessarily questions the current profile of Christian social organizations by way of their very own Christian humanistic tradition. Doing so emphatically stresses the mutual dependencies upon both erotic, possessive love, in and through desire for union with Christ, with that of charity's gratuitousness that overflows from such union and gives itself freely to others without exclusion, and without seeking anything in return. Such a loving dynamism thus helps us transform our very public engagements and the social works of Christian organizations, encouraging us to root ourselves in a stronger particularity that can do no other than to commonly attend to the needs of others without partiality, without exclusion.

---

<sup>47</sup> See generally See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, (London: Burns & Oates, 2004) n. 164-165.

## CHAPTER X

### “FOR GOD IS A COMMON FOOD AND A COMMON GOOD”: JAN VAN RUUSBROEC AND LEARNING HOW TO DESIRE IN THE CHRISTIAN HUMANIST TRADITION

#### §1. INTRODUCTION

##### A. WHAT IS COMMON IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The following proceeds from an ongoing, comprehensive theological retrieval of the late medieval Brabantine contemplative, Jan van Ruusbroec and his understanding of love, or *minne*, within contemporary discussions over love in theological and philosophy of religion quarters. Currently, I will like to reflect upon certain foundational dimensions of Ruusbroec’s mystical theology—exemplary of the tradition of early Christian humanism—as possessing an enduring theological relevance. Especially so, concerning the question of Catholic identity of education within contemporary, Western pluralistic societies. Fundamentally, I will like to argue that one of the basic virtues of Catholic education is that it is *common* and that it traditionally has upheld such distinction, not primarily due to any sense of contextual accommodation, yet as arising from and thus reaffirming the very particularity of its identity as such. Common, is not understood here as either ‘general’ or ‘ordinary’; it is not a mean or, qualitatively speaking, as that which is ‘mediocre’. Rather, by ‘common’, I in part understand as a relational conviction that it is only by being more common that one becomes more particular. Here, we are treading upon a more dynamic synthesis, which, I would suggest was recalled by the Congregation for Catholic Education’s 1997 text, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*. Recalling the spiritual impetus of various religious orders, such the Ursuline sisters, as well as well-known figures such as De la Salle, as well as Don Bosco, it states:

Spurred on by the aim of offering to all, and especially to the poor and marginalized, the opportunity of an education, of training for a job, of human and Christian formation, it can and must find in the context of the old and new forms of poverty that original synthesis of ardor and fervent dedication which is a manifestation of Christ’s love for the poor, the humble, the masses seeking for truth.<sup>1</sup>

##### B. THE COMMON AND ITS ANTHROPOLOGICAL BASIS IN RUUSBROEC

In my current doctoral research, I have argued that in order to seriously consider the constructive theological *relevance* and *credibility*, as well as the contextual *plausibility* of retrieving a figure such as Ruusbroec, then one must hermeneutically engage, not so much with questions of “mystical experience” and the underpinnings of its autonomous, modern subject that are wholly discontinuous with pre-modern thought. Rather, one must contend explicitly with Ruusbroec’s distinct

---

<sup>1</sup> See Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997), n. 15: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_27041998\\_school2000\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_27041998_school2000_en.html), as accessed on 23.03.13.

theological anthropology and the primacy it holds towards relationality as a constructive/critical interlocutor amid current efforts in rethinking human relationality. For Ruusbroec, this intrinsic presupposition can primarily be situated in terms of "mutual indwelling", a defining characteristic of late-medieval mystical theology of Northern Europe and specifically the Low Countries. As a uniquely Trinitarian, "interpersonal" *imago Dei* anthropology,<sup>2</sup> Ruusbroec uniquely stresses mutual indwelling as an intrinsic relationality of God's radical alterity within immanence, wherein both eternal and exemplarist strains dynamically converge with the historical and soteriological in this natural union of the human person and God. Echoing the Johannine prologue that "'All that is made, was life in Him'"<sup>3</sup> Ruusbroec develops upon this theme at considerable length in his *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*:

In this image God knew us before we were created, in Himself, and now, created in time, unto Himself. This image is essentially [*weselec*] and personally in all people have of it among them all no more than one person has. And thus we are all one, united in our eternal image, that is God's image and the origin of us all: of our life and our becoming; wherein our created being and our life hang without intermediary as in its eternal cause. Yet our createdness does not become God, nor (does) the image of God (become) creature; for we are created unto the image, that is: to receive the image of God. And that image in uncreated, eternal: the Son of God.

In desen beelde bekinde ons god, eer wi ghescapen waren, in hem selven, ende nu in der tijd ghescapen, toe hem selven. Dit beelde es weselec ende persoonlec in alle menschen ende ieghewelc mensche heevet al te male gheheel, onghedeilt, ende alle menschen en hebbens onder hen allen niet meer dan .i. mensche. Ende aldus sijn wi alle een, vereenecht in onsen eeweghen beelde, dat gods beelde es ende onser alre orsprong, ons levens ende ons ghewerdens, daer onse ghescapene wesen ende onse leven sonder middel in hangt alse in sine eeweghe sake. Nochtan en wert onse ghescapenheit niet god noch dat beelde gods creatuere. Want wi sijn ghescapen toe den beelde, dat es: dat beelde gods te ontfane. Ende dat beelde es onghescapen, eewegh: de sone gods.<sup>4</sup>

While affirming the "naturalness" of union with such a radically other God, Ruusbroec will in turn develop his theology of grace, his understanding of minne, its rootedness within revealed Christian faith and the practice of virtues as all building from, deepening and "cleaving" to [*aencleven*] such an Image—Christ, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity. Such cleaving thrives upon an inexhaustible dynamic, from which we can then better engage with Ruusbroec's more characteristically distinct reflections upon minne's more erotic and desirous instances of responding to and growing in *likeness* with such a fundamental, natural relationality.

Should knowing and loving [*minnen*] perish in God, so also would perish the eternal birth of the Son and the gushing forth of the Holy Spirit, as well as trinity of persons; and so there would be neither God nor any creature, and that is altogether impossible and an insane stupidity (even) to think (of it) [...] Even though we all gather together in one love [*minne*], in one embrace, and in one enjoyment of God, nonetheless each one keeps his own life and degree in grace and in virtue; each receives from God grace

Want verginge kinnen ende minnen in gode, soe verginghe oec die ewege geboert des soens ende uut vloete des heileghen geest; ende alsoe verginge driheit der persoene; ende alsoe en ware noch god noch creature: dat altemale onmogeleec es ende ene verwoedde sotheit te peinsene [...] Want al eest alsoe dat wi alle vergaderen in ene minne ende in een behelsen ende in .i. gebrucken gods, nochtan behout ygewelc sijn leven ende sinen staet in gratien ende in doechden. Ende yegewelc ontfeet van gode gratie ende

<sup>2</sup> See Bernard McGinn's typology of the differing schools of *imago Dei* anthropology: "intellectual, volitional, and the interpersonal", "*Humans as Imago Dei*" in E. Howells and P. Tyler (eds.) *Sources of Transformation: Revitalising Christian Spirituality*, (London: Continuum, 2010), p.19-40, esp. 24-25.

<sup>3</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, Opera Omnia XIII, *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, ll. 901-902. See also Jn 1, 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Ruusbroec, *Spiegel*, ll. 910-920.

and gifts according to his dignity, and according to his likeness unto God in virtue. And so each is dedicated to God and cleaves to Him to a greater or lesser degree according to his hunger, thirst, and craving after God. It is according to this same measure that he may feel [*gevoelen*], savor, and enjoy. For God is a common food and a common good [...]

gaven na sine werdde ende na dat hi gode gelijc es in doechden. Ende alsoe es oec ygewelc toegevoecht ende aneclevende ane gode min ende meer: na dat hem hongert ende dorst <ende>gods gelust, daer na mach hi gevoelen, smaken ende gebruiken. Want god es ene gemeyne spise ende .i. gemeyne goet [...]<sup>5</sup>

### C. EMERGING IDENTITIES IN GIVEN RELATIONSHIPS

To seriously consider the theological relevance and credibility of this distinct, *imago dei* theanthropological tradition is in part to see the primacy of this natural relation to God, from which the distinctiveness and particularity of our communal and personal identities emerge. "Identity", keeping with Ruusbroec's idiom, is here of the order of likeness, of distinction [*onderscheet*]<sup>5</sup>—an unending work whereby we will be known by the fruits of our desires and their extent. Similarly, education—in the classical tradition at the oracle of Delphi—is the work to know thyself, what Clement of Alexandria termed as the "greatest of all lessons".<sup>6</sup> While in the Christian humanist context, to know thyself is to further become transformed in relationship and union with God and others as rendering one more distinct. Hence, the question of identity, while important, is nonetheless a secondary reflection to the primacy of this contextual relationality that we commonly bear with God and others.

Which thus begs the question: Whose identity is presently under question, if not Christ incarnate within humanity, to which the Church, and the distinct members of the Mystical Body of Christ, in her humility uniquely and unrepeatably reflects. This perspective was dramatically recalled recently in the pre-conclave congregations, wherein then-Cardinal Bergoglio, citing De Lubac's *Meditation sur l'Eglise*, cited the insufficiency of the Church's identity as self-referential as nothing other than a "theological narcissism" and "spiritual worldliness".<sup>7</sup> To which, de Lubac further states:

There is no 'private Christianity', and if we are to accept the Church we must take her as she is, in her human day-to-day reality just as much as in her divine and eternal ideality; for a separation of the two is impossible both in fact and by right [...]. We must be 'the common people of God' with no reservations made. To put it another way: the necessity of being humble in order to cleave to Christ involves the necessity of being humble in order to seek Him in His Church [...]<sup>8</sup>

Returning back to Ruusbroec, by better coming to understand the distinctiveness of "mutual indwelling" and his view of union with God as rendering one more and more human, more particular, we can thus better engage with the wealth and relevant implications of this mystical theological tradition. For it supports both a greater vertical and horizontal continuum of mutual relations between the radical alterity of the Trinitarian God as precisely within the immanence of creation and

<sup>5</sup> Ruusbroec, *Vanden seven sloten*, ll. 700-704; 706-713.

<sup>6</sup> See Panayiotis Nellis, *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person*, (trans.) Norman Russell (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997) 9.

<sup>7</sup> See Sandro Magister, "The Last Words of Bergoglio Before the Conclave", <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1350484?eng=y>, as accessed on 06.05.2013

<sup>8</sup> Henri De Lubac, S.J., *The Splendor of the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1963), 192.

the human person. A continuum of world and reciprocal demand and exchange that distinctly upholds both mutuality, while stemming from a greater dissimilarity and asymmetry of the created world and the human person towards the gratuitousness of God as Creator. Such a continuum—both exalted and glorified in the Trinity, as well as radically concrete and embodied in the world—is what Ruusbroec calls the common life [*ghemeyne leven*].

#### D. PARADOX OF THE COMMONS

Like our cleaving desires, that which is “common” is an equally important theme in Ruusbroec—as well as relevant, especially in a reflection upon Catholic education and the struggle to (re)claim the distinctiveness of its identity within contemporary, pluralistic Western societies. *Common*. I desire to standby this most beleaguered and often bruised understanding of the world: both in all its Trinitarian depth and profundity, as well as its concrete ordinariness, skirting the banal, the mundane and sometimes even the hideous, the fallen and undesirable. Nevertheless, desiring such a “common” has been dangerously under threat amid the ruthlessness and resiliency of our consumer-driven capitalistic societies as it endlessly narrates what we are to desire as a furthering of self-identity. Such economic narratives rely upon the basic presumption of scarcity, or that which we lack<sup>9</sup>—what ecologist Garret Hardin famously termed as the paradox or “tragedy of the commons”.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> See generally Daniel M. Bell, Jr. *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012). While I am generally very intrigued by Bell’s critical-theological take on Capitalism, nonetheless, there are strongly implicit Nygerian overtones in opting for a division between eros and agape, as seen in the following: “The driving force of capitalism is scarcity—limited resources to meet unlimited desires. Scarcity warps desire into a grasping, acquisitive power and so prepares it for the agony that is the capitalist market [...]. In contrast, Christianity has long proclaimed that God has given and continues to give abundantly [...]. Care should be taken, however, not to mistake the character of God’s abundance. The opposite of scarcity is not ‘unlimited’ in the sense that God will satisfy our avarice, gluttony and lust—all the cravings of our disordered or fallen desire. Rather, the abundance that God gives is a matter of enough[....] God’s abundance is not about meeting our wildest consumer dreams. Rather, God’s abundance takes form in the disciplines that heal our desire so that it moves in accord with its true end, so that we desire what and how we should desire.” (178-180) See contra Ruusbroec, *Spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*, ll. 739-741: “If we could see the voracious lust Christ has for our blessedness, we would not be able to restrain ourselves from flying into His throat.” “Mochten wi sien de ghierghe ghelost die Cristus heeft tote onser salecheit, wi en mochten ons niet onthouden, wi en souden heme in de keele vlieghe.”

<sup>10</sup> See Garret Hardin, [“The Tragedy of the Commons”](#), *Science* 162 (1968):1243–1248: “The tragedy of the commons develops in this way. Picture a pasture open to all. It is to be expected that each herdsman will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons. Such an arrangement may work reasonably satisfactorily for centuries because tribal wars, poaching, and disease keep the numbers of both man and beast well below the carrying capacity of the land. Finally, however, comes the day of reckoning, that is, the day when the long-desired goal of social stability becomes a reality. At this point, the inherent logic of the commons remorselessly generates tragedy. As a rational being, each herdsman seeks to maximize his gain. Explicitly or implicitly, more or less consciously, he asks, “What is the utility to me of adding one more animal to my herd?” This utility has one negative and one positive component. 1) The positive component is a function of the increment of one animal. Since the herdsman receives all the proceeds from the sale of the additional animal, the positive utility is nearly +1. 2) The negative component is a function of the additional overgrazing created by one more animal. Since, however, the effects of overgrazing are shared by all the herdsmen, the negative utility for any particular decision making herdsman is only a fraction of -1. Adding together the component partial utilities, the rational herdsman concludes that the only sensible course for him to pursue is to add another animal to his herd. And another; and another[....] But this is the conclusion reached by each and every rational herdsman sharing a commons. Therein is the tragedy. Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd

A paradox, to which some are trying to re-envision, such as the Italian Focolare economist, Luigino Bruini and the development of an “economy of communion”, wherein gratuitousness does not lapse back into suspended asymmetry of power relations, privilege and philanthropy. Rather, by reimagining our mutual, common, local relationships, Bruini argues that “human beings need reciprocity to fulfill themselves, but to have it one must make the leap of gratuitousness” without which, “genuine reciprocity does not develop, nor society with it.”<sup>11</sup> Such an effort is formed in part by its resistance to current market-ideology that seeks to eliminate conflict by way of isolation, privatization, with the result of incentivizing and regulating our interactions by becoming increasingly immune and sterilized from the other. Which, by dint of a mixed realism of relationships and local communities that avoids any form of romantic idealism, Bruini attempts instead to “connect economics and the struggle with the wound and the blessing of the other.”<sup>12</sup> Or, from a different angle, what transformational theologian Oliver Davies calls for in *reorienting* the very location of our theological reflection, transforming its praxis away from the very modern, academic presupposition of critical neutrality and “cognitive distance from the everyday situational reality” and instead, towards common, “crowded spaces” wherein this continuum, in all of its humility is more fully realized and heeded.

Nevertheless, despite the admirable worthiness of these attempts at trying to re-envision that which is “common”, to simply reclaim or to reassert a defense of the common and its attending values is to simply play into the postmodern critique. Which, in this case, would assert such attempts as a form of ontological enclosure and a reduction of difference and otherness to a closed, hegemonic narrative in its privilege of unity and sameness as primary. Which is to say, in some sense, such a view is itself ideological, if not historically naive. For in part, to claim such a certain degree of ownership over the commons presupposes a highly reified sense of Tradition as an artifact, as something inherited and passed on down, without development or change. How then to concretely restore such a sense of Tradition, while remaining attentive to the features and causes of its modern withdraw are some of the key positions in Gabriel Marcel’s beautifully evocative series of reflections in *The Decline of Wisdom*.<sup>13</sup>

Here, Marcel’s reflections are inescapably contextualized by post-war Europe, its historical anxieties and as an attempt at trying to comprehend the devastation befallen the continent. And yet, amid the rapid calls for innovation and modernization, Marcel takes a very patient, unwavering look at the horrific destruction and the “spiritual heritage on which it seemed that human blindness had inflicted such irreparable damage.”<sup>14</sup> Surprisingly, however, Marcel’s rhetoric is by no means dour, nor does he seek an abstract causal analysis or turn to ideology *ad nauseam*. Rather, the continuing appeal and relevance to his reflections is in the manner in which he holds onto a patient contemplation and commitment to the concrete particular, to which he claims go against modern technological advances, its view of history and its “devitalized rationality”, most evidently seen in its

---

without limit-in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all.”

<sup>11</sup> See Luigino Bruni, *The Wound and the Blessing: Economics, Relationships and Happiness*, (trans.) N. Michael Brennen, (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 68.

<sup>12</sup> See Luigino Bruni, *The Wound and the Blessing*, xvii.

<sup>13</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, trans. Manya Harari (London: The Harvill Press, 1954).

<sup>14</sup> Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 21.

preference for the abstract. Here, such preferences for the abstract are likened to modern corporations, “creat[ing] the needs which it later claims to satisfy”, which, as a self-perpetuating phenomenon, “tends to create its own inevitability”.<sup>15</sup> Here, Marcel is thinking about modern architectural trends and city planning—appropriately so, given its post-war context—and the preference for the abstract as “agglomerations”, super-imposed and the “very embodiment of uprootedness”.<sup>16</sup> Here, the “vital link is broken between man and his environment”<sup>17</sup>, which, in theological terms, is to say *creation* and the creatureliness of the human person as distinctly relational. By historical contrast, he then notes, albeit somewhat ideally, that “in the past a city molded itself on the natural structure or pre-structure, as though it were fulfilling it.”<sup>18</sup>

Hence, Marcel is in a suspended dynamic, held between two horrors: that of post-war Europe and the wreckage of its discontinuity, as well as the super-imposition of modern, technological innovations as the furthering of a violent, de-humanized technological rationality of inevitable progress. And yet, instead of reacting with a “frenzy of integralism...[and] return to the most rigid and antiquated thinking in theology,”<sup>19</sup> Marcel instead advocates for a continuing attention and commitment to the concrete particular and the contextual wherein incarnation takes place. Herein, such a contextual commitment offers a far more robust, thick hermeneutical frame, held in stark relief to the plasticity and thinly abstract technological rationality. Which in turn, if indeed love incarnate is the salvific remedy to such a triumph of technological, de-vitalized rationality and its enduring persistence, then Tradition well informs us that “such an incarnation, if it can take place at all, can only do so at the humblest level.”<sup>20</sup> Here, attention to the concrete and the embodied is none other than the defining principle upon which the retrieval of sources within our Tradition will be “valuable [...] only if it is incarnate” in the concrete particular. Which is to say, at the “humblest and most intimate level of human life.”<sup>21</sup>

Here, one can rather boldly say that Marcel is recalling the Church to her distinctly Marian character, as Ruusbroec writes:

Then she said: ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord.’  
When God lifted her up in the highest, then she  
put herself lowest. And the wisdom of God taught  
her that. For highness cannot keep existing but in  
lowness...

Doe sprac si: ‘Siet hier de deerne ons heeren.’ Doese  
god verhief ten hooghsten, doe sette si hare ten  
nedersten. Ende dat leerde hare de wijsheit gods.  
Want hoochheit en mach niet staende bliven dan in  
nederheit.<sup>22</sup>

A lowliness, to which is never mediocre, yet profoundly common, as Ruusbroec further expands upon this theme by developing the tradition of the patristic fathers and continued within Christian humanism as none other than a profoundly “admirable exchange”:

---

<sup>15</sup> Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 17.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 55.

<sup>20</sup> Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom*, 55-6.

<sup>22</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, ll. 567-570



[T]hat is: that He has sent His only Son into our nature, so that He is a human being with us, and brother of us all. He has lowered Himself and elevated us, impoverished Himself and made us rich [...] He remained all that He was and put on what He was not. He remained God and became human, that humans might become God. He has clothed Himself with the human nature of us all, like a king who clothes himself with the clothes of his dependents and his servants so that we are all with Him from one garment of human nature.

[D]at es dat hi sinen enneghen sone ghesendt heeft in onser natueren, also dat hi es een mensche met ons ende onser alre brueder. Hi heeft heme ghenedert ende ons ghehoeght, heme ghearnt ende ons gherijct [...] Want hi bleef al dat hi was ende nam ane dat hi niet en was. Hi bleef god ende wart mensche, op dat de mensche god worde. Hi heeft heme ghekleedt met onser alre menscheit, alse .i. coning die hem kleedt met den kleede sijnre familien ende sijnre knechte, alsoe dat wi alle sijn met heme van eenen kleede menscheleker natueren.<sup>23</sup>

## E. CONCLUSION

Unlike the presumption of scarcity and the “tragedy of the commons”, for Ruusbroec, humanity’s *potentia obedientialis* and natural desire for God proceeds from what is already distinctly common—joined “with Him from one garment of human nature”. From which, by desiring the immanent otherness of God and others, as ongoing and eternal work, offers a profound alternative to modern ideologies that regard our ‘rational’ desires as signaling a lack that needs appeasing with goods that are themselves, scarce and limited. Instead, desire is seen here as participative in the very life and fullness of Christ’s *minne* towards the Father. Which in turn, by way of the tradition of Christian humanism, is nourished by a continual vision of humanity as fundamentally relational, showing human integrity, flourishing and solidarity with others by way of furthering union with God. Hence, in the unending pursuit of that which is common, our Catholic Tradition possess a wealth of sources that not only challenge existing, cultural narratives about *what* to desire, from what not to desire, but furthermore, convincing witnesses of *how* to desire—beyond any and all banal consumerism—and instead, as inexhaustible and without end.

---

<sup>23</sup> Jan van Ruusbroec, *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, ll. 974-976; 978-982.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation is rooted in a fundamental, constructive/critical theological retrieval of the Brabantine contemplative, bl. Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381) and the Admirable Doctor's understanding of love [*minne*] while situated within contemporary discussions over love in theological and philosophy of religion quarters. Specifically, it engages in a constructive/critical dialogue with Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology of love and its conceptual univocity, while additionally addressing various sub-themes that this retrieval initiates and encounters: the problematic of mystical theology and its contemporary relevance for theological reflection; accessing competing priorities between "experience" and a theological anthropology in mystical authors; Ruusbroec's synthesis of the "common life" [*ghemeyne leven*] as a corrective to a privatized, disembodied forms of 'mysticism'; postmodern theories of the 'gift' and its privileging of gratuitousness as a *pure gift*; the "natural desire for God" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century ressourcement theology; competing figures of "desire" in philosophical and theological reflections on love. The grounds of this retrieval are as follows: as a fundamental, constructive/critical retrieval, equal consideration must bear upon that which Ruusbroec's *minne* presupposes, so as to gauge its *theological relevance*, *textual accountability* as well as its contemporary *contextual plausibility*.

### A. THEOLOGICAL RELEVANCE

As an explicitly *theological* retrieval of Ruusbroec, one immediately encounters the fragile, situated identity of mystical theology (and/or 'spirituality') within academic, theological reflection as one strongly marked by discontinuity. While the "rediscovery" of (medieval) mystical theological texts has certainly taken place in various quarters as an emerging resource for constructive theological reflection and its critical relevance in providing sources for a renewed, "transformative" anthropology and the praxis of Christian identity. However, such a rediscovery and discussion across various theological disciplines still remains tenuous at best. Therefore, so as to access the continuity of its theological relevance, retrieving Ruusbroec's *minne* first requires considering that which *minne* presupposes, as an intelligible, rigorous concept. For Ruusbroec, this intrinsic presupposition can primarily be situated in terms of his mystical anthropology of "mutual indwelling", a distinct relational anthropology and a defining characteristic of late-medieval mystical theology of Northern Europe and specifically the Low Countries. As a uniquely Trinitarian, "interpersonal" *imago Dei* anthropology, Ruusbroec uniquely stresses mutual indwelling as an intrinsic relationality of radical alterity within immanence wherein both eternal and exemplarist strains ('in the image') converge with the historical and soteriological modalities ('unto likeness') in this natural union of the human person and God. Relationality and the "common life" thus convey a *dynamic immanence* that is continuously supported by Ruusbroec's mystical anthropology of mutual indwelling, which likewise underlays the very dynamism of *minne* itself.

### B. TEXTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

This research contends that the contemporary reception and possible critical retrieval of Ruusbroec hinges more upon the theological relevance and contemporary contextual plausibility of his mystical anthropology of mutual indwelling and the various consequences stemming therefrom,

more so than the question of 'mystical experience' and its [im]possibility as a determining criterion of legitimacy and hermeneutical engagement. This research operates within a close, textual heuristic executed in search of a rigorous conceptuality and unique theological hermeneutic of minne in Ruusbroec's texts. Thus, its hermeneutical engagement, while historically recognizing the important question of Ruusbroec's sources, has nonetheless opted primarily for a close reading of his texts as offering a unique hermeneutic as thus situated prior to, yet inseparable from its historical/contextual embedding.

### **1. Minne's conceptuality**

Ruusbroec's understanding of minne and its distinctly univocal character—in its origins; its enduring, everyday individual and communal praxis; and the deified perfection of such love—is that it is mutually one, "without difference or distinction" [*sonder differentie ochte onderscheet*], amid a dynamic relational dissimilarity that is asymmetrical, yet mutually reciprocal between Creator and creature. It is a "double minne" that is both *fully ours* and *fully God's*—a *common love*. "This minne that is God is common to us all and to each one in particular and (belongs) totally to those who love." The principle to 'unify, so as to distinguish' is thereby deeply helpful in explaining Ruusbroec's unique insistence—compatibly distinct from *analogia*—in maintaining minne's univocity as *common*.

In turn, by better coming to understand the distinctiveness of mutual indwelling for Ruusbroec, we can thus see it as supporting a continuum of mutual relations between the radical alterity of the Trinitarian God within the immanence of world and the human person as *creation*. While at the same time, such a continuum of world and relations as *created*, also reinforces the greater dissimilarity of creation and the human person with that of the Creator. Thereby conceiving such a radical dependence, intimate bond and relational continuity with the nonetheless distinct and autonomous orders of the creaturely to that of the Creator renders sensible and consistent what Ruusbroec says of minne's distinct sense of knowing—recalling the tradition of Gregory the Great's "*amor ipsia notia est*" [love itself is knowledge]—as "above reason, but not without reason". For such an ontological relationality is itself a relation of "essential minne" [*wezeleke minnen*] from which Ruusbroec's anthropology can be seen as supporting the four fundamental movements or rhythm of the life of minne itself: (1)facilitating a continual, dynamic tension of first charitably "going out" in mediated works that lovingly affirms alterity by way of its "overflowing", gratuitous activity; (2)pivoting in its turn towards an interiority of immediacy and marked by an erotic and insatiable yearning in its reciprocal demand for the other; (3) yielding thus and "over-formed" [*overforminghe*] in an immersion of minne and resting enjoyment in unity "without difference or distinction"; (4) only to lastly reaffirm one's created particularity in distinction and otherness with God and others as the full-flowering of Ruusbroec's "common life", seen here as an eternal, "restlessness of loving" [*ongheduer van minnen*] that is modeless and "beyond reason and beyond manner, for minne desires what remains impossible for it and reason bears witness that minne is right but it can neither advise minne in this case nor forbid it."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ruusbroec, *The Sparkling Stone*, ll. 721-723

## **2. Ruusbroec's reconfiguring of desire**

The distinctive univocity of Ruusbroec's *minne* as "common" and its contemporary retrieval offer a constructive reconfiguration of our (theological) understanding of desire. Herein, Ruusbroec's theologically-based, proto-phenomenological reflections upon desire are set against and in contrast to various contextually-normative presumptions held towards desire as necessarily a "desires of lack"—as seen consistently in Marion—as a fetishized scarcity that mirrors a weak subjectivity of restless finitude. Instead, Ruusbroec's reflections upon the eternity of *minne*'s voracious [*ghierighen*] desire stems from a 'fullness' reflective of his theology of creation and mystical anthropology of mutual indwelling. This reconfiguration in turn thereby highlights the intrinsic character of *minne*'s demands [*eyschet*] and its insatiable, impossible object as none other than the greater dissimilarity between Creator and the human person's immanent creatureliness as a *locus capax Dei* [place capable of God].

## **3. Common life as Deification**

Mystical union, sanctification and deification—or in Ruusbroec's frequent neologism, being "over-formed" [*overforminghe*]*—*in the Brabantine's mystical theology is portrayed as *both entirely natural* (mutual) *and entirely God-given* (asymmetrical). While, the "common life" highlights the primacy of concrete, contextual relationality in Ruusbroec's thought—"becoming partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pt. 1, 4) equally affirms *minne*'s thoroughly Christological and Trinitarian character. Therein, Ruusbroec's understanding of the various modes of mystical union of God—with mediation; without mediation; without difference or distinction [*sonder differentie ochte onderscheet*]*—*are invariably regarded as accenting mystical union not as a lifting one above and beyond one's embodied self and the creaturely order in the form of a wholly disembodied, two-tiered "supernatural grace". Rather, the conviction is held that in terms of *minne*'s radical language of union with God—without difference [*sonder differentie*] in terms of identity, and without distinction [*sonder onderscheet*] in terms of our loving and virtuous works—is an ongoing affirmation that by drawing closer to the alterity of God and His "greater dissimilarity", such movement equally renders one more and more human, more and more concretely and uniquely particular.

### **C. CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTUAL PLAUSIBILITY**

Amid contemporary approaches to the univocity of love, Jean-Luc Marion's erotic reduction and its emphasis upon the givenness of the "weight of love" [*pondus amoris*] certainly stands out as rigorously provocative. This retrieval is opened by a critical/constructive dialogue with Marion in his emphasis upon a *purely asymmetrical transcendence* that acts as a strong, postmodern corrective to intrinsicist views of 'graced nature' and their frequent, anthropological reduction, by way of the [im]possible—as succinctly denoting the heteronymous dissimilarity of God; the [im]possibility of God for us. Which in turn, as a form of radical negative certitude that announces the complete caesura between God and creature, the [im]possible possesses an equally radical denomination for

God: the 'impossibility of impossibility'. By retrieving Ruusbroec, Marion's position has been critiqued precisely due to this view of radical [im]possibility, insofar as such a heteronymous account elides any form of creation's *intrinsic*, "native attunement" towards, as well as any sense of *desiderium naturale* for God. For Marion, such a creaturely desire would constitute a *counterweight* of mutual reciprocity that would domesticate the pure gratuity of the gift and its phenomenological givenness, placing it instead within an 'economy of exchange'. Therefore, while Marion upholds the *certainty* of our *possible* desires for God, he secures this universality proportionate to God's [im]possible uncertainty, as infinitely and radically Other and *at the cost* of human capacity for moral/ethical action to respond to such alterity. The architecture of radical apophysis is thereby set up as the *guarantor* for a turn towards universality with God as the [im]possible, deployed in givenness that is both anterior to forms of intentionality, coming from "elsewhere" which simultaneously makes *possible* desire itself. Hence, the *certainty* of Marion's desire indubitably remains a *desire of lack* as Marion secures the universal *certainty* of this [im]possible desire precisely as an a-contextual, *univocal givenness*, which in no sense should be confused with having any "native origins". That is, in no sense is it to be confused with a *natural desire for God*, a *locus capax dei* and/or *potentia obedientialis* for divine grace. Rather, the weight of such an [im]possible desire in its pure givenness is asymmetrically anterior and stemming from pure givenness itself, absent of any reciprocal economic response or return.