

The Mystical Fulfilment of a Spiritual Ideal:

Common Love in Baldwin of Forde, Beatrice of Nazareth, and the *Vita Beatricis*

Throughout the centuries, numerous theologians and church officials have been hostile towards the bold claims of intimacy and union of mystical writers, not only due to the perceived dangers of heterodoxy, but also out of 'social' concerns. In some quarters, this suspicion continues up to this day. Indeed, while reading mystical texts, one might be tempted to think that mystics are solitaries who are disconnected from the world (and the Church) in the best case, and in the worst, solipsistic individualists who glory in the self-gratification of their extraordinary though isolated and isolating 'spiritual' abilities. Rob Faesen and I have addressed such questions elsewhere, with reference to John of Ruusbroec's conflict with the Brussels clergy and his subsequent removal to an isolated spot in the middle of the forest.¹ Our argument there centred around Ruusbroec's doctrine of the common life, which on our reading, is one of the most theologically comprehensive articulations of the combination of contemplation and action in the Christian mystical tradition.² But Ruusbroec was not the first vernacular theologian to present such a teaching. Indeed, it is possible that he was inspired directly by Beatrice of Nazareth.³ The present article thus returns to the question of common love in Beatrice's text in an attempt to illustrate that as far as her mysticism is concerned, there is no opposition between a deeply personal consciousness of the presence of God⁴ and a communitarian spirit. Indeed, as I will

¹ 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 (2013), 18-32. See also the references to the secondary literature there, which deal with the suspicious nature of mysticism.

² Several studies have been devoted to this central theme in Ruusbroec's work, e.g., Bernhard Fraling, *Mystik und Geschichte: Das "ghemeyne leven" in der Lehre des Jan van Ruusbroec*, Studien zur Geschichte der katholischen Moraltheologie, 20 (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1974); Johan Bonny, *Het ghemeyne leven in de werken van Jan van Ruusbroec* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Gregorian University, 1988), Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec, Mystical Theologian of the Trinity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), Satoshi Kikuchi, 'Ruusbroec's Concept of "gemeen" (Common) Reconsidered', *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, 83 (2012), 97-121.

³ In their edition of the *Seven Manners*, Leonce Reypens and Jozef Van Mierlo mention in footnote that Beatrice uses the term 'common love' in the specifically mystical-theological sense in which it would later be elaborated by Ruusbroec: Beatrijs van Nazareth, *Seven Manieren van Minne*, ed. by L. Reypens and J. Van Mierlo, *Leuvense Studieën en Tekstuitgaven*, 12 (Leuven: De Vlaamsche Boekenhal, 1926), p. 32, note to line 54. Guido De Baere's index of Ruusbroec's sources, on the other hand, does not associate Beatrice and Ruusbroec on this point: see Guido De Baere, *The Complete Ruusbroec (2014), Jan van Ruusbroec: Opera omnia (1981-2006): Sources and Parallel Passages, Index of Sources*, Version 1.0 (25 November 2014), p. 32 <https://www.uantwerpen.be/images/uantwerpen/container2726/files/Ruusbroec_Sources-1.pdf> [accessed 12 January 2018]. Paul Verdeyen has suggested that Ruusbroec may have been inspired by Marguerite Porete. See Paul Verdeyen, 'Oordeel van Ruusbroec over de rechtgelovigheid van Margaretha Porete', *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, 66 (1992), 88-96 (p. 96).

⁴ To use Bernard McGinn's now widely accepted description of mysticism.

argue, the former implies the latter. My earlier contributions⁵ on this topic only marginally explored the spiritual tradition in which Beatrice herself stood, and the present article will thus situate Beatrice's conception of common love in the Cistercian tradition, with particular reference to Baldwin of Forde. I do not claim or intend to present incontrovertible evidence that Beatrice read Baldwin's work, though it is certainly not impossible that she did. I seek only to highlight the central importance of the 'common life' in Cistercian thought and across late-twelfth-century monastic theology and vernacular theologians like Beatrice. Finally, I will address the question of how the anonymous author of the *Vita Beatrix* understood and incorporated the doctrine into his biography of Beatrice.

1. *COMMUNIO* IN BALDWIN OF FORDE

Baldwin of Forde (c. 1125-1190) is perhaps best known now as a rather controversial Archbishop of Canterbury and later crusader, who died in the Holy Land during the Siege of Acre. Despite several episodes that cast a shadow over his posthumous reputation, when he was abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Forde, he delivered a series of sermons to his monks that were later edited into what have become known as *Spiritual Tractates*.⁶ The fifteenth of these, *On the [Coenobitic or] Common Life (Sermo de vita communi)*, which most probably began as three separate sermons but was later edited into one text,⁷ has been described as 'the most comprehensive theological study on *communio* and its relationship with the spiritual life.'⁸ Discussing Baldwin's place in the spiritual tradition of Augustine and Gregory the Great and the context of twelfth-century (especially Cistercian) spirituality, David Bell concludes that 'nothing that Baldwin says is wholly new,' but that his new and rich elaboration of the older tradition 'is to be found in his consideration of the source, nature, and significance of the principle of *communio* and its practical realization in the common life.'⁹

⁵ See particularly John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, "'Commune à tous par largesse de pure charité": Common Love in Beatrice of Nazareth and Marguerite Porete', *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, 83 (2012), 297-323 and John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, 'The Influence of Beatrice of Nazareth on Marguerite Porete: "The Seven Manners of Love" Revised', *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses*, 64 (2013), 41-88.

⁶ For a fuller treatment of Baldwin's biography, problematic posthumous reputation and the origins of all but two of the *Spiritual Tractates* as sermons first delivered at the Abbey of Forde, see David N. Bell's introduction to Baldwin of Ford, *Spiritual Tractates*, trans., annot. and intro. by David N. Bell, 2 vols, Cistercian Fathers Series, 41 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1986). Baldwin's *Sermons* or *Spiritual Tractates* are edited as Balduini de Forda, *Sermones. De commendatione fidei*, ed. by David N. Bell, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis, 99 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991). Hereinafter I will refer to the critical edition as '*Sermones*', with page and line numbers, and to the English translation as '*Spiritual Tractates*', with page numbers.

⁷ See *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 192, note 1.

⁸ Charles Hallet, 'La communion des personnes d'après une oeuvre de Baudouin de Ford', *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique*, 41 (1966), 405-22 (p. 405). Bell notes that 'the tractate is an extremely important discussion of the monastic life, and a significant part of the heritage of twelfth-century Cistercian spirituality' (*Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 192, note 1).

⁹ David N. Bell, 'The Ascetic Spirituality of Baldwin of Ford', *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses*, 31 (1980), 227-50 (p. 249). It is thus perhaps no surprise that Baldwin's text continues to be used as a valuable resource for religious life today and is recommended reading for monastics. See Enzo Bianchi, 'The Holy Spirit in the Monastic Life', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 37 (2002), 153-66 (pp. 165-66) and Rosaria Spreafico, 'The Community, Subject of Evangelization (I)', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 41 (2006), 351-68 (p. 353, note 4). It is entirely to the credit of David Bell, not only in his edition and translation work, but also in several articles, that

As mentioned, Baldwin's *Tractate XV* is composed of three distinct parts, which were later joined together to form one tractate. The first section deals with the common life as the life of the Trinity and the angels (*De communi vita Patris et filii et Spiritus Sancti* and *De communione angelorum*). The second discusses human communion and is itself divided into three parts (*De communione triplici: nature, gratie, et glorie*): (i) all humans share the same (sinful) nature, (ii) all Christians share the same faith in grace, and (iii) the grace of the common life is lived in a particular way by those who live in a monastic community. The third section of the tractate (*De mutua caritate inter communiter viventes*) discusses further questions related to life in community: how love is to be shared, how personal gifts and possessions are to be devoted to the common good, and how all this will lead to the ultimate perfection of shared charity in the life of glory.

Baldwin's reflections on what constitute the common life of a monastic community are ultimately rooted in God, and the three Persons of the Trinity are the origin and foundation of the common life. Baldwin does not engage in any of the Trinitarian debates of the twelfth century,¹⁰ and much less does he anticipate the Trinitarian debates of the next generation.¹¹ He simply asserts that God is three Persons who share a common nature and a common life: 'God is life. The holy and indivisible Trinity is one life. The Father is not one life, the Son another, and the Holy Spirit a third, but these three are one life. Just as they have one common essence and one common nature, so they have one common life.'¹² Though there are three Persons in the Trinity, they share one common essence and life, and this, as Baldwin will go on to explain, is the nature of divine charity which, following 1 John, is the nature of God itself, as Baldwin says:

God, however, is charity. [...] This charity is in us by grace and reveals to us in a certain way the nature of that incomprehensible charity which is God himself, whose nature is charity or generosity; and by a sort

the study of Baldwin's important spiritual legacy has not been entirely neglected. In addition to the other works cited here, see also his 'Baldwin of Ford and Twelfth-Century Theology', in *Noble Piety and Reformed Monasticism: Studies in Medieval Cistercian History VII*, ed. by E. Rozanne Elder, Cistercian Studies Series, 65 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), pp. 136-48. This article discusses how Baldwin was essentially a *monastic* not a scholastic theologian, in the Cistercian and ultimately Patristic tradition. Although he was aware of many of the theological debates of his age, since there are evident allusions to them in his work, he does not engage in dialectical debates over these thorny issues. See also and especially David N. Bell, 'Celestial and Cenobitic Unity in the Thought of Baldwin of Ford', in *Heaven on Earth: Studies in Medieval Cistercian History IX*, ed. by E. Rozanne Elder, Cistercian Studies Series, 68 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1983), pp. 1-21. In this impressive demonstration of his erudition, Bell recapitulates the central tenets of Baldwin's *Tractate XV* and shows how each of his points are as such unoriginal, since he draws directly on Augustine, Aelred, Bernard, and Benedict, and indirectly on numerous other sources. What makes Baldwin worth reading, Bell says, is the coherence of his doctrinal synthesis. Bernard McGinn offers a brief discussion of Baldwin (though only concerning his use of the Song of Songs in his other *Tractates*) in *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great Through the 12th Century*, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, 2 (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), pp. 303-05. For a more general discussion of understandings of community among Cistercians, but which does not deal with Baldwin of Forde, see Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Cistercian Concept of Community: An Aspect of Twelfth-Century Spirituality', *Harvard Theological Review*, 68 (1975), 273-86.

¹⁰ See *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 192, note 3.

¹¹ For an excellent study on Trinitarian theology in the thirteenth century with commentary on some twelfth-century sources, see Russell L. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought from Aquinas to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹² *Spiritual Tractates*, II, pp. 157-58; *Sermones*, p. 230, II. 41-44: 'Deus est uita; sancta et indiuidua Trinitas una uita est. Non alia uita est Pater et alia Filius, alia Spiritus sanctus, sed hi tres una sunt uita; et sicut una est eorum communis uita.'

of inward feeling of charity itself, it indicates to our inmost being that the nature of charity is to love and to wish to be loved.¹³

The charity of God is thus in us because the nature of God is not merely that the Persons of the Trinity share all they have in common with one another, but also that their perfect charity is generous. In other words, it seeks to communicate itself, to love and to be loved. When God's charity is communicated to us, 'our inmost being' perceives that this perfect charity also seeks to be shared in us and by us. On this basis, Baldwin develops one of the cornerstones of his treatise, namely that perfect charity not only loves to share, but shares its love:

As we have said earlier, charity always loves to be loved. A *love of sharing* is not enough for the lover: there must also be a *sharing of love*. And since it wants to share its goods, it wants much more to share love itself. [...] With regard to the desire of charity, therefore, the charity which is in us is characterized by two factors which are inseparably connected: the love of sharing and the sharing of love.¹⁴

Baldwin later reiterates that both the love of sharing and the sharing of love constitute the divine nature, which, as we have seen, is constituted of their common life, charity, and generosity. We know this through faith and thanks to the revelation of scripture, but we know it most of all thanks to the fact that in its overflowing generosity, the charity of God is gifted to us. Having established the nature of charity in God, Baldwin then distinguishes between the divine nature and the gift of charity in us. And charity in us is evidently also constituted of both the love of sharing and the sharing of love:

If, then, we see clearly the invisible things of God by means of the things which were made within us, if we are permitted to judge the nature of God from his grace, if it is given us to recognize the giver of the gift from the gift itself, then there can be no doubt that the love of sharing and the sharing of love correspond to the nature of God. He whose nature is charity and generosity naturally loves and wants to be loved, and the extent to which he loves is the extent to which he wants to be loved.¹⁵

Finally, Baldwin again reiterates the theological roots of what will follow concerning the common life here below: 'Such is the eternal life, the blessed life, the common life, infinite

¹³ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 159; *Sermones*, pp. 230-31, II. 69, 71-75: 'Deus autem caritas est. [...] Caritas autem que per gratiam in nobis est, aliquo modo representat nobis qualis sit illa incomprehensibilis caritas que Deus est, cuius natura siue caritas siue benignitas est. Natura caritatis hec est, sicut quodam intimo sensu ipsius caritatis nobis medullitus intimatur, et amare et uelle amari.'

¹⁴ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 160 (my emphasis); *Sermones*, p. 231, II. 95-98, 108-10: 'Semper enim, ut predictum est, amat Amari; nec amanti sufficit amor communionis, si non assit communio amoris. Nam cum bona sua uelit esse communia, at ipsum amorem multo magis. [...] Caritate itaque que in nobis est, due res, quantum ad desiderium ipsius caritatis, inseparabiliter annexe sunt: amor communionis et communio amoris.' For more on Baldwin's conception of *amor communionis* and *communio amoris* see Hallet, 'Le communion des personnes' and Hallet, 'Notes sur le vocabulaire du "De vita coenobitica seu communi" de Baudouin de Ford', *Analecta Cisterciensia*, 22 (1966), 272-78 (pp. 272-74). The latter article contains a useful discussion not only of this distinction but also helpful statistical information on Baldwin's use of the terms *amor*, *dilectio*, and *caritas*.

¹⁵ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 162; *Sermones*, p. 232, II. 143-48: 'Si ergo inuisibilia Dei per ea que facta sunt in nobis intellecta conspiciuntur, si estimare licet naturam Dei ex gratia sua, si ex munere auctorem muneris cognoscere datur, procul dubio nature Dei congruit amor communionis et communio amoris. Nam cuius natura caritas est et benignitas est, naturaliter amat et uult Amari; et quantum amat, tantum uult amari.'

and incomprehensible charity, common to God the Father and his only-begotten Son. [...] Their mutual love is the Holy Spirit, who is the bond and communion of both.¹⁶

In the second part of what was originally the first sermon from which *Tractate XV* is composed, Baldwin follows his discussion of the common life of God with a description of the way that the common life of the angels is modelled on that of the Trinity. The celestial harmony is guaranteed by the fact that all the angels speak and act in unison and are unified in their communion by the Holy Spirit: 'The common life of the angels is a sort of copy of that common life which is in God, of God, and is God. It is united in perfect peace by the Holy Spirit, who is its love, its bond, and its communion.'¹⁷ Each of the angels loves all the others, and all of them love each. Like the Persons of the Trinity, their life too is constituted by the perfect love of sharing and the sharing of love.

In the second sermon that makes up *Tractate XV*, Baldwin turns his attention to a discussion of the ways in which people share aspects of their being. All humans share a common, sinful human nature. We need not dwell too long here on Baldwin's exposition of this theme, though he does offer some striking reflections on the responsibilities of all people (as sharers of the same nature):

We are drawn by the very example of God himself to love our neighbour who shares our nature. We are urged to it by the authority of him who gave the commandment, and we are constrained by our sharing of the same nature. Because of the awareness of our common infirmity, each should humble himself before the other, and each should feel pity for the other, and there will then by no proud self-glorification to divide those whose common condition of infirmity renders them equal. Whoever presumes to despise in another the nature he has in common does not yet know how to love himself, and whoever does not recognize in another the rights he has from being created in the image of God does injury to his own condition.¹⁸

The following section treats the sharing of grace in the Christian community. Baldwin distinguishes here between the just whose faith is sincere and the unjust, a group which includes hypocrites, schismatics, etc. The just are held together in the bonds of peace and unity of spirit in the Church,¹⁹ and whether they live singly or in (monastic) communities, they are bound together in the Church, the body of Christ. The final section of this second part of the *Tractate*, by far the longest, and the third part of the text treat specifically of the

¹⁶ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, pp. 163-164; *Sermones*, pp. 233-234, ll. 169-71, 187-88: 'Hec est autem uita eterna, uita beata, uita communis, caritas infinita et incomprehensibilis, Deo Patri eiusque unigenito Filio communis [...] Horumque amor Spiritus sanctus est: amborum nexus est et communio.'

¹⁷ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 164; *Sermones*, p. 234, ll. 198-201: 'Huius uite communis, que in Deo est et Dei est et Deus est, quedam representatio est communis uita angelorum, quam in summa pace conciliat Spiritus sanctus, sicut amor et nexus et communio.'

¹⁸ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 167-68; *Sermones*, p. 236-37, ll. 277-84: 'Ad diligendum itaque nature nostre consortem, ipsius Dei exemplo trahimur, auctoritate precipientis urgemur, communionem nature constringimur; et pro communis infirmitatis conscientia, inuicem nos oportet humiliari, inuicem misereri; nec superba gloriatio diuidat, quos una conditionis infirmitas equat. Nondum seipsum nouit diligere, qui communem naturam in altero presumit contempnere; et conditioni sue iniuriam facit, qui ius suum in Dei imagine non agnoscit. Et humane societatis ius uiolat, qui communionem nature in proximo non honorat.'

¹⁹ Baldwin makes copious use of the expression *unitas spiritus* in this *Tractate*, both to refer to the communion of believers in the Church and the communion of monks in their communities. For an excellent account of the various uses of this Pauline expression from the fourth to the twelfth century, and William of Saint-Thierry's innovative use of the expression to refer to the soul's union with God and deification, see F. Tyler Sergent, "'Unitas Spiritus' and the Originality of William of Saint-Thierry', in *Unity of Spirit: Studies on William of Saint-Thierry in Honor of E. Rozanne Elder*, ed. by F. Tyler Sergent, Aage Rydstrom-Poulsen and Marsha L. Dutton (Collegeville: Cistercian Publications, 2015), pp. 144-70.

common life lived in monastic communities. It would be impossible to convey the depth and richness of Baldwin's account, including his insight into the practical ways in which the common life of monastic communities mirrors the common life of the angels and, ultimately, the Trinity, but for our purposes we must emphasize his description of the nature of the common life in the monastic community: 'What makes the common life [of monks] is one heart, one soul, and having everything in common. Such a life is an earthly copy – so far as human weakness allows – of the life of the angels.'²⁰ The members of monastic communities are to love one another mutually, and to share all things in common. All the members are to contribute all their particular personal gifts and possessions for the common benefit of all. As Baldwin states at the end of the second sermon:

This, therefore, is the law of the common life: unity of spirit in the charity of God, the bond of peace in the mutual and unfailing charity of all the brethren, the sharing of all the goods which should be shared, and the total rejection of any idea of personal ownership in the way of life of holy religion.²¹

Drawing especially on Paul, Baldwin discusses how the sharing of love and the love of sharing – the twin movements that constitute the divine nature – are lived out in the community. When all the members make their personal gifts and possessions 'common' by contributing them to the community for the common good, whatever need or lack is present in the other members is remedied. The following, rather long quotation, highlights the compassion of common charity:

The different spiritual gifts are made common in two ways: firstly when the gifts given to individuals individually are possessed in common by the sharing of love, and secondly, when they are loved in common by the love of sharing. In a way, a gift is always common to the one who has it and the one who does not. If he who has it shares it with another, he has it for the sake of the other; and he who does not have it actually does have it in the other because he loves him! And by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the individual needs and weaknesses of each person are also made common to all, for just as charity is patient, it is also compassionate, and someone who suffers with another who suffers makes the other's need his own.²² Thus, there is one need common to both, for the need of the former consists in the pain of suffering and that of the latter in feeling his pain with him.²³

²⁰ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 171; *Sermones*, p. 239, ll. 355-58: 'Vitam itaque communem efficiunt cor unum et anima una, et communio omnium. Hec in terris, quantum permittit humana infirmitas, angelorum uitam representat.'

²¹ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 177; *Sermones*, p. 243, ll. 504-08: 'Hec est ergo lex uite communis: unitas spiritus in caritate Dei, uinculum pacis in mutua et continua caritate fratrum, omnium communio in omnibus bonis communicandis, omni occasione habende proprietatis a sancte religionis proposito procul relegata.'

²² Influenced by St Paul, the notion of growth in love through identification with the joys and sorrows of one's neighbours was a popular theme in medieval spirituality. See Bynum, 'The Cistercian Conception of Community', p. 277 for a brief discussion concerning the work of Bernard of Clairvaux. See below for the relevance of this theme in Beatrice and her biographer.

²³ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 188; *Sermones*, p. 250, ll. 751-63: 'Duobus modis diuisiones gratiarum ad communionem reducuntur: cum dona que singulis singillatim dantur, per communionem amoris communiter habentur; et cum per amorem communionis communiter amantur. Communis est enim gratia quodammodo habenti et non habenti, cum is qui habet, alteri habet quia communicat; et qui non habet, in altero habet quia amat. Proprias quoque necessitates et infirmitates singulorum ad communionem trahit Spiritus sancti communicatio. Sicut enim caritas patiens est, ita compatiens est; et qui patienti compatitur, alienam necessitatem suam facit, ut ambobus communis sit una necessitas. Nam alterius necessitas est per passionem dolendi, alterius per affectionem condolendi.'

Both in good and ill, therefore, in consolation and desolation, are all things shared in common. In several striking passages, Baldwin describes how the practice of the common life in the sharing of mutual love is a very real reflection of the Trinitarian life. He writes, for example:

If, then, the charity of God which is in us can be so much in accord with the charity with which God loves us that it loves that which he himself loves, if it always pursues the better things in its zeal for perfection and is always careful to avoid even the lighter sins, if it regards as contemptible what God also wants regarded as contemptible, then this charity of God brings about in us unity of spirit, and as the only-begotten Son of God lives with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit (for there is but one Spirit of the Father and the Son), so we too, as adopted sons, live under God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, and it is in this Spirit that we cry 'Abba, Father'. We do not, of course, say this in the same way as the only-begotten Son. He is at the right hand of the Father and equal to him in all things, whereas we are inferior and far and away unequal.²⁴

The last lines of the quotation above are important, for we see here that Baldwin clearly emphasizes distance from God – we cry from afar. Although the common life properly so lived is a participation in and a reflection of the Trinitarian life, it is no more than that. Baldwin was not a contemplative in the same way that Bernard of Clairvaux or William of St Thierry or several others of the earlier generation of Cistercians were. Baldwin's emphasis is far more communitarian. As David Bell has written, discussing Baldwin's spirituality generally: 'Baldwin [...] has little to say on these high matters. We find no detailed discussions of the nature and significance of the *excessus [contemplationis]*, and [...] considerations of contemplative ecstasy are conspicuous by their absence.' Bell therefore concludes that 'we can call Baldwin a 'spiritual', but we cannot call him a mystic.'²⁵

This is not to imply that contemplation and communitarianism are in any sense opposed. On the contrary, there are several passages that, like the quotation above, emphasize how closely aligned are the common life here below and the perfect common life of God. In the final sermon of the Tractate, Baldwin writes the following:

If we love God with one heart and one soul in accordance with the purity of our profession, there is no doubt that the charity of God will be poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit and that the one Spirit of God will animate all of us as if we were one body. None of us then will live for himself, but for God, and all of us together will live in unity of spirit through the one spirit that dwells in us. It is by the charity of God that this unity of spirit is found in us, and it is preserved in us by the love of our neighbour. In this way we may all remain together in the love of God, and by remaining in this love remain also in God and God in us.²⁶

²⁴ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, pp. 175-76; *Sermones*, p. 242, II. 462-75: 'Si autem caritas Dei que est in nobis, caritati qua nos diligit Deus ita concordat, ut ea diligat que ipse diligit; et perfectionis emula semper meliora sectetur, probans potiora, et in peccatis etiam leuioribus uitandis semper sollicita; si que Deus uult contempni, ea quoque contemptibilia ducat: tunc hec ipsa caritas Dei unitatem spiritus operatur in nobis, et sicut unigenitus Filius Dei cum Deo Patre in unitate Spiritus sancti uiuit (unus est enim Spiritus Patris cum Filio), sic et nos tanquam filii adoptionis sub Deo Patre in unitate Spiritus uiuimus, in quo clamamus: "Abba, Pater". Clamamus quidem tanquam de longinquo, utpote inferiores longe longeque inequales, sed tamen aliquo modo similes: non sicut unigenitus Dei Filius, qui est ad dexteram Patris, per omnia ei equalis.'

²⁵ Bell, 'The Ascetic Spirituality of Baldwin of Ford', p. 247.

²⁶ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 179. Baldwin, *Sermones*, p. 244, II. 555-65: 'Si unanimiter et concorditer secundum professionis nostre puritatem Deum diligimus, procul dubio caritas Dei per Spiritum sanctum diffunditur in cordibus nostris, unusque Spiritus Dei quasi unum corpus omnes nos uiuificat, ut nemo nostrum sibi uiuat, sed Deo, utque omnes nos simul, per unum spiritum qui habitat in nobis, in unitate spiritus uiuamus. Hec autem

By explicitly drawing on the theme of mutual indwelling, Baldwin underscores that the common life in community is a real and genuine participation in the divine life, albeit an indirect one. In these final paragraphs, he even goes further than he had at the beginning of the treatise. Initially distinguishing between the nature of God and the gift of grace or charity (see *supra*), he now affirms that the Holy Spirit is both giver *and* gift, for to those who have been made worthy, the Holy Spirit gives himself:

The Holy Spirit is communion and sharing, and he loves so much to share things that he wants to give himself. He is generosity itself, and it is not enough for him to give the things he has: he must also give himself. But he gives himself only to those whom he himself has made worthy to receive so great a gift, for he is the gift and was, from eternity, the supreme good and the supreme gift. Whoever has received a gift from God and shares its use and benefit with his neighbour truly possesses what he has received, and to him that has will more be given.²⁷

Lived thus, Baldwin concludes at the end of the treatise, those who live the common life can foster the hope of the reward of perpetual and perfect communion:

Charity extends our hope to the communion of the saints, and we can therefore share with them their merits and their rewards. But the sharing of their rewards is reserved for the time to come, for it is the sharing of the glory which shall be revealed in us [...] It is then that all the saints will be as one heart and one soul, and they will have all things in common when God will be all in all.²⁸

2. GEMENE MINNE IN THE *SEVEN MANNERS OF LOVE*

Beatrice of Nazareth was born only ten years after Baldwin's death, and as mentioned, there is no tangible historical evidence that she knew or read his work. Nevertheless, as I have argued with Rob Faesen elsewhere, she was the first (dateable) vernacular author to offer a 'doctrine' of *common love* in her short treatise on *The Seven Manners of Love*.²⁹ I have

unitas spiritus, que in caritate Dei inuenitur in nobis, per dilectionem proximi seruatur in nobis, ut maneamus simul in dilectione Dei; et manentes in hac dilectione, maneamus in Deo, et Deus in nobis.'

²⁷ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 185. *Sermones*, p. 248, ll. 692-700: 'Spiritus sanctus communio est, et communionem in tantum amat, ut uelit ipse dari. Ipsa enim benignitas est: non contentus est sua dare, nisi et seipsum dederit; sed his quos tanti doni acceptione dignos ipse fecerit. Bonum enim est, et ab eterno fuit summum bonum et summum donum. Qui uero acceptam Dei gratiam usu et utilitate proximo communicat, ille uere habet quod accepit, et habenti dabitur et abundabit.'

²⁸ *Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 190-91; *Sermones*, p. 252, ll. 811-14, 821-23: '[...] dilatat caritas spem nostram ad communionem sanctorum, in communionem meritorum et communionem premiorum. Sed communio premiorum future temporis est: communio scilicet glorie, que reuelabitur in nobis. [...] ...et tunc omnium sanctorum erit quasi cor unum et anima una; et erunt illis omnia communia, quando erit Deus omnia in omnibus.'

²⁹ For a discussion of Beatrice's *common love* and Marguerite Porete's *common soul*, see John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, "'Commune à tous par largesse de pure charité'". This contribution does not mention Baldwin of Forde, but seeks the possible origins of the theological doctrine of common love rather in Richard of Saint-Victor's *Four Degrees of Violent Charity*. For an analysis of Beatrice's connection with Richard that does not discuss common love, see Kris Van Put, *De invloed van Richard van Saint-Victor op Beatrijs van Nazareth* (unpublished master's thesis, Catholic University of Leuven, 1998). Leonce Reypens had already noted the particular influence of William of Saint-Thierry and Richard of Saint-Victor, as well as Rupert of Deutz, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Aelred of Rievaulx, on Beatrice. See *Vita Beatrix: De autobiografie van de Z. Beatrijs van Tienen o. cist. 1200-1268*, ed. by L. Reypens, *Studiën en Tekstuitgaven van Ons Geestelijk Erf*, 15 (Antwerp: Ruusbroec-Genootschap, 1964), pp. 59*-60* (henceforth abbreviated as 'VB'). For an extensive discussion and

placed the word doctrine between quotation marks, for it is perhaps too lofty to describe Beatrice's single reference to *gemene minne* in the seventh and final chapter of her work. On my reading, however, it is an important witness to the presence of the mystical teaching of common love, the common soul, and the common life which would become one of the mainstays of arguably the most important figure in the Middle Dutch mystical tradition, John of Ruusbroec. Beatrice was the first vernacular author to articulate many central mystical themes in Middle Dutch, such as the abyss of God and love without any why (*minne sonder enich waeromme*). In other words, though she refers to *gemene minne* only once, we need not underestimate its importance.

Bernard McGinn has written that Beatrice was the first female representative of the new mysticism in the tradition of vernacular theology.³⁰ It is important to emphasize, however, as McGinn also does, that many of the elements present in the authors of the new mysticism were aligned with twelfth-century monastic theology. Generally speaking, this is also true of Beatrice, for many of the key themes of the Cistercian tradition in which she stood are present in her text, such as the nature of the soul as being created in the image and likeness of God, the manner of the soul's ascent to God through increasing interiority, and especially, the absolute centrality of love. Beatrice does, of course, develop these in her own distinctive ways, but the presence of these themes testify that she did not write in a vacuum and that she, as the first female author of the new mysticism, was also very much indebted to the old.

Beatrice does not use any explicitly autotheistic language in the *Seven Manners*. In other words, she does not claim explicitly that she is or has become God. Nevertheless, it is evident from the entire structure and development of the text, as well as from the statements she makes in the sixth manner and the first section of the seventh, that the mystical transformation of the soul and union with God are her central concerns. Fundamentally, as the very title of the work indicates, Beatrice's *Seven Manners* are concerned with various 'types' or 'modes' of love. These various types are all called *manieren van minnen* in Middle Dutch. *Minne* is therefore evidently a multivalent term that refers to a variety of different modes of love, and problems of interpretation and exact points of theological reference are thus difficult to establish definitively.³¹

Before we discuss Beatrice's seventh manner, it is interesting to point out that in Beatrice's sixth manner, which is not yet the highest state to which the soul can climb, the soul 'feels a divine power and a clear purity and a spiritual sweetness and a desirable freedom and a discerning wisdom and a blissful equality with God.'³² Beatrice describes this

comparison of Beatrice of Nazareth's *Seven Manners* and Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*, see John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, 'The Influence of Beatrice of Nazareth on Marguerite Porete'.

³⁰ For a discussion of the characteristics of what McGinn calls 'new mysticism' and 'vernacular theology', now generally adopted terms in the scholarship, see *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism 1200-1350*, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, 3 (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), pp. 1-30.

³¹ For a brief discussion of *minne* and its relation to courtly love poetry, see Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, pp. 168-71 and the sources cited in the notes. Reypens mentions the dual influence of twelfth-century theology and courtly love lyric in his introduction to the *Vita Beatricis*: see VB, pp. 59*-60*. Rob Faesen offers a brief summary of the fundamentally theological significance of *minne* in Beatrice's text in *Beatrijs van Nazareth, Seven manieren van minne*, into. and trans. by Rob Faesen (Kapellen: Uitgeverij Pelckmans, 1999), pp. 41-2.

³² All the quotations from Beatrice's text are from the critical edition, cited in note 3 (henceforth abbreviated as '*Seven Manieren van Minne*'). The English translation is my own. *Seven Manieren van Minne*, p. 24, ll. 20-24:

as an angelic life: 'love, reigning within her, works the sovereign work of love, and makes all things small and eases all labour and soothes all pain and pays every debt. [...] This is an angelic life and afterwards follows eternal life that God, by his goodness, might give us all.'³³ In other words, the soul on its journey to God passes through the celestial sphere and is conformed to the life of the angels before it ascends further into the Godhead in the seventh manner.

It is here that Beatrice offers us the only glimpse of a distinct category of common *minne*, with which she defines the apex of mystical transformation. At the beginning of the seventh manner, Beatrice writes that:

She is drawn above humanity into love and above human sense and reason and above all the work of our heart, and is drawn only by eternal love into the eternity of love and into the ungraspability, the width, and the unattainable height, and into the deep abyss of the Godhead, who is all in all things and who remains ungraspable above all things and who is immutable, all-being, all-powerful, all-encompassing and all-powerfully working.³⁴

Beatrice thus conceives of the highest state of mystical union to be participation in the divine life itself. Unlike the eschatological postponement we saw in Baldwin's application of the Pauline dictum, Beatrice simply states that God is 'all in all', not that he will ultimately be all in all. Despite the proximity of the soul to God in this elevation above the self, however, God remains ungraspable and above all things. We see here, incognito, the doctrine of *epectasis* in Beatrice's treatise.³⁵ God is experienced as an unfathomable abyss, but within this abyss, the soul comes to know God, his will, and the intensity of his love. Indeed, as Beatrice says, it is precisely by sharing in this love that the soul participates in God's life:

Thus she [love] draws her [the soul] into higher being, thus her spirit has climbed above time into eternity, and is raised above the gifts of love into the eternity of love which is without time, and she is elevated above human manners in love, above her own nature.³⁶

The reference to transcending the gifts of all by entering into love itself is important. Charity – or *minne* – is now no longer a derivative gift, but the reality of the giver itself. The reference to the soul being drawn above its own nature need not be interpreted to imply

'Dan so gevult si ene godeleke mogentheit ende ene clare purheit ende ene geestelike sutheit ende ene begerlike vriheit ende ene onderscedege wijsheit ende ene sachte effenheit te gode.'

³³ *Seven Manieren van Minne*, p. 28, ll. 69-72, 77-79 : '[...] dattie minne, binnen hare regnere, die geweldelike werc der minnen werct, ende die alle dinc clene maket ende alle arbeide sachte ende alle pine versutet ende alle scout quijt. [...] Dit es itoe hier een ingelec leven ende hier na volght dat ewelec leven dat god omme sine goetheit moete ons allen gheven.'

³⁴ *Seven Manieren van Minne*, pp. 28-29, ll. 4-14: 'Datsi es getrect bouen menschelicheit in minnen, ende bouen mensceliken sin ende redene ende bouen alle die werke ons herten, ende allene es getrect met eweliker minnen in die ewelicheit der minnen ende in die onbegriplicheit, in die witheit, ende die ongerinlike hoeheit ende in die diepe afgronde der godheit, die es al in alle dinc ende die onbegripelec bliuet bouen alle dinc ende die es onwandelec, al-wesende, al-mogende, al-begripende ende al-geweldeleke werkende.'

³⁵ On the meaning of this Greek theological concept and its significance for the spiritual life, see Placide Deseille, 'Épectase', *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Ascétique et Mystique: Doctrine et Histoire*, 4 (1960), 785-88. It is interesting to note in this regard that among others, the influence of this idea is to be found in Baldwin of Forde's *De sacramento altaris*, as Deseille mentions.

³⁶ *Seven Manieren van Minne*, pp. 30-31, ll. 30-36: 'Aldus trect si se in hoger wesen aldus es si geclommen met geeste bouen den tijt in die ewelicheit ende es gehoght bouen die gigten van minnen in die ewelicheit der minnen die es sonder tijt ende si es herheuen (var. verheuen) bouen menscelike maniere in minnen ende bouen hars selfs nature.'

that the soul loses its proper nature as creature by being absorbed into the divine nature. The soul retains its nature, but is, at the same time, drawn above itself into the Trinitarian life. As Beatrice writes: '[the soul's] sweet rest and enjoyable home are in the great Godhead and the high Trinity.'³⁷ This sentence forms the counterpoint to Beatrice's image of God as being at home in the soul in the sixth manner, as now the soul has also made its home in God.³⁸ Beatrice thus also employs the classical concept of mutual indwelling to explain the deepest point of unity with God, which we had also seen in Baldwin.

Beatrice then moves from these descriptions of her life of participation in the Trinity to the effects it has on her relations with others:

She searches for him in his majesty, she follows him there and contemplates him with her heart and her spirit. She knows him, she loves him, she desires him so ardently that she cannot pay heed to saints nor people, nor angels nor creatures except with the common love in him with which she loves all. And him alone has she chosen in love above all and beneath all and within all. With all the desire of her heart and all the power of her spirit she desires to see him and to have him and to enjoy him.³⁹

'Common love in him' can, on my reading, only refer to the Holy Spirit itself, as such designations for the third Person of the Trinity are classical and unremarkable.⁴⁰ What is striking about Beatrice's text is the context in which she employs this reference to the Holy Spirit. She claims that the soul in this state knows God and loves God, and to such an extent that she can only love the saints, all people, the angels, and all created beings with the love in him, i.e., the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is thus joined to the 'common' soul, which loves all in and through divine love. Beatrice thus appears to suggest that the Holy Spirit is both the object and subject of the love with which the deified soul loves, as it is the binding force in the union both between the persons of the Trinity, between the soul and God, and between the deified soul and the whole of creation. By participating directly in God's life of overflowing charity, the soul becomes the vehicle for this love to overflow in the world. The love of God is thus not an exclusively personal experience, as though God were only to

³⁷ *Seven Manieren van Minne*, p. 31, ll. 47-49: 'In die grote godheit ende in die hoge drievuldicheit es hare liefleke rustinge ende hare genuechleke woninge.'

³⁸ Cf. *Seven Manieren van Minne*, p. 25, ll. 25-34: 'Dan es si gelijc ere husrouwen die hare husce wale heeft berigt ende wiseleke besceden, ende scone gheordineert, ende vorsienlike bescermt, ende vroedelike behoedt, ende met onderscede werct; ende si doet in ende si doet ute, ende si doet ende laet na haren wille; also gelijc met derre sielen, si es minne ende minne rengnert in hare geweldelike ende mogendeleke, werkende ende rustende, doende ende latende van buten ende binnen na haren wille.' [Then she is like a housewife who has arranged her house well and managed it wisely and ordered it finely and provisioned it protectively and guarded it carefully, and works discerningly; and she brings in and takes out, and she acts or abstains according to her will; so it is with the soul: she is love and love sovereignly and mightily reigns in her, at work and at rest, acting and abstaining outwardly and inwardly according to her will.]

³⁹ *Seven Manieren van Minne*, pp. 31-2, ll. 50-60: 'Si suctene in sire majesteit si volget heme daer ende sieten ane met herten ende met geeste. Si kintene si mintene si begertene so seere datsi necan geachten noch heiligen noch menschen, noch ingle noch creaturen dan met gemeenre minnen in heme daer si al mede mint. Ende heme allene heft si vercoren in minnen bouen al, ende onder al, ende binnen al so datsi met al der begerlicheit hars herten ende met al der cracht hars geests, so begertsi heme te siene ende te hebbene ende te gebrukene.'

⁴⁰ For a wide-ranging overview on the Holy Spirit, see the multi-author article 'Esprit Saint' in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Ascétique et Mystique: Doctrine et Histoire*, 4 (1960), 1246-333 (cols. 1279-83) on the Holy Spirit as the bond, concord, union, and communion of the Trinity in Augustine. It is interesting to note in this regard that in the twelfth century, Richard of Saint Victor coined the term 'condilectio' for the Holy Spirit as the loving bond and communion of the Father and the Son. See Richard of Saint Victor, *On the Trinity*, trans. by Ruben Angelici (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011).

bestow the fullness of his love on the deified soul (i.e. the soul that participates in the divine life). Rather, the gift of love is poured out universally, on the whole of creation, through the deified soul. The soul thus not only witnesses this universal love in eternity, it also manifests it in the concrete and factual reality of its earthly life. Indeed, according to Beatrice, it has no other perspective on created reality except through the lens of the ‘common love in him *with which she loves all.*’ In other words, Beatrice presents finding her home within the Trinity in eternity and manifesting common love in the world as the ultimate fulfilment of *minne*. Beatrice thus universalizes necessarily personal mystical consciousness. She is not a kind of solipsistic mystic who becomes God in the privacy of her own cell or her own inner world. She is deified-in-communion. And not only in the communion of the Trinity, but in the communion of all her earthly relations.

Unlike Baldwin’s clearly more reserved position on whether the human person may be transformed fully into the love of the Holy Spirit in this life, Beatrice has no hesitation in claiming that this is precisely what occurs in the highest manner of love. Even allowing for the possibility that Baldwin did ultimately think that contemplative union, albeit brief, was a possibility in this life,⁴¹ Beatrice appears to have no qualms in stating in her seventh manner, that this deiform life is not only a possibility, but the enduring reality of the deified soul. This is not to say, however, that Beatrice therefore conceives of the seventh manner as the soul’s perpetual enjoyment of the beatific vision in this life, for she clearly contradicts such an interpretation quite forcefully in the later passages of the seventh manner.⁴² Nevertheless, it is on the basis of what she writes in the early passages of her final manner of love, discussed above, that I would argue that Beatrice articulates the mystical fulfilment of the spiritual ideal of common love, not as a dim reflection or even a participation in the communion of God, but as a genuine transformation into God’s love – a transformation that has direct effects on Beatrice’s life in time.

3. BEATRICE’S LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR IN THE *VITA BEATRICIS*

What then, does the anonymous author of the *Vita Beatricis* – the text which made the identification of Beatrice as the author of the *Seven manieren* possible to begin with – have to say on these exalted matters? It has been argued that he was most hesitant and trepidatious about the possibilities of mystical union, and sought to mitigate and nuance Beatrice’s bold expressions in his text.⁴³ Indeed, as Leonce Reypens, the editor of the *Vita*,

⁴¹ On this, see Bell’s ‘The ascetic Spirituality of Baldwin of Ford’ and, for a dissenting opinion, John R. Sommerfeldt’s review of David Bell’s translation of the *Spiritual Tractates* in *Speculum*, 64 (1989), 384-85. Sommerfeldt writes: ‘Bell thinks [*Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 140, note 10] there is a reference to “contemplative ecstasy” in *Tractate XIII* (*Spiritual Tractates*, II, p. 135), but the evidence is too meager to convince me. This is important; if contemplation were the *raison d’être* of Cistercian monasticism, its absence in Baldwin is a sign of changing Cistercian values’ (p. 385). We may say that as far as Beatrice was concerned, as a Cistercian writing approximately half a century later, her values had not changed.

⁴² For a discussion of these passages, see Arblaster and Faesen, ‘The Influence of Beatrice of Nazareth’, pp. 74-8.

⁴³ For a convincing argument to this effect, see Rob Faesen, ‘Mystiek en hagiografie: Hoe behandelt de anonieme auteur van de “Vita Beatricis” het verschijnsel mystiek?’, *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, 73 (1999), 97-110. On the other hand, it strikes me that, on occasion, he perhaps inadvertently makes claims and uses metaphors that go further than Beatrice’s own. See my “Flowing from the Wild Sea and Back to the Sea”: Water Metaphors and Mystical Union in the Late Medieval Low Countries’, *The Journal of Religion*, 98 (2018), 169-91 (pp. 175-76).

argues, 'we have much to reproach him for' because he omitted from his Latin the highest expressions of Beatrice's mystical consciousness. For pedagogical reasons, as the biographer/hagiographer himself says, he thought these highest experiences would be too elevated for his readers.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Reypens detects in the *Vita* an emphasis on external, paramystical phenomena and copious moralizing additions that he did not draw from Beatrice's own writings.⁴⁵ Amy Hollywood has focused on the former problem specifically, arguing that whereas '*Seven Manners of Loving* is intent on the mad love of the soul and her ecstatic union with love, who is God,' Beatrice's biographer 'consistently translates her internally felt experience into external, visible markings on the body of the saint. Yet Beatrice describes the spiritual life [...] as occurring interiorly and with no mention of visible manifestations.'⁴⁶ Finally, it is important to note that, as Rob Faesen argues in his contribution to this special issue, Beatrice's hagiographer did also take pains to present her as a real theologian.

Nevertheless, the *Vita* tells us nothing of 'common' love in its recapitulation of the seventh manner in Book 3, chapter 14.⁴⁷ The hagiographer describes the seventh manner primarily from the perspective of Beatrice's earthly exile. He tells us that with devout affection of heart, Beatrice 'daily frequented the heavenly homeland [the *Seven Manners* refers to *genuechleke woninge* (delightful home) p. 31, line 49] of the blessed spirits, daily visited the throngs of holy angels, the company of celestial virtues and, passing through them, hastened to mount to the beloved whom she sought.'⁴⁸ He then adds, however, with a Pauline allusion absent from the *Seven Manners*, that 'because these things happened to the holy woman only as through a mirror and in a dim reflection it necessarily happened that the more pleasantly she took part in the eternal joys through the exercise of contemplation, the more vexed she was to come to herself again, withdrawn from there and returned to earth,

⁴⁴ See VB, pp. 40*-42*. I refer to the author of the *Vita* as both a biographer and hagiographer, for though he refers to himself only as the translator of Beatrice's own text, we cannot call Beatrice the real author, and the book contains both hagiographical and more straightforwardly biographical elements. It is important to note that Reypens calls the text Beatrice's autobiography, but it is difficult to follow him in this.

⁴⁵ The moralizing additions to Beatrice's lost original 'autobiography' are, Reypens claims, easy to identify: see VB, pp. 40*, 44*-46*. This is of course difficult to verify on the basis of lost writings, but it certainly holds true for the hagiographer's additions to the *Seven Manners*. In this regard, see also Amy Hollywood, 'Inside Out: Beatrice of Nazareth and Her Hagiographer', in Amy Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp. 191-211, 347-56 (p. 195), where she argues that since much of the *Vita*'s description of Beatrice's ascetic practice is almost identical to that found in the Life of Arnulph of Villers, Beatrice herself probably did not write about ascetic practice.

⁴⁶ Hollywood, 'Inside Out', p. 191. There is little in Hollywood's account with which I disagree, but her central argument would have been all the more compelling if she had discussed Beatrice's many references to the soul's 'works' (many of which are, of course, interior) but especially its 'exterior works' in the fifth and sixth manners, as well as her description of becoming love as not being able to love angels, saints, people, and creatures except with common love, as discussed above. Furthermore, despite his penchant for somatizing Beatrice's experience, the hagiographer does also devote considerable attention to Beatrice's interior life, just not to its highest mystical fulfilment.

⁴⁷ References to the *Vita* are to the critical edition cited in note 28. The English translation is from *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth, 1200-1268*, trans. and ann. by Roger De Ganck, Cistercian Fathers Series, 50 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991).

⁴⁸ *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, p. 321; VB, p. 174, ll. 493-502: 'Quis, inquam, digne referat quam deuotissimo cordis affectu celestem illam beatorum spirituum patriam cotidie frequentauerit., cotidie sanctorum angelorum agmina celestiumque virtutum consortia visitauerit., et [in] ea pertransiens, ad dilectum festinauerit ascendere quem quesiuit?'

recalled by the weight of the humanity she bore.⁴⁹ While it is certainly true that Beatrice and her biographer share this exilic emphasis in the seventh manner, the tone of the latter's recapitulation is far more dialectical than is Beatrice's own text. There is a tension in the *Seven Manners* between spiritual *excessus* and the prison of the body, but the *Vita* presents the consolations of contemplation and desolations of the earth as distinct and opposed movements. The *Seven Manners* appears to present these more as parallel realities. This is partly due to the fact, as mentioned above, that the biographer was hesitant to elaborate on the encounter with God. As he says at the end of chapter 14:

Why do I delay more on these matters, which, as I have stated elsewhere, can be conceived only by experience, not by a flood of words, and which can be understood not in the letter but in the spirit, not with carnal but with spiritual understanding? Therefore, although we have touched scarcely a few out of many things, and have not adequately even summarized, much less treated fully, the abundant and most ample matter about divine love in my far too few words, nevertheless lest I be burdensome to fastidious readers while I am serving the devout with devoted service, I leave heavenly matters to be exercised, rather than read about, by those who contemplate heavenly things, and I undertake the second branch of love, which is said to consist in the love of neighbour, and insert it in this work before I end, so that everyone may be edified.⁵⁰

Again we see the biographer treating as distinct matters which in Beatrice's own text are intimately connected, namely the love of God and the love of neighbour as one common movement. In Beatrice's text, the highest mode of *minne* is both the transformation into the love of God and the love of neighbour. It is the overflowing abundance of contemplation that is in itself the love of neighbour. And in this sense Beatrice not only mirrors the divine, she is divine because that which overflows is the Holy Spirit itself.

Although Van Mierlo was convinced that Beatrice not only wrote an autobiography but several other mystical treatises as well, including a separate treatise on the love of neighbour, Reypens was not convinced.⁵¹ We simply do not know. Indeed, it is difficult enough, given how liberally he modified the *Seven Manners* themselves, to attempt to distinguish the passages in the *Vita* that the biographer drew from Beatrice's original Middle Dutch autobiography and the passages that he either interpolated on his own initiative or heard about from the sisters at Nazareth who had known Beatrice, including her own sister Christina. Be that as it may, there is a short penultimate chapter – Book 3, chapter 15 – of the *Vita* on the subject of the love of neighbour. If this were originally a treatise by Beatrice, we might suppose it very likely that she did not apply her theme to herself explicitly, but

⁴⁹ *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, p. 323; VB, p. 175, ll. 523-33: 'Verum quoniam hec per speculum tantum et in enigmate sancte femine contingebant: valde necessarium erat vt quanto iocundius per contemplationum exercitium eternis gaudijs interfuerat., tanto molestius ab hijs abstracta denuo sibi redderetur in terris reuocante se nimirum humanitatis pondere quod gestabat.'

⁵⁰ *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, pp. 325, 327; VB, pp. 176-77, ll. 583-605: 'Sed quid hijs diutius immoror;, que, sicut alias protestatus sum, sola mentis experientia, non autem verborum affluentia possunt concipi., et non litera sed spiritu, non carnali sed spirituali valent intelligentia comprehendi? Proinde licet vix e multis pauca <tetigerimus>, et copiosam diuine caritatis amplissimamque [verborum] materiam nimia verborum parcite, non dico plene, sed nec sufficienter quidem hucusque perstrinxerim;, ne tamen fastidiosis lectoribus onerosus efficiar dum deuotis officio deuotionis inseruio, celestem materiam celestium contemplatoribus exercendam quam legendam potius derelinquo, secundumque caritatis membrum, quod in delictione proximi consistere dictum est., ad edificationem omnium inserendum huic operi, priusquam dictis finem faciam, apprehendo.'

⁵¹ See the section of the introduction to the critical edition of the *Seven Manners*, written by Van Mierlo: *Seven Manieren van Minne*, pp. 32*, 69*-81*, and Reypens' introduction to the *Vita Beatricis*: VB, pp. 56*-59*.

rather wrote a more objective, more mystagogical, and more impersonal treatise on the soul, as in her *Seven Manners*, rather than the celebration of Beatrice's own virtue that we find in the *Vita*.⁵² As I have argued with Rob Faesen elsewhere,⁵³ there are certain parallels of theme and articulation between Beatrice's *Seven Manners* and Richard of Saint-Victor's *Four Degrees*, especially regarding the seventh manner and Richard's fourth degree. Curiously, while addressing similar themes in his chapter on the love of neighbour in the *Vita Beatricis*, Beatrice's biographer appears to echo more strongly some elements of Baldwin's conception of the practice of common charity discussed above,⁵⁴ emphasizing her obedience, patience, compassion, and devotion to those in need:

Because like a chosen bride she had been brought into the wine cellar where the heavenly king himself had set charity in order in her, it was fitting that she pour that nectar-like taste of charity back out in sharing it for her neighbours' use, and that she, as an abundant dispenser of the heavenly talent, should pay out for the profit of others, the gift of charity which she had received. [...] Just as love unceasingly embraces God, the creator of all, with outstretched arms, so it should incline to the needs of creatures, loving good and bad alike, and should extend itself with a generous merciful bosom even to irrational creatures.⁵⁵

And, we are told, Beatrice received daily visitors of various ages and stations of life to benefit from this outpouring of her mercy and compassion. With great patience and benevolence, she ministered to them in their needs.

For this reason, following the apostle's rule, she was weak with the weak, and she burned daily with those who were scandalized. For this reason also she necessarily took upon herself whatever servitude the other person was suffering, not being able to withhold her mercy and compassion in any grievous situation. The more closely she clung to the creator of all things through the affection of love, the more faithfully she gave to his creatures a charitable service that was not so much voluntary as necessary.⁵⁶

Apart from the reference to the same Pauline passage that Baldwin had used so effectively, the most interesting thing about the above quotation is that the biographer tells us that Beatrice's charity was '*non tam voluntarium quam etiam necessarium*.' This implies that the author of the *Vita* did indeed appreciate the extent to which Beatrice's will had been transformed into God's will, and that her own proper will was so aligned with the Holy Spirit that she could not but love with the love of God. This highlights a curious irony about our question with respect to 'negative' perceptions of mystics as being detached and

⁵² Cf. Hollywood, 'Inside Out', p. 198.

⁵³ Arblaster and Faesen, "'Commune à tous par largesse de pure charité'", pp. 312-19.

⁵⁴ Again, I make no claim as to whether either Beatrice or her biographer actually knew Baldwin's *Tractate XV*.

⁵⁵ *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, p. 333; VB, p. 180, ll. 8-18: 'At quoniam in cellam vinariam introducta, sicut sponsa [sicut] electissima, fuerat, vbi rex ipse celestis in ea caritatem ordinauerat opera precium erat vt illam caritatis gustum nectareum ad vsum proximorum partiendo refunderet:, et, celestis talenti largissima dispensatrix, caritatis <donum> quod acceperat ad lucrum alijs erogaret. [...] [E]t <sicut> Deum, omnium creatorem, amplissime dilectionis brachijs incessanter amplectitur., ita quoque, rerum creatarum necessitatibus inclinata, bonos simul et malos diligit., et ad ipsas etiam irrationabiles creaturas, dilatator sinu clementine, se extendat.'

⁵⁶ *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, p. 335; VB, p. 181, ll. 32-39: 'Hinc etiam, apostolicam sequens regulam, cum infirmantibus infirmabatur et cum scandalizatis vrebatur cotidie; hinc, omnem aliene tolerantie seruitutem necessariam in se transferens, a compassionis affectu non potuit, in quocumque necessitatis articulo, viscera misericordie cohibere. Quanto namque per caritatis affectum ipsi creatori cunctarum rerum artius inherebat;, tanto profecto fidelius, non tam voluntarium quam etiam necessarium ipsis creaturis adapte caritatis obsequium impendebat.'

individualistic. The central contemporaneous complaint against theologies like that of Beatrice and statements like the above from the *Vita* was not so much that mysticism is privatized and isolated, but rather that it implies the instrumentalization of the human person and the abrogation of its freedom. Such was the view, at least, of Thomas Aquinas, who addressed the question of whether human charity might ever be identified with divine charity, and forcefully opposed the view (but that is another story).⁵⁷

Finally, before offering an account of Beatrice's death, the hagiographer depicts her not only as loving and compassionate towards her neighbours, but as an example of cosmic harmony in her love for all creation. As Beatrice had said in the *Seven Manners*, the soul cannot but love angels, saints, people, and creatures with common love, and this has not escaped her biographer:

Divine grace had poured out in her holy breast such an abundance of compassion that she had the fullest compassionate affection not only for the very brute animals in their needs, and she would affectionately condescend to the smallest little animals and birds in their sufferings that she could not see any of them wounded or killed by anyone without great affectionate compassion.⁵⁸

CONCLUSION

We have sought, through this exploration of the common life and common love in Baldwin of Forde, Beatrice of Nazareth, and the *Vita Beatricis*, to address the question of the purported tension between contemplation and community life. Baldwin of Forde offers a rich theological synthesis of the nature of the common life of the angels, apostles, and all people as derived from the very life of God. Although he was not a mystic, he sets out a communitarian vision built on the sharing of love and the love of sharing that is Trinitarian at its origin. His conception of the common life is thus fundamentally relational, as it is routed in the Trinitarian relations.

In Beatrice of Nazareth's *Seven Manners of Love*, we find a genuinely mystical account of the nature of common love. Likewise built on Trinitarian foundations, Beatrice articulates how the contemplative is drawn above (but not without) its own nature into the Godhead, is transformed, and can henceforth only love the angels, saints, people and creatures with the love that is the Holy Spirit. She does not speak of a participation in the Holy Spirit – be it either direct or indirect – but simply of the inability to love except with the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the author of the *Vita Beatricis*, though he eschews much of the mystical content of Beatrice's own text, and presumably the other materials, now lost, from which he drew, nevertheless offers an account of the way in which Beatrice manifested in her

⁵⁷ For two excellent discussions of this question as it relates to Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, see Edouard-H. Wéber, 'Eléments néoplatoniciens en théologie mystique au XIII^{ème} siècle', in *Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter: Symposium Kloster Engelberg 1984*, ed. by Kurt Ruh (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986), pp. 196-217 and 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 Philosophie Médiévales*, 79 (2012), 39-74.

⁵⁸ *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, p. 339; VB, p. 183, ll. 104-10: 'Tantum quoque compassionis affluentiam in eius sancto pectore diuina gratia propinauerat; ut non solum hominibus, sed ipsis brutis animalibus quoque in suis necessitatibus plenissimo compateretur affect; et sic minutissimis quoque bestiolis aut auiculis in <suarum> sufferentia passionum affectuose condescenderet; ut illorum aliquid a quocumque ledi vel occidi homine sine multo compassionis affectu conspicere non valeret.'

community those hidden realities of which he could speak only with great trepidation, if at all.

All three of these Cistercian texts⁵⁹ were written across a period that saw monumental social and theological shifts in Western Europe, with the flourishing of not only scholastic but also vernacular theology and the emergence of the new mysticism. Nevertheless, despite all their differences of style and content, they all testify that to be truly human is most fundamentally to be in relation and to share all things in common, including the overflowing love of God, because from their perspective, that is precisely the nature of God. For them, in other words, there is no such thing as ‘private’ or ‘individualistic’ mysticism.

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⁵⁹ If we assume that the author of the *Vita* was indeed a Cistercian confessor of Nazareth from the Abbey of Saint Bernard’s on the Scheldt, as is commonly supposed. See Arblaster and Faesen, ‘The Influence of Beatrice of Nazareth on Marguerite Porete’, pp. 81-84.

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ABSTRACT

This contribution treats the theme of 'common love' in the Cistercian tradition, and specifically in Baldwin of Forde's *Spiritual Tractate XV*, Beatrice of Nazareth's *Seven Manners of Love* and the *Vita Beatricis*. It is impossible to establish definitively whether Beatrice knew Baldwin's text, and yet he provided a rich synthesis of the theme of common love and the common life as rooted in the common love of the Persons of the Trinity. Beatrice mentions such love only once in her short text, but for her too, it has important Trinitarian

implications. While for Baldwin, common love is a spiritual ideal, Beatrice describes this love as the fullness of the soul's transformative mystical encounter with God. Finally, in the *Vita Beatricis*, we see an example of how this theme is woven into the hagiographical account of Beatrice's life.