

How Ruusbroec Tastes, Sounds, and Smells

Henry of Coesfeld and the Gerson–Groenendaal Controversy

Around 1406, the chancellor of the University of Paris Jean Gerson († 1429) condemned parts of Ruusbroec's *Espousals* in two letters to the Herne Carthusian Bartholomew Clantier († 1427).¹ In his second letter, Gerson included an excerpt from a capitular sermon by an anonymous Carthusian.² Elsewhere, I have demonstrated that this quotation has its origin in a *sermo* or *collatio* held by Henry of Coesfeld († 1410) at the 1406 general chapter of the Urbanist branch of the Carthusian Order in Seitz [Žiče].³ This sermon contains a summary of Henry's theology of *devotio*, as it was developed in a few earlier sermons and a tract on the institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist.⁴

¶ I would like to thank José van Aelst, Krijn Pansters, Kees Schepers, and John Arblaster, for giving valuable comments and insights to improve this essay. I am also indebted to Jasper Hopkins' translations of the early sermons of Nicholas of Cusa, made available on his personal website (jasper-hopkins.info).

¹ For an overview of the Gerson–Groenendaal controversy, see K. Schepers, 'Ruusbroec in Latin: Impulses and Impediments', in: J. Arblaster & R. Faesen, *A Companion to John of Ruusbroec* [Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 51], Leiden – Boston, 2014, 237-285, p. 262-268.

² See the edition of *Epistola II ad Bartholomeum* in A. Combes, *Essai sur la critique de Ruusbroeck par Gerson*, 3 vols., Paris, 1945-1959, vol. 1: *Introduction critique et dossier documentaire*, p. 790-804. For the excerpt from the Carthusian sermon, see p. 797-798.

³ See T. Gaens, 'Fons hortorum irriguus, ceteras irrigans religiones', in: S.J. Molvarec & T. Gaens (ed.), *A Fish Out of Water? From Contemplative Solitude to Carthusian Involvement in Pastoral Care and Reform Activity* [Miscellanea Neerlandica, 41 / Studia Cartusiana, 2], Leuven, 2013, 51-103, p. 57 (n. 24). Here, I had mentioned that the sermon in MS Mainz, Stadtbibliothek, I 306, fols. 95r-116v did not contain the quoted excerpt. The Mainzer MS catalogue, in fact, reports that the same sermon is also to be found in Köln [Cologne], Historisches Archiv, MS GB quart. 34, fols. 52r-54v. However, the text in the Kölner MS is an abridged version of Henry's sermon, held by a Croisier prior at the general chapter of the Croisier order. Since then, I have inspected the Mainzer MS, and it turns out that it does contain Henry's original sermon. The Rooklooster Register (Wien [Vienna], Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, S.n. 12694, fol. 159v), which lists it as *Collatio de generibus devotionum*, shows that it also circulated separately, e.g. in manuscripts owned by the Canons Regular of Bethlehem in Herent and Saint Martin's in Leuven. In this essay, I will quote from MS Brussel [Brussels], Koninklijke Bibliotheek (hereafter cited as Brussels, KB), MS 1212 (cat. 1945), from Groenendaal, containing a collection of Henry's sermons, including both sermons held at the general chapters of 1404 and 1406 (respectively on fols. 56v-60r and 60r-66v).

⁴ See T. Gaens, 'Sic vivere est devote vivere. Henry of Coesfeld as Theologian of Modern-Day Devotion', in: *Church History and Religious Culture* 96 (2016), 13-39, for an introduction to Henry's devotional theology. Especially one of Henry's sermons on the Purification of Mary, entitled *De multiplici devotione sive de diversis generibus devotorum*, seems to have circulated separately, since the Rooklooster Register (see n. 3) has a separate entry for it, indicating that Groenendaal (and not Rooklooster) owned a copy. This MS seems to be lost.

Gerson seems to have been attracted by the Carthusian's description of different kinds of false devotion, and particularly that of "vain and curious" devotion (*devotio vana et curiosa*), in which Henry lashed out against the excesses of speculative thinking:

The fourth type of false devotion, i.e., vain and curious, is exercised by those who, without mortification of the will or the zeal for serving God, believe the spiritual life to consist in the rumination or, perhaps, the imagination of spiritual things, mistaking this preoccupation or at least the ensuing delight for devotion. Pursuing this, not being content with the ways of speaking of Scripture, they invent or feign more abstract ways of speaking about spiritual things, because these produce greater delight in them, often – because of this – wrapping even rather simple matters in obscure and abstract ways in which they delight, such as calling humbling oneself or, perhaps, also high contemplation an immersion in an abyssal depth, divine love an annihilation or a reduction to nothing, the charitable movement of the mind in God an inflowing in God, while calling the movement to good works an outflowing from God, and so about other, similar matters.⁵

But, as I have shown elsewhere, Henry's devotional theology and his description of false (and true) devotion is dependent on the second book of Ruusbroec's *Espousals*.⁶ Of course, this does not necessarily exclude that Henry would have found certain aspects of Ruusbroec's work problematic.

In this paper, I will show that there is no evidence that Henry had any mistrust about the good intentions of the Groenendaal prior. To better understand the nuanced position of the Carthusian in the matter, I will unpack Gerson's quotation and situate it in Henry's broader discussion of true and false devotion. I will also demonstrate Henry's dependence on Ruusbroec's teachings in his own Trinitarian and Christological thinking, as well as its application to the relation between the human soul and God. Finally, I will return to the Gerson controversy and its purported effects on the dissemination of Ruusbroec's ideas. Since Henry's work remains unedited, I shall quote from manuscripts.⁷

⁵ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo factus in generali capitulo ordinis Carthusiensis AD 1406*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 60r-66v, fol. 64v-65r: *Quartam vero devotionem falsam id est vanam et curiosam illi exercent qui sine mortificatione proprie voluntatis ac zelo Domino serviendi vitam spirituales consistere credunt in ruminacione seu potius fantasiacione rerum spiritualium estimantes hanc ipsam fantasiacionem vel saltem delectacionem inde consequentem devotionem esse. Unde hii ad hanc ipsam consequendam non contenti modis loquendi scripture sacre adveniunt sibi vel fingunt de rebus spiritualibus modos abstractiores, eo quod tales eis maiorem delectacionem generent, plerumque etiam ob hoc materias satis faciles obscuris modis et abstractis in quibus delectantur obvolvunt ut vocantes humiliacionem vel fortassis etiam altam contemplacionem, submersionem in abissabili [sic] profundo, divinum amorem annihilacionem vel in nichil reductionem, caritativum motum mentis in Deum, influxum in Deum, vocantes motum autem ad opus propter Deum, effluxum a Deo, et sic de aliis consimilibus. Compare with the edition of Gerson's letter by Combes (see n. 2).*

⁶ T. Gaens, 'Sic vivere', 19-20, 23-24.

⁷ See *Ibidem*, 14-15 (n. 4), for a brief overview of his life, and, in the appendix to this essay, a list of manuscripts containing his sermons and his treatise on the Eucharist.

GERSON'S APPROPRIATION OF HENRY OF COESFELD

In his critique of Ruusbroec, Gerson stated that he felt “supported” by the Carthusian’s sermon (*ne mihi soli videar inniti*). However, a careful reading of the quoted excerpt shows that Henry of Coesfeld was not directly targeting Ruusbroec. The first phrase mentioned by Henry, “immersion in an abyssal depth” (*submersio in abissali profundo*), immediately seems a problematic one, as it comes very close to Ruusbroec’s own language.⁸ However, nowhere in the *Espousals* did Ruusbroec equate the humbling of oneself to an “immersion in an abyssal depth”, which sounds much more an Eckhartian expression.⁹ Similarly, Ruusbroec did talk about “annihilation” in the sense of “annihilation of the self” – as did Henry –, but nowhere did he equate divine love with “annihilation or reduction to nothing” (*annihilatio vel in nihil reductio*).¹⁰ And, although Ruusbroec, in line with the mystical tradition, was very prodigal in the use of the terms “inflowing” and “outflowing”, he never called the charitable movement of the mind in God an “inflowing in God” (*influxum in Deum*), or the movement to good works because of God an “outflowing from God” (*effluxum a Deo*).¹¹ Here Henry seems to refer to phrasing which suggests that, in humility and contemplation, the human soul would somehow be reduced to nothing (by God), and to conflating language which contradicts the supernatural source of charity or grace, or the human role in meritorious works. An even clearer example that might show that Gerson was too avidly trying to find support in Henry’s sermon, is the appearance of the Ruusbroecian expression “spiritual lewdness” (*spiritualis luxuria*), near the end of Gerson’s quotation.¹² It is not clear whether the Paris chancellor was aware of the fact that he was literally using Ruusbroec’s own words to raise doubts about the *Espousals*.

When discussing “vain and curious” devotion in another sermon (on the feast of the Purification of Mary), Henry explicitly adds that he does *not* refer to truly devout people who have the senses well trained to the discerning of good and evil, inasmuch as they first practice the imitation of Christ before

⁸ B. McGinn, ‘Essential Themes in Ruusbroec’s Mysticism’, in: J. Arblaster & R. Faesen, *A Companion to John of Ruusbroec* [Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition, 51], Leiden – Boston, 2014, 130-178, p. 133-135.

⁹ On humility and the divine “ground”, see U. Kern, ‘Eckhart’s anthropology’, in: J.M. Hackett (ed.), *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, Leiden & Boston, 2012, 237-251, p. 245.

¹⁰ See below, n. 90.

¹¹ See, e.g., John of Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht*, ed. J. Alaerts et al. [Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio mediaevalis, 103], Turnhout, 1988 (hereafter cited as *Brulocht*), b32-33, b80-81, b128-131.

¹² Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo factus in generali capitulo ordinis Carthusiensis AD 1406*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 60r-66v, fol. 65r-65v: *Quarta devotio est vinum valde fumosum id est superbie generativum et libidinosum de quo mistiche et illa fortassis inhibitio apostolica accipi potest. ‘Nolite inebriari vino in quo est luxuria’ [Eph. 5:18]. Et revera in hoc ipso est spiritualis luxuria eo quod sic false devoti non dei cultum et honorem sed propriam querunt delectationem.* On the Ruusbroecian notion of *spiritualis luxuria*, see P. Adnès, ‘Luxure spirituelle’, in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, 9 (1976), 1260.

speculating on divine things to increase their devotion. But he clearly does speak of those who primarily seek the pleasure accompanying this contemplation and who perhaps, because of this, are beyond charity, believing they are holier than others, despising or judging other, truly devout people.¹³ In this sermon too, Henry vents his opinion on the language of those false devout who are “immersed in so many stormy flows of error” that they believe to be able to essentially transform themselves in God, or to be Christ or eternal life themselves.¹⁴

¹³ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in purificatione BMV*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 91r-97v, fol. 94v-95r: *Protestor autem cum omni humilitate quod non loquor de vere devotis et sanctis hominibus qui sensus habent iam probatos et exercitatos ad discretionem boni et mali quamdiu didicerunt sedere ad pedes domini Ihesu et audire verba eius id est qui prius didicerunt contemplari seu meditari exercitia vitam virtutes et passionem domini Ihesu Christi et secundum hoc vitam suam instituire passiones frangere mores emendare atque sanctissime doctrine sue in omnibus obtemperare ac per hoc iam ad osculum oris eiusdem ascenderunt gustantes scilicet dulcedinem deitatis ipsius. Hii siquidem non incongrue fortassis premissarum spiritualium rerum contemplationem vel meditationem pro excitatione aut augmentatione sue devotionis aliarumve sacrarum affectionum accipiunt, vel ex nimio fervore amoris aut devotionis in ipsam prosiliunt. Sed de illis loquor qui principaliter illam delectationem que antedictam meditationem seu speculationem concomitatur queritant, et propter eam quamvis fortassis sint omnino extra caritatem vel saltem non ideo maioris caritatis se aliis sanctiores credunt, despicientes ac rudes iudicantes, ceteros vere devotos homines ymmo et aliquando prelatos suos qui se huiuscemodi fatuitatibus non occupant, et propter hoc ipsis non obedientes quinpotius rebellantes atque contra eos murmurantes* [I assert, however, with all humility, that I do not speak about truly devout and holy people who already have the senses practiced unto the discernment of good and evil, inasmuch as these people have exercised themselves to spiritually sit at Christ’s feet and hear his words, i.e., they have practiced beforehand to contemplate and meditate the acts, the life, the virtues, and the Passion of Christ, and to institute their life accordingly, breaking down their passions, correcting their habits, and conforming to the holiest doctrines, and, through this, climb up to the proverbial “kiss of the mouth”, tasting God’s sweetness. These people, perhaps, not incongruously, accept the meditation or speculation of the aforesaid spiritual things [= of occult and high, divine things] for the rousing and augmentation of their devotion or other sacred affects, or leap forth in this out of the excessive fervor of love and devotion. But I do speak of those people who primarily seek the pleasure that accompanies this kind of contemplation and perhaps, because of this, are wholly outside of charity or at least not of greater charity, believing they are holier than others, despising or rudely judging other, truly devout people and sometimes even their prelates, who don’t occupy themselves in this way with these extravagances, and, because of this, are not obeying them and even rebelling and murmuring against them].

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, fol. 96r: *Unde et de huiuscemodi hominibus multi fuerunt [qui tam diu secundum proprium sensum fantasiati fuerunt] de unitione vel unitate hominis cum Deo, de submersione hominis in abissibilis profundo, de reversione eius in primordiale originem, de hominis in nichilum reditione et eiusdem in Deum [de]liquefactione, de eiusdem sed in Deum influxu et a Deo effluxu etc. consimilibus quod tantis submersi sunt errorum procellosis fluctibus ut crederent se in Deum essentialiter posse converti se esse Christum, se esse vitam eternam et per se omnem in ecclesiam derivari gratiam. Et ceteros errores consimiles premissis quales fuerunt aliqui heretici qui ante non multos annos in diversis partibus combusti sunt* [Of this kind of people there were many who, in the proper sense, were filled with phantasms on the uniton or unity of man with God, on the immersion of man in an abyssal depth, on his return to a primordial origin, on the reduction of man to nothing and his melting away in God, on his inflowing in God or outflowing from God, and on other similar things for such a long time that they, immersed in so many stormy flows of error, believed to be able to essentially transform themselves in God, to be Christ

An indication that Henry held Ruusbroec beyond suspicion is that he calls him “a certain devout man” (*quidam vir devotus*) when directly quoting from his work. In discussing the effects of the Eucharist, for example, Henry confronts the traditional theology of Innocent V with the violent image of Christ as a “sin-eater” from the *Mirror of Eternal Blessedness*, in which Ruusbroec describes Christ’s insatiable hunger and his greedy devouring of our sins. To this, Henry adds that these words, which perhaps sound astonishing, nevertheless have to be accepted in a spiritual way, while expressing his belief that they taste best to an amorous mind and that they are redolent (i.e., “share the same smell”) with the previous (more traditional) words.¹⁵

HENRY OF COESFELD’S TRINITARIAN THINKING AND THE THREEFOLD BIRTH OF CHRIST

Further influences of Ruusbroec’s Trinitarian and Christological thinking can be found in Henry’s influential sermon on the meaning of Christmas as a three-fold birth, relating these births to the three masses of the Christmas liturgy: the eternal and divine, inner-Trinitarian generation of the Son from the Father,

themselves, to be eternal life themselves, and to pass on all grace in the Church. And [they believed] other, similar errors, as there were some heretics, who were burnt not that many years ago in various regions].

¹⁵ Henry of Coesfeld, *De sacramento eucharistie*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 11811-12 (cat. 2160), 3r-101v, fol. 91v: *Et hec verba que minus spiritualibus fortassis mirabiliter sonant et minus sapiunt spiritualiter debent accipi et sic credo quod menti amoroze optime sapiant et eandem sententiam cum precedentibus redoleant* [And these words that perhaps sound astonishing to the less spiritual and that they taste to a lesser extent, have to be taken in a spiritual way, and I believe that they taste optimally to the amorous mind and that they are redolent to the same sense with the previous words]. Immediately preceding this opinion, a translated excerpt from Ruusbroec’s *Mirror* can be found: *Et istam eandem sententiam quidam vir devotus prout ego intelligere possum pulchre insinuat dicens de hoc sacramento quod amor Christi est avarus et cum hoc liberalis dans nobis quidquid habet et quidquid est et reaccipiens quidquid habemus et quidquid sumus ymmo repostulans a nobis plusquam reddere sufficimus. Eius esuries est sine mensura magna consumens nos totaliter a fundo ymmo medullas ossium nostrorum. Verumptamen bene favemus sibi illius consumptionis nostre et de quanto sibi magis favemus de tanto sibi melius sapimus et quidquid de nobis consumit saturari tamen non potest. Et primo quidem preparat cibum suum et comburit igne amoris sui sive caritatis omnia peccata nostra et defectus nostros, et postquam tunc purgati et in amore assati sumus tunc recte hyat et aperit os suum instar vulturis volentis deglutire omnia vult namque vitam nostram peccatricem mutare et consumere in vitam suam plenam gratie et glorie. I compared the quotation with the known translation of the *Mirror*, ascribed by some scholars to Geert Grote (using the 1952-1954 edition of Geerdardijn, *pro manuscripto*). Ruusbroec’s depiction of Christ as a “greedy-guts” suffering from “bulimia”, which is missing in Henry’s text, was already left out in a number of Middle Dutch manuscripts and also in this Latin translation. However much the Groenendaal prior’s language “shared the same smell” with more traditional teachings, apparently some people had felt that there were certain limits to it. On this image of the devouring Christ, see also G. de Baere, “‘Christus een ghieregh slockard’ of de wansmaak van Ruusbroec”, in: K. Schepers & F. Hendrickx (ed.), *De letter levend maken. Opstellen aangeboden aan Guido de Baere bij zijn zeventigste verjaardag* [Miscellanea Neerlandica, 39], Peeters, 2010, 93-102; G. Warnar, *Ruusbroec. Literature and Mysticism in the Fourteenth Century*, tr. D. Webb, Leiden & Boston, 2007, p. 311.*

the human and temporal, historical incarnation of Christ, and the daily and spiritual, mystical birth of Christ in the soul.¹⁶ This thematic approach, which can be traced back to a popular Christmas sermon by the German mystic John Tauler († 1361)¹⁷, places Henry in a long tradition of variations on this theme, running up to the sixteenth century.¹⁸

The eternal birth or the production of the Word

The first, divine birth of the Son is simply the intellectual procession of the Word from God the Father (*processus intellectualis Verbi a Deo Patre*) or the production of the divine Word (*divini Verbi productio*).¹⁹ Scripture shows that God – as the intellectual beginning of creation – acts through intellect and will, and hence Henry posits in him an intellectual or mental word (*intellectuale vel mentale verbum*), in which God understands himself and other things.²⁰ As it is the nature of a word that it is the word of someone who is speaking, Henry calls it the word of the one “wording” (i.e., uttering) the word (*verbum quasi verbantis verbum*).²¹ This wordplay leads Henry – vaguely echoing Tauler’s treatment of the divine nativity – to a digression on the various ways in which

¹⁶ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in nativitate Domini de triplici Christi nativitate*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, fol. 125v-129r (Inc. *Verbum caro factum est ... Patres dilectissimi hodie ut noscitur caritas vestra ...*). Excerpts from Henry’s sermons, or even partial or entire copies of them, can be found in works of theologians such as Bernard of Waging and Nicholas of Cusa. From this particular Christmas sermon, the young Cusanus literally borrowed in his sermons XI (Christmas 1431), XVI (Christmas 1432), and XVII (Christmas 1432). See *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita*, vol. 16: *Sermones I (1430-1441)*, pt. 3: *Sermones XI-XXI*, ed. R. Haubst & M. Bodewig, Hamburgi [Hamburg], 1977, p. 221-228, 261-269, and 270-278.

¹⁷ F. Vetter, *Die Predigten Taulers aus der Engelberger und der Freiburger Handschrift sowie aus Schmidts Abschriften der ehemaligen Strassburger Handschriften* [Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters, 11], Berlin, 1910, p. 7-12.

¹⁸ H. Rahner, *Die Gottesgeburt. Die Lehre der Kirchenväter von der Geburt Christi im Herzen des Gläubigen*, Innsbruck, 1935; J. Sudbrack, ‘Die Lehre von der dreifachen Gottesgeburt’, in: A. Schönfeld (ed.), *Spiritualität im Wandel. Leben aus Gottes Geist. Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von „Geist und Leben“*, Würzburg, 2002, 225-230; R. Faesen, ‘The Three Births of Christ and the Christmas Liturgy in *The Temple of Our Soul, the Evangelical Pearl*, and the *Arnhem Mystical Sermons*’, in: *Ons geestelijk erf* 81:1 (2010), 121-137.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, fol. 126v: ... *nichil aliud est Filii Dei divina nativitas quam processus intellectualis Verbi a Deo Patre vel quam divini Verbi production* [... the divine nativity of the Son of God is nothing other than the intellectual procession of the Word from God the Father or than the production of the divine Word].

²⁰ *Ibidem*, fol. 126v: *Cum enim Deus benedictus sit principium intellectuale omnis creature agens per intellectum et voluntatem secundum illud ‘Omnia quaecumque voluit, fecit in celo et in terra’* [Ps. 134(135):6]. *Et illud ‘Ipse dixit et facta sunt, ipse mandavit et creata sunt’* [Ps. 113b(115):3]. *Immo necesse est quod in ipso sit intellectuale sive mentale verbum in quo se et cetera intelligat* [Since God is the intellectual beginning of every creature, acting through intellect and will, it is necessarily so that in him there is an intellectual or mental word, in which he understands himself and other things].

²¹ *Ibidem*, fol. 126v: *Et cum sit de ratione verbi quod sit alterius verbum, dicitur enim respective verbum quasi verbantis verbum* [And since it is of a word that it is the word of another, it is relatively called the word of the one wording the word].

this word can be distinguished (in God). Following the teachings of the modern doctors (*doctores moderni*), Henry mentions three logical ways of distinguishing things in an opposed or contradictory way (*opposito sive contradictorio modo*): (1) a formal or modal distinction (*distinctio formalis vel modalis*), between the divine persons and the divine essence;²² (2) a real personal distinction (*distinctio realis personalis vel suppositalis*), between each of the divine persons; and (3) a real essential distinction (*distinctio realis essentialis*), between the divine essence or each of the divine persons, and each creature.²³

This *obiter dictum* on the distinctions in God leads Henry to the conclusion that the Word which is in God, the beginning of all things, also *is* God. Because

²² *Ibidem*, fol. 126v: *Uno modo quod quamvis c dicatur de a affirmative et de b negative vel econtra eo modo quo dictum est non tamen b negatur de ipso a nec econtra, hoc est quod propter hoc non est verum dicere quod ipsum a non est b nec quod b non est a. Et hec distinctio vocatur a doctoribus distinctio formalis vel modalis et illo modo essentia divina est quilibet personarum distinguuntur quia de qualibet persona aliquod affirmatur et tamen negatur de essentia. Hec est enim vera Pater generat et similiter hec Filius generatur Spiritus Sanctus spiratur vel procedit. Item hec Pater et Filius spirant Spiritum Sanctum. Et tamen nulla essentia divina generat aut generatur, spirat aut spiratur, prout determinavit sancta mater ecclesia de summa Trinitate et fide Catholica capitulo Dam[namus] primo. Et quamvis hoc ita sit tamen essentia divina est quilibet personarum et econtra. Est igitur concedendum quod essentia divina distinguitur a qualibet persona formaliter id est ex parte Dei aliquid. [In one such way, something (say, "C") is said of A affirmatively (i.e., "A is C") and of B negatively (i.e., "no B is C"), or vice versa, although B is not denied of A, nor vice versa (i.e., it is not true to say that "A is not B", nor that "B is not A"). This distinction is called formal or modal by the doctors. In this way the divine essence is distinguished from each divine person, since there is something affirmed of each person and however denied of the essence. For it is true that the Father generates and, similarly, that the Son is generated, yet no divine essence generates or is generated, as determined by the Church in *On the Supreme Trinity and the Catholic Faith*. And yet the divine essence is each of the persons, and vice versa. It is therefore conceded that the divine essence is formally distinguished from each person, i.e. from the point of view of God in some manner].*

²³ *Ibidem*, fol. 126v-127r: *Alio modo potest mens ymaginari res distingui quod una etiam negatur de alia ut si sit verum dicere quod nullum a est b et econtra. Et hec vocatur distinctio realis. Et potest subdividi quia vel est simpliciter talis distinctio quod quamvis verum est dicere quod a sive nullum a est b tamen non est verum dicere quod a non est aliqua res que est b vel hoc est verum dicere. Prima a doctoribus vocatur distinctio realis personalis sive suppositalis quia sic divine persone sive divina supposita a se invicem distinguuntur. Licet enim sit verum dicere secundum fidem Catholicam quod Pater in divinis non sit Filius nec Spiritus Sanctus et econtra non tamen est verum dicere quod Pater non est aliqua res que est Filius etc. cum sit utique idem Deus. Pater siquidem et filius sunt unum quamvis non sint unus. Alia distinctio vocatur realis essentialis et sic essentia divina et qualibet persona a qualibet creatura distinguitur [In another way, things are distinguished when one of the things is also denied of the other (i.e., "no A is B"), and vice versa, and this is called a real distinction. And this distinction can be further subdivided: either it is not true to say that A is not another thing that B is, or it is true to say this. The first is called a real personal distinction by the doctors, since the divine persons are mutually distinguished from each other in this way. For, according to the Catholic faith, it is true to say that the Father is not the Son, and vice versa, although it is not true to say that the Father is another thing that the Son is, since each of them is the same God. Accordingly, the Father and the Son are one [unum], although they are not identical [unus]. The second is called a real essential distinction, and in this way the divine essence and each divine person is distinguished from each creature].*

there is only one God, the Word is not essentially and really distinct from God, although the Word (viz., the Son) is personally distinct from the Father.²⁴ The divine Word is infinite in its essential perfection – because it *is* God – and infinite in its representation – because it represents most usefully and nevertheless most perfectly and determinately, better than all mental and vocal words, created and creatable, can ever represent.²⁵ The primary object of the divine intellect is thus God himself: he is himself the object of his own contemplation or his own concept (*conceptus*). Through contemplation and fruition he reflects upon himself and beatifically rests in himself with infinite delight.²⁶ Secondly, Henry continues, this very Word represents in the most perfect way every created and creatable thing, of which the ideas, i.e., the forms, are exemplars in the divine mind, the cause of all the things. These things are present in the same way in which the species of any item he is making actually or habitually “lights up” in the mind of a craftsman. And this is the way according to which everything that is made, is eternally life in this Word, i.e., not really (*realiter*) but intellectually (*intellectualiter*). Truly, Henry says, among the grades of life, the intellectual life holds the supreme place.²⁷

Surprising as it might seem to scholars who are used to thinking of medieval Carthusians as escapist anti-intellectuals clinging to the orthodoxy of the Fathers, Henry’s treatment of the distinctions in God is strongly reminiscent of ideas on Trinitarian logic addressed by contemporary (academic) debates, particularly as they were brought forward by the Frisian theologian Henry Totting of Oyta († 1397).²⁸ Henry’s text also shows similarities with the teachings of

²⁴ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in nativitate Domini*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 125v–129r, fol. 126v: ... *quare Verbum quod est in Deo omnium rerum principio etiam est Deus, et sic cum tamen sit unus Deus a Deo non distinguitur realiter essentialiter quamvis a Deo Patre distinguitur alio modo realiter et hoc est realiter personaliter distingui.*

²⁵ *Ibidem*, fol. 127r: *Unde quia hoc benedictissimum Verbum est infinitum in perfectione essentiali quia est Deus et infinitum in representando quia utilissime et tamen perfectissime et determinatissime representat plusquam omnia verba mentalia et vocalia creata et creabilia representare possunt [prout] divine cognitioni per optime congruit.*

²⁶ *Ibidem*, fol. 127r: *Obiectum namque primum divini intellectus est ipse Deus, ad quem etiam sensum beatus Iohannes dicere videtur ‘Verbum erat apud Deum’, eo modo quo dici consuevit, contemplatio illius est apud se ipsum et ipse est obiectum sue contemplationis sive sue conceptus, ac si diceretur ymaginatio vel conceptus illius est apud illam rem vel apud illam etc. Non enim potest Deus extra [se] ferri per extasim sicut contingere possit in homine aut angelo vel etiam plus alteri rei per contemplationem intendere quam sibimetipsi, sed tanquam vere nullo creato bono egens quam omnium, Deus est in se ipsum per contemplationem et fruitionem reflectitur, et cum infinita delectatione beatifice quietatur.*

²⁷ *Ibidem*, fol. 127r: *Secundario tamen hoc idem benedictissimum Verbum omnem rem creatam et creabile[m] perfectissime representat, quarum ydee, id est rationes, exemplares sunt in mente divina que est omnium causa, eo modo quo in mente artificis actu vel habitu relucet omnes species artificii cuius ipse est factivus. Et hic est modus secundum quem omne quid factum est in ipso [Verbo] eternaliter vita erat, non scilicet realiter sed intellectualiter. Inter gradus nempe vite vita intellectualis supremum locum tenet.*

²⁸ See A. Maierù, ‘Logique et théologie trinitaire dans le moyen-âge tardif. Deux solutions en présence’, in: M. Asztalos, *The Editing of Theological and Philosophical Texts from the Middle Ages*. Acts of the Conference Arranged by the Department of Classical Languages, University of

Bonaventure as well as with *De verbo incarnato*, a treatise that – according to the manuscript witnesses – was written by *Henricus de Hassia* and that has been ascribed by some scholars to the German theologian Henry of Langenstein († 1397).²⁹ Nevertheless, in defining these three distinctions, Henry stresses that they are *all* imaginations (*imaginaciones*) of the human mind. At the start of his sermon, Henry had already pointed out that the inner-Trinitarian mystery remains incomprehensible for us mortals, while even wondering whether it might not be better to remain silent about it altogether. Yet he *does* elaborate on it, because he still considers it worthy to soberly, piously and devoutly reflect (*sobrie pie atque devote recolere*) upon the matter in contemplating Christ's divinity, even if a clear contemplation can only be reached *in patria*.³⁰

In his Christmas sermon and, repeatedly, in other sermons and in his work on the Eucharist, Henry expounds on the three ways in which we can predicate names of God the Son. The first type of predicates relates to the Son as he proceeds from the Father or as he represents God [the Father]: the Mental Word [of the Father] (*verbum mentale*), through which everything is said; the Word of the One “Wording” (*verbantis verbum*), proceeding (*procedens*) by way of the intellect (*per modum intellectus*) from the Father, though never receding (*recedens*), yet inseparably remaining in him (*inseparabiliter in eo manens*); the Invisible Image of God [the Father], the mental projection or expression (*mentalis expressio*), in which God, as in an intellectually expressed, natural likeness or image, understands himself; the Radiance of the Eternal Light (*candor lucis*), the Splendor of Glory (*splendor glorie*), and the Figure of the Father's Substance (*figura substantie Patris*), as the Son proceeds by way of radiance, splendor, and intellectual figure; etc.³¹ The second type of predicates relates to the Son as he represents all things created and creatable,

Stockholm, 29-31 August 1984 [Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. Studia Latina Stockholmiensia, 30], Stockholm, 1986, 185-212, p. 203-205; S.L. Uckelman, ‘Reasoning About the Trinity: A Modern Formalization of a Medieval System of Trinitarian Logic’, in: A. Ontos (ed.), *Logic in Religious Discourse*, Frankfurt – Paris – Lancaster – New Brunswick, 2010, 216-239. See also S. Meier, ‘Von der Koinzidenz zur *coincidentia oppositorum*. Zum philosophiehistorischen Hintergrund des Cusanischen Koinzidenzgedankens’, in: O. Pluta (ed.), *Die Philosophie im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert. In memoriam Konstanty Michalski (1879–1947)* [Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie, 10], Amsterdam, 1988, 321-342, p. 327.

²⁹ On these and other possible dependencies in Henry's Christmas sermon, refer to the notes in the modern edition of Cusa's sermon XI (see above, n. 16). *De verbo incarnato* has been edited by J. Lang, OFM, *Die Christologie bei Heinrich von Langenstein* [Freiburger theologische Studien, 85], Freiburg – Basel – Wien, 1966, p. 373-390.

³⁰ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in nativitate Domini*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 125v-129r, fol. 126r: *Est autem hec generatio tam mirabilis omniumque mortalium oculis tam obscura, ut nulla mens eam concipere nulla lingua exprimere sufficiat. Quapropter fortassis melius precipue mihi videtur tacendum quam quidquam loqui ...* [This generation, however, is so miraculous and so obscure in the eyes of all mortals, that no mind can conceive it and no language can express it. Therefore, it might even be better to ignore it altogether, rather than to say something about it ...].

³¹ *Ibidem*, 127r; *Sermo in sollempnitate Paschali de mistico esu agni*, in: *Ibidem*, 7v-9v, fol. 8v; *De sacramento eucharistie*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 11811-12, 3r-101v, fol. 69v.

as a cause represents its effect, or as the divine intellect is concerned in relation to creatures by way of overflowing or participation in creatures (*per modum redundantie vel participationis in creaturis*): the Ideal Exemplar of All Things, in as much as from eternity all creatures have shined forth from it (*exemplar ideale omnium rerum in quantum in eo omnes creature ab eterno relucebant*); the Book of Life (*liber vite*); the Art of God (*ars Dei*); the Predestination of All Saints and All Those to be Saved (*predestinatio omnium sanctorum et salvandorum*); the Light of the Holy Minds and the Shining-Through and Enlightenment of All Saints, in heaven and earth (*lumen sanctorum mentium, penetrans splendor et claritas sive clarificatio omnium sanctorum in celo et in terra*); etc.³² The third type of predicates simply concerns the divine intellect, not with respect to the Father nor to creatures: the eternal, uncreated, and abyssal Wisdom of God (*sapientia Dei*); the eternal and infallible Truth of God (*veritas Dei*); the eternal and invariable Law (*invariabilis lex Dei*) or the immutable Rule (*immutabilis regula*); the Intuition, the Sight, the Intent Seeing, and the Penetrating Vision of All Things (*intuitus, aspectus, in[tro]spectus, perspectus rerum*), in which all things are bare and open (*nuda et aperta*), and for which no creature is invisible, reaching to the division of the spirit and soul, and the joints and marrow (*pertingens usque ad divisionem spiritus et anime compagumque ac medullarum*); etc.³³ As far as these three types of predicates are concerned, it is clear that Henry is not only referring to biblical names but that he is also abundantly drawing from Ruusbroec's *Espousals*.³⁴

Furthermore, one can assume that Henry sees no opposition between a procession of the Word by way of the intellect (*per modum intellectus*) or by way of nature (*per modum nature*), as he states that God's nature is intellectual.³⁵ In this respect, he also indicates that we predicate the names "Father" and "Son" of, respectively, the first and second person in the Trinity, because of

³² Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in nativitate Domini*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 125v-129r, fol. 127r; *Sermo in sollempnitate Paschali de mistico esu agni*, in: *Ibidem*, 7v-9v, fol. 8v; *De sacramento eucharistie*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 11811-12, 3r-101v, fol. 70r.

³³ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in nativitate Domini*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 125v-129r, fol. 127r; *Sermo in sollempnitate Paschali de mistico esu agni*, in: *Ibidem*, 7v-9v, fol. 8v; *De sacramento eucharistie*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 11811-12, 3r-101v, fol. 69v-70r.

³⁴ *Brulocht*, b1049-1053. Compare with Geert Grote's translation, ed. R. Hofman & H.A.M. Douwes, *Ioannis Rusbrochii Ornatus spiritualis desponsationis, Gerardo Magno interprete* [Gerardi Magni Opera omnia, 5:1 / Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis, 172], Turnhout, 2003 (hereafter cited as *Ornatus*), p. 117 (l. 1317-1323): ... *verbum eternum, abyssalis sapientia et veritas, exemplar omnium creaturarum et vivacitas, et quedam sine variabilitate regula eterna, quidam inspectus seu aspectus et quidam perspectus omnium rerum sine occultatione vel tegmine, atque quidam penetrans splendor et clarificatio omnium sanctorum in celo et in terra iuxta merita et dignitates*.

³⁵ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in nativitate Domini*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 125v-129r, fol. 127r: *Plures namque res in divinis sunt eadem essentia quia tres persone, quarum quelibet est res nature intellectualis sive rationalis per se una* [For indeed, the several things in God are one and the same essence, as they are three persons of which each is a thing of intellectual or rational nature, by itself one]. The expression *per se una* refers in a classical, Boethian sense to a "person".

the similarity between the manner in which the Word proceeds from God the Father by way of a natural likeness (*per modum naturalis similitudinis*), viz., by way of a mental image or a concept (*per modum mentalis imaginis sive conceptus*), and the manner in which a living being with an intellectual or animal life proceeds from another living being.³⁶ When God says “You are my son, today I have begotten you”, Henry points out, “today” means eternally, where there is no yesterday nor tomorrow, but always today, only the present, where God never starts to “word” or produce the word, nor ever ceases, for he is pure act (*actus purus*).³⁷ Henry’s neologism “to word” (*verbare*) is, in my view, a reference to Ruusbroec’s use of “to give birth” (*baren*) in describing how the Son is born, is being born, and remains unborn.³⁸ In any case, Henry sees in God – as does Ruusbroec – a coincidence of contraries, i.e., rest in contemplation and fruition, as well as action in “wording” (*verbare*) and “spirating” (*spirare*).³⁹ For, Henry concludes, the Son (or the Word) and the unbegotten Father breathe or “spirate”, by way of the will, the Spirit, who is love, charity, and the gift of God, in the same way as our mind through its word breathes love or elicits volition, since in us *nothing* is willed unless it is understood.⁴⁰

Henry’s statements on the primacy of the intellect and the *logos* might sound surprising to scholars who are accustomed to commonplaces depicting medieval Carthusian monks as “contemplative-affective”. But, as will become clear below, Henry’s position cannot simply be categorized as intellectualist.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, fol. 127v: ... *ut cum omne suppositum vivum vita intellectuali aut animali quod procedit ab alio supposito vivo vita intellectuali aut animali per modum naturalis similitudinis admittit specie vel generis propinqui aut propriissime secundum ydemtatem naturalem essentie vel nature dicatur filius illius a quo procedit secundum communem et propriissimum modum loquendi liquet quod verbum Dei etiam Filius Dei dicitur et eius processio generatio filiativa [... as every supposit, alive in an intellectual life or animal life, that proceeds from another supposit, alive in an intellectual or animal life, by way of a natural likeness that is at least a likeness of species or of a close or closest genus in a natural identity of essence or nature, is called the son of the one from whom he proceeds, following the common and most appropriate way of speaking, it is evident that the Word is also called the Son, and its procession a filiative generation].*

³⁷ *Ibidem*, fol. 127v: *Et hoc est quod ipsum idem prophetam in prophetia loquitur, ‘Dominus,’ inquit, ‘dixit ad me “Filius meus es tu ego hodie genui te”’* [Ps. 2:7], *hodie, inquam, id est eternaliter sive in eternitate, ubi numquam heri, id est preteritum, aut cras, id est futurum, sed semper hodie, id est presens, est. Numquam enim Deus incepit verbare sive verbum producere nec aliquando desinet cum semper actu intelligat eo quod sit purus actus.*

³⁸ *Ibidem*, fol. 127v: *Quapropter concedendum est quod Filius ab eterno fuit natus et genitus et semper nascitur et in eternum nascetur* [On this account, it is to be conceded that from eternity the Son was born or begotten, and always is being born and to be born in eternity]. Henry here adds that Gregory the Great preferred to use the say *semper natus* instead of *semper nascitur* (cf. *Moralia in Iob*, lib. 29, cap. 1, in: *PL* 76, 477).

³⁹ See above, n. 26. Perhaps, *actus purus* should then be interpreted in a slightly different way than in the Thomist sense.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, fol. 127v: *Hoc igitur est divinum Verbum et Filius Dei cum quo ingenitus Pater spirat Spiritum Sanctum qui est amor, caritas et donum Dei, cum procedat per modum voluntatis, eo modo sicut mens nostra per suum verbum spirat amorem sive volitionem elicit, cum in nobis nichil sit volitum nisi cognitum.*

The incarnated Word or the human birth of the Son

In his Christmas sermon, Henry only briefly touches the “the Word made flesh”, i.e., the second, human and temporal birth, in and from the virgin Mary, in two natures but one person.⁴¹ However, he provides a more detailed rendering in a few other sermons as well as in his work on the Eucharist, in which he frequently returns to what he calls the “singular novelty” (*singularis novitas*) of the incarnated Word, or the “union of creator and creature, above all kinds of union” (*unio creatoris et creature, super omnia genera unionum*).⁴² In this extraordinary (*supermirabilis*), ineffable (*ineffabilis*), indestructable (*indissolubilis*), incomprehensible (*inexcogitabilis*), yet not unbelievable (*non tamen incredibilis*) union, Christ’s humanity is assumed by the Word, so that it is not a “person” (*persona*) or “supposit” (*suppositum*), nor even properly a “human being” (*homo*), but it is so intimately united in this assumption, that it loses its proper personhood (*personalitas sive suppositalitas*) and transfers its personhood into the divine person of the Son. Hence, in the expression “the Word assumed a man”, “man” should be understood as a human nature, assumed from the beginning and hence never existing out of itself.⁴³

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, fol. 127v: ... ‘*Verbum caro factum est*’ [Jn. 1:14], *id est perfectus homo ex anima rationali et humana carne subsistens in duobis naturis et una persona*.

⁴² These works are: a *collatio super Psalmum 86* on the feast of Annunciation (Brussels, KB, MS 1212, fol. 52r-56v), three *sermones* on the same feast (*Ibidem*, fol. 12r-15r, 49v-52r, fol. 97v-99v), and *De sacramento eucharistie*. Here, I am indebted to Rudolf Haubst’s study of the Christology of the young Nicholas of Cusa. See R. Haubst, *Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues*, Freiburg [im Breisgau], 1956, p. 109-138. Haubst specifically analyzed Cusa’s Christmas sermon of 1432, listed as nr. XVII in the most recent edition of Cusa’s sermons, or nr. 6 (*pars altera*) in the older edition (see above, n. 16). In the second part of this sermon, Cusanus made use of Henry’s collation on Psalm 86 (cf. next note).

⁴³ Henry of Coesfeld, *Collatio super Psalmum 86*, in: KB, MS 1212, 52r-56v, fol. 55r, 56r: ... *Christi ... humanitas sit pura creatura et in naturalibus omnino similis humanitati nostre, non tamen est persona sive suppositum aut etiam proprie loquendo homo, cum homo proprie sit nomen persone ... tam intime divino Verbo coniungitur ut licet eadem natura maneat. Nullam tamen rationem supponitatis seu personalitatis obtineat sed omnem quam per se subsistens habet in divinum supponitum transferat. Est nempe divinum suppositum, hoc est Verbum Dei assumens et ymmo suam personalitatem non perdens, humanitas vero assumpta et idcirco perdens. Hinc est quod Verbum sive Filius Dei non dicitur assumpsisse hominem, quemquidem non assumpsit humanum supponitum aut hominis personam. Et, si usque quaque in dictis sanctorum reperitur modus loquendi huiusmodi non debet homo accipi pro persona sed in proprie pro humana natura que in Christo nec est nec unquam fuit per se subsistens, sed ab initio sui esse assumpta [...]. Christ’s humanity is a pure creature, in natural things wholly similar to our humanity, although it is not a person or supposit, nor even properly speaking a man, since man is properly the name of a person ... It is so intimately united to the Word that, even if the nature remains the same, it obtains no form of personhood, but rather transfers all that it has, subsisting in itself, into the divine person of the Son. The divine supposit, i.e., the Word is assuming and not loosing its personhood, while the humanity is truly assumed, loosing its personhood for this reason. This is why the Word or the Son of God is not said to have assumed a man, as in fact it hasn’t assumed a human supposit or a human person. And, wherever it is found in the sayings of the saints in this manner of speaking, man must not be taken for a person but properly for a human nature, that in Christ is not, and never was, subsisting in itself, but from the beginning*

Here again, Henry is making use of the work of Henry Totting of Oyta and the aforementioned tract *De verbo incarnato*.⁴⁴ In doing so, I claim that he is theologically framing Ruusbroec's ideas on the unique sonship of Christ, as they, for example, can be found in Ruusbroec's *Mirror of Eternal Blessedness*.⁴⁵ The same can be said of Henry's Christmas sermon, in which he states that Christ has maximal grace above all human beings as far as his humanity is concerned, so that through him grace is poured out into others.⁴⁶

The spiritual birth in rational creatures or the mission of the Son

The third birth of Christ, usually called the invisible sending of the Son (*invisibilis missio Filii Dei*), Henry says, is simply the procession of the Word or of begotten wisdom (*processio Verbi sive genite sapientie*), from God the Father unto the mind of a rational creature, for the spiritual and gratuitous enlightenment of that creature.⁴⁷ In rational creatures, the Word and the divine wisdom is thus present in two ways: essentially (*per essentiam*) and gratuitously through divine illumination. The latter is called the spiritual birth and it is appropriated to the Son, since he is the Word, the Wisdom, the Image of God and the Radiance of the Eternal Light.⁴⁸ These four *propria* and *appropriata* of

is assumed] ... *Hec itaque supermirabilis ineffabilis indissolubilis atque inexcogitabilis unio sacrosancta ... non tamen incredibilis*. In the cited MS, this sermon has no title (*non habet titulum*).

⁴⁴ See Haubst, *Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues*, p. 116 (n. 60-65).

⁴⁵ On this topic, see S. Kikuchi, *From Eckhart to Ruusbroec. A Critical Inheritance of Mystical Themes in the Fourteenth Century* [Mediaevalia Lovaniensia. Series, 1. Studia, 44], Leuven, 2014, p. 258-262, especially p. 261-262 (n. 52), citing Ruusbroec: "For the humanity of our lord Jesus Christ has no subsistence in itself, for it is not its own person like all other human beings are, but the Son of God is its supposit and its form."

⁴⁶ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in nativitate Domini*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 125v-129r, fol. 128r: *Nolo tamen dicere quod Christus sit filius gratie sicut nec est filius Dei adoptivus, filius enim est nomen persone et Christus non est persona ex gratia. Sed volo dicere quod pre omnibus hominibus habet a Deo maximam gratiam quo ad humanitatem sic etiam quod per ipsum in ceteros diffunditur gratia* [However, I don't want to say that Christ is a son of grace, as he also is not an adopted son of God. For son is a name of a person and Christ is not a person through grace. But I want to say that he – above all human beings – has maximal grace from God as far as his humanity is concerned, so that through him grace is poured out into others]. See Kikuchi, *From Eckhart to Ruusbroec*, p. 259-260 (n. 43-47).

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, fol. 128r: *Dixi tertio, quod in verbis premissis tangitur Ihesu Christi nativitas cotidiana et spiritualis. Ubi advertendum quod spiritualis nativitas Christi que alio nomine invisibilis missio Filii Dei dici consuevit, nichil aliud est quam processus Verbi sive genite sapientie a Deo Patre ad rationalis creature mentem pro ipsius creature spirituali et gratuita illustratione.*

⁴⁸ *Quapropter etenim ubique et per consequens in qualibet rationali creatura semper sit per essentiam divina sapientia et Dei Verbum, quoniam et tota Trinitas attingens a fine usque ad finem fortiter et disponens omnia suaviter, non tamen est ubique per lumen gratuitum. Quapropter quemcumque in mente tenebrosa huiuscemodi lumen divinum oritur sive in mente minus illuminata maius lumen gignitur, congrue Filius Dei spiritualiter nasci perhibetur. Hoc nempe opus licet a tota Trinitate fiat effective, cum opera Trinitatis sint indivisa secundum beatum Augustinum primo de Trinitate. Tamen iure Filio cum ipse sit verbum et sapientia et ymago Dei et candor lucis eterne appropriatur* [Even though the divine wisdom and the Word of God is truly present

the Son are – respectively – associated by Henry with (1) illumination and revelation (*mentem illuminare et revelare*); (2) with higher wisdom (*mentem sapientem facere*); (3) with the assimilation and reformation of the mind to that of which it is the image (*mentem cuiusquam illi cuius est imago assimilare et reformare*); and (4) with brightness of the mind (*mentem per spiritualem lucem candidam facere*).⁴⁹ Henry stresses that, through this spiritual birth, nothing is acquired by the Son, but that those in whom he is born are made sons of God – either through grace *in via*, or through glory *in futuro*. Also, he states that humans are not reborn of blood nor of the will of man or the flesh, but by the inbreathing (*inspiratio*) of divine wisdom – that is, when we believe in his name, so that Christ may live in us by faith informed by charity in our hearts.⁵⁰

Although scholastic theology in the fourteenth century increasingly turned against divine illumination, Henry maintains that pure truth cannot be known without it. Also here, I believe, he is following Ruusbroec, because at this point in his sermon, Henry recalls the metaphor of the sun that illuminates, warms, and makes fertile, as it appears in the *Espousals*.⁵¹ It is the sun of eternal righteousness – traditionally associated with the Son – which illuminates and brightens the just human being as to the intellect through contemplation, and which warms him as to the affect through fruition – both representing the contemplative power (*vis contemplativa*) of the soul –, and which makes the practical power (*vis practica*) fertile through the doctrine of prudence and the rousing of the moral virtues.⁵²

everywhere and consequently in each rational creature essentially – indeed the whole Trinity reaching from end to end mightily and sweetly disposing all things –, it is not present everywhere through gratuitous light. Therefore, when the divine light arises in an obscured mind, or when a stronger light is begotten in a less illuminated mind, it can rightly be said that the Son is spiritually born. Although this work is indeed effectively performed by the whole Trinity – since the works of the Trinity are undivided according to saint Augustine in *On the Trinity* –, nevertheless it is rightly appropriated to the Son, since he is the Word, the Wisdom, the Image of God and the Radiance of the Eternal Light].

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, fol. 128r: *Verbi etenim est mentem illuminare et revelare, et sapientie mentem sapientem facere, et spiritualis ymaginis est mentem cuiusquam illi cuius est ymago assimilare et reformare, et candoris lucis est mentem per spiritualem lucem candidam facere etc. propriis aut appropriatis Filii Dei.*

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, fol. 128r-128v: *Per huiusmodi namque Filii Dei spiritualem nativitatem nichil sibi acquiritur. Sed illi in quibus sit spiritualis Filii Dei efficiuntur [sive filii gratie hic in via] sive filii glorie in futuro. Sic quippe dedit nobis Dominus potestatem filios Dei fieri non quidem ut renascamur denuo ex sanguinibus id est duarum personarum seminibus, neque ex voluntate viri, neque ex voluntate carnis, id est mulieris que viro carnalior est, hoc est non ex consensibus delectationi sive concupiscentiis iuri viri et mulieris, sed ex Deo per inspirationem divine sapientie que trahitur ex occultis, tunc scilicet quando credimus in nomine eius ut inhabitet Christus per fidem caritate formatam in cordibus nostris.*

⁵¹ *Brulocht*, 342-348.

⁵² Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in nativitate Domini*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 125v-129r, fol. 128v: *... recte siquidem sicut sol corporeus cum super terram apertam et disponsitam oritur tria, facit eam scilicet illuminando calefaciendo et fructiferam reddendo. Sic ipse sol iustitie eterna Dei sapientia cum oritur in anima viri iusti illuminat et clarificat eam quo ad intellectum per contemplationem, et accendit sive calefacit eam quo ad affectum per amoris fruitionem que*

Both in form and content, Henry thus combines elements of contemporary theories of Trinitarian logic and the hypostatic union, aspects of Rhineland and Brabantine mysticism, and more traditional doctrines on the divine persons. At the same time, his Christmas sermon could be read as an implicit critique and even a correction of Eckhartian teachings (or interpretations thereof) on the spiritual birth of Christ in the soul.⁵³

THE SPIRIT AS A BOND IN HENRY OF COESFELD'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

The counterpart of Henry's Christmas sermon is formed by two influential sermons on Pentecost, in which the Carthusian talks about the procession of the third person of the Trinity (*processio Spiritus Sancti*).⁵⁴ Similar to the *verbantis verbum* of the Christmas sermon, Henry states that, since the Spirit comes from the Father and the Son, it is called the spirit of the one who breathes or "spirates", or of those who breathe or "spirate" (*spiritus quasi spirantis vel spirantium spiritus*).⁵⁵ This allusion to John 3:8 might be called

duo vim contemplativam in nobis respiciunt, et tertio vim practicam fructuosam facit per doctrinam prudentie et virtutum moralium excitationem ut eamus et fructum afferamus et fructus noster maneat.

⁵³ This has been concluded from Nicholas of Cusa's treatment of the threefold birth of Christ in his sermon XVI (see n. 16), which literally borrows from Henry's text. See R. Haubst, *Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues*, Freiburg [im Breisgau], 1956, p. 36-38; K. Reinhart, 'L'idée de naissance de Dieu dans l'âme chez Nicolas de Cues et l'influence d'Eckhart', in: M.-A. Vanner (ed.), *La naissance de Dieu dans l'âme chez Eckhart et Nicolas de Cues* [Patrimoines – Christianisme], Paris, 2006, 85-99, p. 88-89. For a comparison of Eckhart's and Ruusbroec's "birth of God" doctrine, see Kikuchi, *From Eckhart to Ruusbroec*, p. 255-267.

⁵⁴ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermones in festo Pentecostes*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, fol. 21r-23v (Inc. *Veni sancte spiritus. Sic hodie sancta mater ecclesia canit. Celebrantibus nobis patres dilectissimi* ...) and fol. 23v-26v (Inc. *Caritas diffusa est in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis. Scribitur ad Romanos quinto capitulo. Patres ac fratres dilectissimi* ...). Nicholas of Cusa borrowed from the former in his sermons XXXVII and LIX. See *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate Acadamiæ Litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita*, vol. 17: *Sermones I (1443-1452)*, pt. 1: *Sermones XXVII-XXXIX*, ed. R. Haubst & H. Schnarr, Hamburgi [Hamburg], 1983, p. 72-100; and pt. 4: *Sermones LVII-LXI*, ed. H. Schnarr, Hamburgi [Hamburg], 2001, p. 313-319. The two sermons can, almost in their entirety, be found among those of Bernard of Waging; cf. München [Munich], Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 18572, fol. 81r-83r and fol. 83v-86v.

⁵⁵ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in festo Pentecostes*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 21r-23v, fol. 21r: ... *unde veniat, quia a spirante sive spirantibus, id est Patre et Filio, venit. Dicitur enim spiritus quasi spirantis vel spirantium spiritus. Unde et in symbolo misse canimus qui a Patre Filioque procedit*. See also fol. 23r-23v: ... *Spiritus ... a Patre et Filio venit qui ipsum spirant id est per modum voluntatis sive amoris producunt ... et quia proprium est amoris quod impellat et moveat voluntatem in amatum, ideo persona in divinis que procedit per modum amoris sive huiusmodi impulsione dicitur proprie Spiritus, id est spiratus* [The Spirit comes from the Father and the Son, who "spirate" him, i.e., produce him by way of will or love. And because it is a property of love that it impels and moves the will in the loved one, the person in the divine that proceeds by way of love or such impulse is properly called Spirit, i.e., "spirated"].

typically “Germanic” and can also be found in Ruusbroec’s *Espousals*⁵⁶, as well as in sermons of Eckhart and Tauler.⁵⁷ Apart from this eternal going out (*processio eternalis*) of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, which is incomprehensible and indescribable to mortals⁵⁸, there is a temporal going out (*processio temporalis*), commonly called the sending or mission of the Spirit (*missio Spiritus*), which is directed at each rational creature, either through a visible or an invisible sign.⁵⁹ This mission, i.e., that which the Spirit “inspires”, is the progression of love from the Father and the Son to a rational or intellectual creature for the sanctification of that creature.⁶⁰ It is said that the Spirit is given through the infusion of charity, without which a human being is nothing spiritually (*spiritualiter nihil*), even if that being has all the other gifts or virtues.⁶¹ Charity is the habit infused by God – or appropriately, the Spirit –, and it is the most excellent among all created gifts, or rather it is the sharing in that uncreated gift, i.e. the Spirit, from whom it emanates without intermediary into the rational spirit and subjectively into the will, surely animating all the powers of the soul and leading it towards God as its final cause. Just as the Spirit is the bond through which the Father and the Son love each other and us, similarly the virtue of charity is definitely a certain bond through which we are formally connected to God in a loving way and through which we are “glued” (i.e., united) to our neighbour in God. And this is God dwelling in us and we in God, according to 1 John 4: “God is charity” (i.e., the highest uncreated charity, producing created charity), “and he who dwells” (in the highest created charity) “dwells in God and God in him”.⁶²

⁵⁶ *Brulocht*, 213-214: *Ende si [= the Father and the Son, the Wisdom of the Father] gheesten eenen geest, dat is: eene minne die een bandt harer beyder es ...*

⁵⁷ K. Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, vol. 4: *Die niederländische Mystik des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts*, München, 1999, p. 68-69.

⁵⁸ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in festo Pentecostes*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 23v-26v, fol. 24r ... *eternalis processio Spiritus sancti est mortalibus incomprehensibilis ac innarrabilis ...*

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, fol. 24r: ... *duplex est Spiritus sancti processio. Una scilicet eternalis qua ab eterno a Patre et Filio tamquam donum amor sive caritas spirabatur atque processerat. Quedam temporalis que communiter missio Spiritus sancti dicitur, qua ad aliquam creaturam destinatur sive hoc fiat mediante signo exteriori visibiliter que ob hoc missio visibilis dicitur, sive absque signo invisibiliter que idcirco missio invisibilis nominatur* [Twofold is the procession of the Spirit. One is eternal, in which from eternity the gift of love or charity is “spirated” or has gone out. The other is temporal, commonly called the mission of the Spirit, which is destined to any creature. Either this happens visibly through an exterior sign, and then it is called the visible mission, or invisibly without a sign, and then it is given the name of the invisible mission].

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, fol. 24r: *Idcirco de cotidiana eusdem Spiritus sancti missione id quod idem Spiritus inspiraverit breviter dicam. Hec igitur processio temporalis solet describi a doctoribus quod est progressus amoris a Patre et Filio ad creaturam rationalem pro ipsius creature sanctificatione.*

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, fol. 24r: *Patet igitur quod in infusione caritatis Spiritus sanctus dari dicitur ... Quemquidem sine caritate homo spiritualiter nichil est, etiam si omnia alia dona vel virtutes habeat.*

⁶² *Ibidem*, fol. 24v: *Sed ipsa caritas est habitus a Deo et appropriate per Spiritum sanctum infusus et inter dona creata excellentissimum, quinimo participatio quedam illius doni increati id est Spiritus sancti a quo immediate emanat in spiritum rationalem et subiective in voluntatem, vivificans nimirum omnes vires anime et finaliter in Deum dirigens. Sicut nempe Spiritus sanctus est nexus et gluten indissolubile quo Pater et Filius se et nos diligunt, sic nimirum et virtus*

This spiritual, supernatural charity, which is poured into the minds of the faithful by the Spirit, tends to operate in three ways. It amorously and delightfully attaches itself to the mind through love, and unites the flesh with its God. This is the first action that it elicits, which is called fruitive love (*amor fruitivus*), in the sense that through it the mind enjoys God.⁶³ Secondly, because charity cannot be idle, it commands all the powers of the soul and the body to be directed upwards with benevolent promptness to serve, praise, bless and glorify its beloved, where and whenever it is needed. This is what is called practical love (*amor practicus*) – elsewhere Henry also uses active love (*amor activus*) –, in the sense that it leads to works on account of the beloved.⁶⁴ This benevolent promptness or prompt benevolence is Henry’s definition of “devotion”.⁶⁵ Thirdly, this charity moves, incites and stimulates the amorous mind, so that it desires his beloved to be praised by other people just like he himself praises him. On account of the condemned [heretics], Henry says that out of the love of God flows forth the love of neighbour, and this, insofar as it is to the honour and glory of God, happens either outwardly, by helping, or inwardly, by encouraging, guiding, reproving or comforting.⁶⁶ Here, Henry has arrived at what Ruusbroec in his *Espousals* calls “common love”, the outflowing movement to other creatures.⁶⁷ Charity, Henry concludes, is formally the

caritatis nexus quidam est quo formaliter nos Deo amore connectimur atque proximo in Deo [con]glutinamur. Et hoc est Deum in nobis manere et nos in Deo, secundum illud prime Iohannis quarto. ‘Deus caritas est’, suprema increata effective caritatis create, ‘et qui manet’, in caritate suprema create, ‘in Deo manet et Deus in eo’.

⁶³ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in festo Pentecostes*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 21r-23v, fol. 21v: *Primo namque per amorem mentem amore ac dulciter iungit et unit Deo suo caro, et iste est eius primus actus quem elicit, cum sit habitus amativus sive amicitia quedam habitualis, et hunc amorem sic elicitum, ut estimo, quidam vocant amorem fruitivum, eo quod per ipsum mens Deo suo fruitur ...*

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, fol. 21v-22r: *Secundo hec eadem caritas, cum non possit esse otiosa, secundum beatum Gregorium, precipue cum Dominus dicat ‘Qui diligit me sermones meos servabit’, imperat omnibus viribus anime et corporis, ut sunt sursim erecte, cum benevola promptitudine servendi laudandi benedicendi atque glorificandi suum dilectum, ubi et quando oportet. Unde ut sic etiam omnium aliarum virtutum actus dirigit in suum finem supernaturalem. Quamobrem ab apostolo dicitur ‘Caritas patiens est benigna est’ etc., non quod ipsa sit alie omnes virtutes sed quod sit directrix et regina ipsarum. Alie nempe virtutes adhuc preter caritatem ad hoc necessarie sunt ut per eas mens, illos actus prompte et delectabiliter eliciat, quos ipsa regina caritas in finem supernaturalem, id est in Deum dirigit et imperet, et hic ut reor est amor quem quidam operativum vocant sive practicum, eo quod propter dilectum quemquam ad opus dirigit.*

⁶⁵ Gaens, ‘*Sic vivere*’, p. 16 (n. 9).

⁶⁶ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in festo Pentecostes*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 21r-23v, fol. 22r: *Tertio ipsa sancta caritas mentem amorem movet instigat ac stimulat, ut suum dilectum sicut a se sic velit ab omnibus honorari laudari benedici ac glorificari, sibi quoque serviri quos ad hoc abiles reputat. Quid propter condemnatos dico? Unde sic ni fallar a caritate Dei effluit caritas proximi, ut sibi velim quidquid est Domini honoris et glorie, sive hoc sit ad extra adiuvando, sive hoc sit ad intus favendo consulendo corripiendo aut consolando.*

⁶⁷ *Brulocht*, b1212-1215. Compare with Grote’s translation, in: *Ornatus*, p. 126 (l. 1526-1530): *Similiter homo clarificatus debet omnes homines docere et corripere, eisque servire secundum discretionem fideliter. Ipse enim quandam communem et generalem gerit amorem, ideoque inter Deum et omnes homines mediator est.*

spiritual life of the soul, or rather the bond of perfection, and the fountain-like life through which the Spirit, and moreover the Father and the Son, inhabit that soul and make their abode with it.⁶⁸

Undoubtedly inspired by Ruusbroec's teachings, Henry thus argues – in a somewhat remarkable way for a “solitary” Carthusian – for delivering to others the “fruits of contemplation”. This also proves to be quite crucial for his views on the contemplative and the active life, further developed in other sermons. Given Henry's influence within the Carthusian Order, the importance of these words should not be underestimated. For, at the end of the fourteenth century, and as the fifteenth century progressed, an increasing number of Carthusian monks were active as reformist authors, translators, and compilers, or were effectively involved in reformist movements or the reform of other monastic orders.⁶⁹

Further, it is not surprising that Henry's portrayal of the Spirit as the loving bond between Father and Son is one of the key aspects of Ruusbroec's Trinitarian theology. It has been argued that this can be traced back to the works of William of Saint-Thierry, and especially his *Letter to the Carthusians of Mont-Dieu*, a cornerstone of medieval Carthusian spirituality.⁷⁰ In describing the Spirit as the bond of the Father and the Son, Henry not only uses the familiar Augustinian *nexus*, but also the somewhat unfamiliar expression “indestructible or insoluble glue” (*glut[am]en indissolubile*). For the depiction of charity as the bond between the soul of the faithful and God, he borrows from Ruusbroec the verb “to be glued together” (from the Middle Dutch *anecleven*, here rendered in Latin as [*con*]glutinari).

THE HUMAN SOUL AND THE VISION AND FRUITION OF GOD

From the above, it seems that Henry does not just slavishly make use of Ruusbroec's teachings, but that he is embedding, confronting, and sometimes re-interpreting aspects of them in a sort of synthesis of the “doctors” of the Church and the broader mystical tradition. More examples of this can be found throughout Henry's sermons.

For example, Henry repeatedly talks about the clear and intuitive vision of God and the beatific fruition, which cannot be attained *in via* by us, mortals.⁷¹ In a sermon on the Purification of Mary, expounding on the divine light, Henry

⁶⁸ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in festo Pentecostes*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 23v-26v, fol. 25r: ... *caritas est formaliter spiritualis vita anime ymmo vinculum perfectionis secundum beatum Paulum [Col 3:14] et cooperiens multitudinem peccatorum secundum apostolum Petrum per quam fontalis vita Spiritus sanctus quinetiam Pater et Filius ipsam animam inhabitant et mansionem apud eam faciunt, dicente Iohannis quarto decimo [John 14:23].*

⁶⁹ See Gaens, ‘*Fons hortorum*’, for an overview.

⁷⁰ McGinn, ‘Essential themes’, p. 131 (n. 4).

⁷¹ Henry also points at the *hereses Baggardorum* in this matter; cf. Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in assumptione BMV*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 105r-108v, fol. 107r.

builds on Ruusbroec's *Spiritual Tabernacle* to describe the four kinds of divine light available *in via militantium gentium* (i.e., the light of the upper heaven, the light of heaven, the spiritual light, and the light of grace)⁷², which can make the "deformed" (*deformes*) faces of our souls "Deiform" (*Deiformes*). But he immediately adds a fifth kind, namely the light of glory, that, beyond wonder and beyond narration, perpetually enlightens and burns in the "tabernacle of the Lord".⁷³ Following Saint Paul, Henry insists that our vision always remains "in a mirror and dimly" (*per speculum et in enigmate*).⁷⁴

When, in two other sermons on Pentecost, Henry discusses the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he does this in traditional formulations, yet his text also shows traces of Ruusbroec's teachings. This is not only apparent from the ordering of the gifts and their mapping to the active and contemplative parts of the soul, but especially from the interpretation of the fifth gift, the gift of counsel, as the "fervent inflammation of the will" (*fervens voluntatis inflammatio*) or "stimulating zeal" (*stimulans zelus*). As Henry explicitly indicates, he prefers this rendering over a more traditional (Thomist) interpretation of the gift of counsel as perfecting the practical intellect.⁷⁵ Here, Henry's seems to be paraphrasing another *Henricus de Hassia*, namely the German Augustinian theologian Henry of Friemar († 1340).⁷⁶

In a sermon on Saint Hugh of Lincoln, Henry relates the three superior powers of the soul, i.e., memory, intellect, and will, to the way in which the soul must be made Godlike, respectively through the virtues of simplicity (*simplicitas*), clarity (*claritas*), and charity (*caritas*).⁷⁷ Here too, he is building

⁷² *Tabernakel*, 4:169-201.

⁷³ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in purificatione BMV*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 129r-130v, fol. 129v-130r. In his *Espousals*, Ruusbroec also talks about the light of glory, in which "we may meet him [= Christ] in the hour of our death"; cf. *Brulocht*, 959-960.

⁷⁴ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in nativitate Domini*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 150r-152v, fol. 152v: *Verum videmus nunc per speculum et in enigmate*.

⁷⁵ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in festo Pentecostes*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 21r-23v, fol. 22v-23r: ... *spiritum consilii, qui est quedam fervens voluntatis inflammatio ac stimulans zelus, ad hoc exequendum quod sibi divinitus fuerit consultum sive inspiratum ...*; and *Sermo in festo Pentecostes*, in: *Ibidem*, 114r-117r, fol. 116r: ... *etiam cum hoc accipiatur pro inflammatione voluntatis aut divino zelo ad id ferventer obsequendum quod divinitus consultum aut inspiratum fuerit. Quamvis etiam id ipsum supererogationis fuerit. Que secunda acceptio consilii magis michi videtur ordini donorum congruere quam prima* [= the more traditional interpretation].

⁷⁶ Henry of Friemar, *Tractatus de adventu Verbi in mentem*, pars 1, principale 4, ed. A. Zumkeller (ed.), *Henrici de Frimaria OSA Tractatus ascetico-mystici*, vol. 1: *Tractatum de adventu Verbi in mentem, Tractatum de adventu Domini, Tractatum de incarnatione Verbi* [Corpus scriptorum Augustinianorum, 3:1], Romae [Rome], 1975, p. 27 (l. 12-13): *Primum est, que sint ille mentes devote, que circa divinam unionem assequendam tam ferventi desiderio inflammantur*. Henry's definition of the gift of fortitude as *robor supernaturalis* might be borrowed from the same treatise (cf. Zumkeller, p. 10). By comparing Combes' edition of John of Schoonhoven's defense of Ruusbroec against Gerson (see above, n. 2), I noticed that many of the Groenendaal canon's arguments can almost literally be found in Friemar's works in this edition.

⁷⁷ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo de sancto Hugone*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 122r-124r, fol. 123r: ... *sciendum est quod superior pars anime nostre que sola capax est Dei per contemplationem in tribus consistit potentiis quibus ad ymaginem et similitudinem suam Trinitas benedicta creavit*

on the *Espousals*, where Ruusbroec mentions the same three “streams” in the so-called “second coming” of Christ.⁷⁸ But Henry also interpolates Ruusbroec’s text with excerpts from David of Augsburg’s *Profectus*.⁷⁹ The first virtue, *simplicitas*, which works in the memory, liberates a human being from inconstancy of mind (*ab inconstantia mentis*). Furthermore, it creates unity of spirit (*unio spiritus*).⁸⁰ The second virtue, *claritas*, works in the intellect, and has many degrees. The lowest degree is simple faith (*fides*), through which one believes what is to be believed without any special enlightenment. Through divine illumination and proper exercise, the more proficient human beings uncover reason of faith (*rationes fidei*). Many devout, who have trained themselves in the abstract life and virtuous exercises, are able to rise up to intellection in a superhuman way and to have a vision of God in contemplation, not mediated by images of corporeal similitude, nor using arguments of ratiocination, but with the purest understanding of the mind.⁸¹ The third virtue, supernatural *caritas*, ignites the will of a human being in divine love.⁸² By increasingly infused charity, we may pass through devotion, spiritual sweetness (*dulcedo spiritualis*), jubilation (*iubilus*), pleasure (*voluptas*), inebriation of the spirit (*ebrietas spiritus*), self-oblivion and self-resignation

illam scilicet memoria intellectu et voluntate. Et ergo si post peccatum anima nostra econverso debet Deiformis fieri tribus indiget virtutibus ...

⁷⁸ *Brulocht*, b972-b1131.

⁷⁹ Taken from *Profectus*, II, 5-9.

⁸⁰ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo de sancto Hugone*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 122r-124r, fol. 123r: *Sed prout simplicitas est virtus qua ipsa memoria hominis prompte et delectabiliter scit se a cordis dispersione mentis evagatione et fantasmatum incurisibus discutere et orando meditando contemplando Deo et hiis que Dei sunt intendere ... Et sepe Deus secundum magnificentiam suam in spiritualibus hominibus super communem gratiam et omne humanum exercitium hanc virtutem intantum adauxit ut ipsi per memoriam obsorberentur in Deo, et seipsos et omnium que sunt obliviscerentur et in solo Deo absque omni strepitu volubilium cogitationum suaviter quiescerent. Et hoc prima virtus liberat hominem ab inconstantia mentis et facit unionem spiritus.* Compare with *Profectus*, II, 9, §1. See also *Ornatus*, p. 113 (l. 1235-1237): *Hoc modo homo secundum memoriam elevatur et de alienis cogitationum incurisibus et ab inconstantia liberatur.*

⁸¹ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo de sancto Hugone*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 122r-124r, fol. 123r: *Secundam virtutem placeat vocare claritatem capiendo claritatem pro virtute que intellectum clarificat, ut Deum et ea que Dei sunt sapiat. Et hec virtus iterum multos habet sub se gradus, et in infimo gradu credo est fides illa scilicet que sine speciali illuminatione credit illa que credenda sunt. Et proficit homo in hac virtute quando iam ex illuminatione divina vel exercitio proprio incipit rationes fidei aequaliter intelligere saltem sicut illi materie convenit sacram scripturam sapere et ea in sensibus diversis uti prout devotioni sue congruit, et in virtutes et vitia discernere et remedia invenire in operibus Dei potentiam sapientiam et bonitatem eius ammirari etc. de aliis. Et multis devotis hominibus qui se in vita abstracta et virtutum exercitiis exercuerunt, hec virtus in tamen adducta est, ut supra humanum modum intelligendi qui huiusmodi in carne hac convenit non per fantasmata nec per enigmata corporalium similitudinum nec per ratiocinationum argumenta sed purissima mentis intelligentia Deum contemplando viderent.* Compare with *Profectus*, II, 7.

⁸² Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo de sancto Hugone*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 122r-124r, fol. 123v: *Tertiam virtus vocatur caritas et est virtus qua voluntas hominis tota amore divino accenditur.* Compare with *Ornatus*, p. 120 (l. 1395): *Iste rivus voluntatem hominis veluti ignis accendit ...*

(*sui ipsius oblivio sive resignatio*), to become one spirit with God (*esse unus spiritus cum Deo*).⁸³

Very reminiscent of this “passing through”, as it was described by David of Augsburg, is Henry’s own theology of devotion with its triple-grade progression of the dove-like mind – an image borrowed from William of Saint-Thierry – through three types of “sensible” or “sensual” devotion.⁸⁴ In his work on the Eucharist, Henry explains how people who believe themselves to be experts in the most advanced form of this sensible devotion (*devotio fervorosa vel spiritualiter furiosa*) may have various types of experiences. Some of them are able to receive revelations (*revelationes*). Sometimes these are words, images, or signs, formed in the imaginative power (*vis imaginativa*) through the ministration of angels, at other times a naked truth is produced in the intellectual power (*vis intellectiva*) directly by God. The more these devout are able to abstract from their senses, the clearer intellectual or spiritual visions (*visiones intellectuales sive spirituales*) they are able to receive.⁸⁵ Yet again, Henry does not deviate from what Ruusbroec says in the second book of the *Espousals*⁸⁶, and he even literally cites him in explaining rapture (*raptus*), the moment when devout people are drawn above themselves in every mode into “that incomprehensible good” (*in quoddam incomprehensibile bonum*), that they can never verbalize or express according to the mode in which they heard and saw it.⁸⁷

⁸³ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo de sancto Hugone*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 122r-124r, fol. 123v: ... et secundum quod hec virtus plus augetur secundum hoc etiam in homine frequenter intenditur devotio et dulcedo spiritualis iubilus voluptas et ebrietas spiritus desiderium celestis Patrie, et presentium fastidium ac suiipsius oblivio sive resignatio et esse unus spiritus cum Deo ... supplet et infundit caritatem per quam ulterius voluntas potest proficere in caritate et devotione ... Compare with *Profectus*, II, 8 and III, 64.

⁸⁴ Gaens, ‘*Sic vivere*’, p. 19-20.

⁸⁵ Henry of Coesfeld, *De sacramento eucharistie*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 11811-12, 3r-101v, fol. 86v: Dicunt etiam qui creduntur in hac re fuisse experti quod in ista devotione [= devotio fervorosa vel spiritualiter furiosa] sepe hominibus multe revelationes fiunt, aliquando ut aiunt verbis aliquando ymaginibus aliquando signis et huiuscemodi fiunt comuniter in vi ymaginativa et solent ministerio angelorum fieri. Aliquando etiam ipsis nude veritas se obicit sine signis aut ymaginibus et hec revelatio fit in vi intellectiva et causantur a solo deo sine ministerio alicuius creature. Et istud videtur in multum verisimile quia secundum quod quis plus et excellentius a sensibus abstrahitur secundum hoc clariores recipit visiones intellectuales vel spirituales ... Compare with *Ornatus*, p. 88-89 (l. 675-684): Aliquando etiam quidam homines ex hiis furiosus ex hoc furore et ex hac importunitate ultra sensibilitatem trahuntur in spiritu, et aliqua veritas verbis eis exprimitur, vel imaginibus vel similitudinibus vel signis eis ostenditur, que vel eis vel aliis hominibus uel rebus futuris necessaria est. Iste dicuntur revelationes uel visiones. Que imagines si corporales fuerint, tunc eas in imaginativa recipiunt. Hec aliquando per virtutem Dei angelus operatur in homine. Sed si ipsa ueritas intellectualis fuerit, vel similitudo spiriualis qua se Deus immensus ostendit vel manifestat, in intellectu eam recipiunt et ipsam eloqui verbis possunt, si verbis expressibilis sit.

⁸⁶ *Brulocht*, b549-b558.

⁸⁷ Henry of Coesfeld, *De sacramento eucharistie*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 11811-12, 3r-101v, fol. 86v: ... sed per istum modum devotionis videtur quis multum a sensibus abstrahi cum tam importune et seriose nitatur spiritui subici ymmo ut quidam scribit homines huiusmodi aliquando trahuntur super seipsos secundum omnem modum in quoddam incomprehensibile bonum quod

Mystical ascent itself is rendered by Henry in proper Dionysian style. It is charity, Henry says, which – “according to blessed Dionysius in *On the Divine Names*” – brings ecstasy, so that the lovers belong not to themselves but to the beloved.⁸⁸ In a *collatio moralis* in which he unfolds his devotional theory, he marvels at the mystery of the dove, which – as the *physiologi* narrate – is the only bird that feeds and nurtures its young during the night:

It becomes understandable, if one bears in mind that the dove-like soul rightly contemplates God in obscurity (*in caligine*) and enjoys God in a modeless manner, and is totally consumed with the fire of divine love, and loses its spirit, and does not attend to itself or consider itself, as if in darkness (*in tenebris*), and also, with respect to divine worship, it is devoutly affected through spiritual self-annihilation. For indeed, it is necessary to abandon all sensible and intellectual operations to which it is accustomed, and to make abstraction of all things and conditions that it knows, before it arrives at the cognition of that most simple being, the cognition by which a similar love and devotion are accompanied, whereupon it rightly dwells in a superluminous darkness of secretly learned silence, as Dionysius declares in the most beautiful manner and in many ways, in *On Mystical Theology*, especially in the first chapter, and similarly in his *Letter to Dorotheus the Deacon*, commenting on Psalm 17, as well as in his *Letter to Caius the Monk*.⁸⁹

In this passage one can find typically Dionysian and Ruusbroecian language, such as the words “modeless” and “annihilation” (in the sense of spiritual annihilation of one’s self).⁹⁰ Also noteworthy is Henry’s statement that, in

non possunt verbis exprimere vel signis ostendere secundum illum modum secundum quem bonum istud audierunt vel viderunt, idem namque vocatur hic audire vel videre et iste modus communiter dicitur raptus. Compare with Ornatus, p. 89 (l. 686-693): Potest etiam aliquando huiusmodi homo trahi supra se secundum omnem modum, in quoddam incomprehensibile bonum, quod nunquam potest vel verbis exprimere vel ostendere iuxta et secundum modum quo ipsum bonum audivit et vidit. Idem nam est audire et videre in hoc simplici opere et in hoc simplici visu interno. Et hoc nullus nisi deus solus sine medio vel sine cooperatione alicuius creature operatur. Hic modus raptus nominatur.

⁸⁸ Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo de sancto Hugone*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 122r-124r, fol. 123v: *Et hec virtus secundum beatum Dionysium quarto De divinis nominibus facit recte extasim et non dimittit sui ipsorum esse amatores sed amatorum.*

⁸⁹ Henry of Coesfeld, *Collatio moralis in purificatione BMW*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, 130v-134r, fol. 133r: *Narrant physiologi videlicet quod ipsa [= the dove] sola inter aves pullos suos nocte nutrit et fovet, quale misterium est hoc, dilectissimi, nisi fortasse quod anima turturina deum recte in caligine contemplatur et sine modo ipso fruitur et igne divini amoris tota comburitur et a se ipsa deficit nec se ipsam tamquam in tenebris sic attendit aut considerat, atque circa divinum obsequium cum spirituali annihilatione sui ipsius devote afficitur. Oportet namque mentem derelinquere omnes sensibiles et intellectuales operationes quibus assuetus est et abstractionem facere omnium rerum et conditionum quas novit antequam ad cognitionem illius simplicissimi entis perveniat, quam cognitionem ni fallor conformis amor et devotio comitantur, quo facto manet recte supersplendens caligo occulte docti silentii, prout declarat sanctus Dionysius pulcherrime et multipliciter in De mystica theologia et specialiter capitulo primo et similiter in Epistola sua [ad Dorotheum dyaconum exponens illud Psalmi 17 [Ps. 17(18):12] ‘Posuit tenebras latibulum suum’ et etiam Epistola prima] ad Gayum monachum.*

⁹⁰ Spiritual self-annihilation is here to be understood as a process in which the spirit dies to its oneness, i.e., a moving away from self-centeredness in self-renouncement; cf. McGinn, ‘Essential

becoming one in spirit with God, the mind loses itself, i.e., loses its spirit (*a se ipsa deficit*). This example particularly shows the difficulty in interpreting and translating expressions such as Ruusbroec's *ontgheesten* or *ontwerden*.⁹¹ Gerson, who struggled with mystical terms such as *deficere a se*, showed himself guilty of misreading and even misconstruing Ruusbroec's words in his first letter to Bartholomew Clantier, when he accused the Brabantine mystical teacher of making it "sound" (*sicut scripta sonant*) as if the soul itself would somehow cease to exist.⁹²

However, it is Henry's insistence on the intertwining of intellective vision, fruitive love, and devotion that is the most striking in the above description of mystical union, even though all customary sensible and intellectual operations have been left behind in the process of reaching it. This is clearly the way Henry did read Ruusbroec.

CONCLUSION: THE WEIGHT OF GERSON'S CENSURE

Throughout his sermons and other works, Henry seems to be drawing an imaginary line, running from Bernard of Clairvaux, and especially William of Saint-Thierry, through the mystical tradition of the Low Countries and the Rhineland, making use of authors such as David of Augsburg⁹³, John Tauler⁹⁴, Henry Suso⁹⁵, and Ruusbroec. These ideas are embedded in an eclectic theology, which makes abundant use of the monastic and scholastic tradition.⁹⁶ But nor did Henry hesitate to base some theological arguments on the visions of

Themes', p. 177-178 (n. 150). In the *Espousals*, Ruusbroec himself opposed those who proclaim they are "annihilated with respect to themselves"; cf. *Brulocht*, b2458-2460.

⁹¹ When translating *Seven Rungs*, Surius prudently rendered *ontgheesten* as *deficere vel excedere*; cf. *Van seven trappen*, 1001. From the edition, I borrowed the free, modern English translation "to lose its spirit".

⁹² Combes, *Essai*, vol. 1, p. 618-619: *Imaginatur enim, sicut scripta sonant, quod anima tunc desinit esse in illa existentia quam prius habuit in proprio genere, et convertitur seu transformatur et absorbetur in esse divinum et in illud esse ideale defluit quod habuit ab eterno in essentia divina*. Note that Henry – as does Ruusbroec – doesn't talk at all about the soul ceasing to be. Denys the Carthusian also uses the expression *a se ipsa deficere*; see *Idem*, cap. VII, art. LXXVII, in: *Ibidem*, p. 260D: *In qua contemplatione mens amorosa et pura ... a se ipsa deficit, alienatur ac defluit ...* On the spirit and the soul, see also Denys the Carthusian, *Commentaria in Librum de divinis nominibus*, cap. IV, art. XXXVII, in: *Doctoris ecstatici D. Dionysii Cartusiani Opera omnia*, vol. 16: *In libris S. Dionysii Areopagite*, Tornaci [Tournai], 1902, p. 144D-145A.

⁹³ See above, n. 79.

⁹⁴ See above, n. 17.

⁹⁵ See Gaens, 'Sic vivere', p. 26 (n. 44).

⁹⁶ Apart from the Decretals and the Sentences, Henry draws from authors such as Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, William of Saint-Thierry, Hugh and Richard of Saint Victor, Peter of Tarentaise, Peter the Devourer, Innocent III, William of Auvergne, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Henry of Ghent, William Durand, John Duns Scotus, Nicholas of Lyra, Thomas of Strasbourg, Henry Totting of Oyta, and Henry of Langenstein.

female mystics such as Mechtild of Magdeburg or Bridget of Sweden⁹⁷, something which would surely abhor many a scholastic theologian, including Gerson.⁹⁸ I believe that the interpretation of what can be considered as “tradition”, i.e., which things “share the same smell”, is exactly what is at stake in the Gerson–Groenendaal controversy. It is surely a difference in interpretation that sets Henry of Coesfeld and Jean Gerson apart, even though both of them (*and* Ruusbroec) share similar concerns about the excesses of lay and vernacular mysticism and of “useless” *curiositas* at theological faculties. As a Carthusian monk, Henry was less eager to set aside the mystical tradition of the Low Countries and the Rhineland too easily.

Henry’s theology, with its emphasis on devotion *in modernis temporibus*, could very well be called a type of *Frömmigkeitstheologie*, because it attempts to respond to the various controversies of the fourteenth century and yet strives towards a kind of synthesis at the same time. All of this is presented in the form of sermons with a mystagogical touch or in the form of explanatory treatises, at moments bold and refreshing, but often lacking the hyperbolic language of mystical literature, while prudently colouring within the lines of orthodoxy. The purpose is clearly what Henry calls “encouraging, guiding, reproving or comforting”, and not *doing* theology as such. Many themes that are typically found in speculative mysticism and in contemporary scholastic theology are virtually absent. There are no ponderings on the “being” or “essence” of the human soul and the exact nature of its relation to God’s being, such as they can be found in Ruusbroec’s work, nor are there any reflections on form and matter, universals and singulars, or any of the other *ratiocinationes* found in academic discussions of his time. Henry simply won’t have any of this. Here, he surely differs from Denys the Carthusian († 1471), an even more ardent follower of Ruusbroec, who would – in certain ways – embark on a similar exercise a few decades later and whose oeuvre would totally eclipse Henry’s legacy.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ See, e.g., in Henry of Coesfeld, *Sermo in assumptione BMV*, in: Brussels, KB, MS 1212, fol. 142v–145v; and *Sermo in nativitate Domini*, in: *Ibidem*, 152v–154r.

⁹⁸ B.P. McGuire, *Jean Gerson and the Last Medieval Reformation*, University Park PA, 2005, p. 318; B. Obrist, ‘The Swedish Visionary. Saint Bridget’, in: K.M. Wilson (ed.), *Medieval Women Writers*, Manchester, 1984, 227–251, p. 236.

⁹⁹ Ruusbroec was called an *alter Dionysius* by Denys the Carthusian, *De donis Spiritus sancti*, tract. 2, art. 13, in: *Doctoris ecstatici D. Dionysii Cartusiani Opera omnia*, vol. 35: *Opera minora* 3, Tornaci [Tournai], 1908, p. 184. Denys also dismissed Gerson’s critique of Ruusbroec in his *In librum S. Dionysii Areopagite de mystica theologia, Difficultatem precipuarum absolutiones*, art. 4, in: DCOO, vol. 16: *In libros S. Dionysii Areopagite*, p. 493B: ... *quemadmodum et Johannes pretactus [= Gerson] in tractatu suo de mystica theologia redarguit acriter nimis et non vere, devotissimum virum innocentemque Joannem Ruusbrochium, quod voluerit quorundam hereticorum renovare errorem in libro suo de spiritualibus nuptiis*. On this, and on Denys’ interpretation of Ruusbroec’s *wesen* through the lens of Henry of Ghent’s theology, see K. Emery Jr., ‘The Carthusians, Intermediaries for the Teaching of John Ruusbroeck during the Period of Early Reform and in the Counter-Reformation’, in: *Miscellanea Cartusiana*, vol. 4 [Analecta Cartusiana, 43], Salzburg 1979, 100–116.

In any case, Henry of Coesfeld was the first author of importance to incorporate elements of Ruusbroec's texts in original sermons and treatises, written in Latin. To determine whether he made his own translations or used existing ones, a much more thorough study of his work is needed. Especially Henry's borrowings from the *Espousals* are very similar and – at times – almost identical to the translation made by Geert Grote († 1384), who likely started his translation of the *Espousals* while staying at the charterhouse of Monnikhuizen, during Henry's priorate.¹⁰⁰ Hence, it might be hypothesized that Grote was encouraged or even influenced in his work by Henry or by fellow inhabitants of the Monnikhuizen charterhouse, or even that there might have been some form of cooperation.¹⁰¹ Grote's attitude towards the *Espousals* was not totally uncritical. Immediately following his retreat in Monnikhuizen Grote paid Ruusbroec a visit in Groenendaal, and after Ruusbroec's death, he wrote, in a letter addressed to the Groenendaal Canons, that he was convinced that their former prior was sincere and wise, and that he would be ready to defend the *Espousals* against anyone, provided that they made some necessary corrections.¹⁰²

Geert Grote and possibly also Henry of Coesfeld should therefore be regarded as trying to safeguard Ruusbroec's work, rather than ordering to “rip out” parts of it, as Gerson did. If Henry would indeed have labeled Ruusbroec's *Espousals* as erroneous or heretical, this would surely have had an effect on the spreading of Ruusbroec's work and its reception by the Carthusians. Henry was an authoritative voice within the Carthusian order, and, being the provincial visitor of the Urbanist Rhine province and occasional visitor of the English charterhouses, his influence cannot be underestimated. Evidence, however, shows rather the contrary. The Carthusians in the Low Countries, the Rhineland, and England were actively involved in the spreading of Ruusbroec's work, through manuscript transmission, and again during the sixteenth century, through printed editions and the Surius translations. Less is known about the actual reception and use of Ruusbroec's teachings by Carthusians, since scholars have been mostly looking into manuscript transmission only. Also here, a few scholars have recently started to unearth some more indications: not only

¹⁰⁰ R.Th.M. van Dijk, *Prolegomena ad Gerardi Magni Opera omnia* [Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio mediaevalis, 192], Turnhout, 2003, p. 531-532, 565-570.

¹⁰¹ I would prefer to leave a detailed study of the passages that Henry borrowed from Ruusbroec and their similarities and differences with Geert Grote's and other translation(s) to the interested Ruusbroec specialists, as this would go far beyond the scope of the present essay and my own capabilities.

¹⁰² Rudolf van Dijk argued that Grote came to know Ruusbroec's work in the charterhouse of Monnikhuizen (Van Dijk, *Prolegomena*, p. 564) and that Monnikhuizen highly likely owned a copy of the *Espousals* which came from Herne (*Ibidem*, p. 567). See Van Dijk, *Prolegomena*, p. 564 and 567. Already around 1362, the Carthusians of Herne had invited Ruusbroec to clarify a number of points in his teachings; cf. R. Faesen, ‘Ruusbroec at the Charterhouse of Herne. How Did the Carthusians React to the Eckhart Shock?’, in: S.J. Molvarec & T. Gaens, *A Fish Out of Water? From Contemplative Solitude to Carthusian Involvement in Pastoral Care and Reform Activity* [Miscellanea Neerlandica, 41 / Studia Cartusiana, 2], Leuven, 2013, p. 107-125.

Henry of Coesfeld drew from Ruusbroec's works or from pseudo-Ruusbroecian texts such as *On the Twelve Virtues*, so did Evrard of Diest¹⁰³, Denys the Carthusian¹⁰⁴, James of Gruitrode¹⁰⁵, and others.¹⁰⁶

In the context of the effect of the Gerson–Groenendaal controversy on the spreading of Ruusbroec's work in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, especially in France, Kees Schepers has recently argued that the differences in style between the Jordaens and Grote translations of the *Espousals* caused the latter to be received more warmly in the German cultural sphere and less in the Roman culture sphere (while the opposite holds true for the former).¹⁰⁷ If one

¹⁰³ Evrard, prior of Diest, *Tractatus de militia humana super terram (Opusculum de temptationibus, De modis temptationum)*, in: Trier, Bibliothek des Bischöflichen Priesterseminars, 130, 133r-153r, fol. 144r: *Ruusbroic tamen non dicit aliud ...* Evrard's work is also available in Brussel [Brussels], Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 1216-34 (cat. 1129), fol. 93r-102v; Köln [Cologne], Historisches Archiv, GB quart 21, fol. 113r-124v; Lille, Médiathèque municipale Jean Lévy, 115 (olim 85), fol. 326r-336r; Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, 930 (olim 1145), fol. 92r-112v; and Wien [Vienna], Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, S.n. 12888, fol. 155r-172r. The Rooklooster Register (see above, n. 3), fol. 117r mentions this title for the libraries of Rooklooster and Groenendaal. Evrard's work, with its treatment of temptations in the context of the intelligible, concupiscible and irascible powers of the soul, and its critique on the lack of devotion in religious institutions, clearly bears the stamp of Henry of Coesfeld. Evrard, prior of Zelem, and Henry of Coesfeld, prior of Geertruidenberg and (con)visitor of the Urbanist Rhine province, together travelled at least once across the Channel for a visitation of English charterhouses. In 1405, they evidently performed a visitation of the Carthusians of London (and likely other charterhouses as well). Unfortunately, the *chartae* of the Carthusian general chapter are only partially extant, but they do show that Henry was instructed to visit the English charterhouses *cum socio* in 1406, 1408, 1409, and 1410. See J. Hogg, 'L'ordine certosino nel periodo dello Scisma', in: P. de Leo (ed.), *L'Ordine certosino e il Papato della fondazione allo scisma d'Occidente*, Soveria Mannelli, 2003, 157-338, p. 159; J. Sanders, *Waterland als woestijn. Geschiedenis van het kartuizerklooster 'Het Hollandse Huis' bij Geertruidenberg (1336-1595)* [Hollandse Studiën, 25], Hilversum, 1990, p. 144.

¹⁰⁴ Emery, 'The Carthusians, Intermediaries'.

¹⁰⁵ J. Deschamps, 'De lange en de korte redactie van het Rosarium Jesu et Mariae van de kartuizer Jacobus van Gruitrode en de Middelnederlandse vertaling van de korte redactie', in: C. De Backer, A.J. Geurts & A.G. Weiler (ed.), *Codex in context. Studies over codicologie, kartuizergeschiedenis en laatmiddeleeuws geestesleven aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. A. Gruijs* [Nijmeegse codicologische cahiers, 4-6], Nijmegen & Grave, 1985, 105-128, p. 109; T. Gaens, 'Spiritu Iesu operante. Written Sources for the Work of James of Gruitrode', in: K. Pansters (ed.), *The Carthusians in the Low Countries. Studies in Monastic History and Heritage* [Miscellanea Neerlandica, 43 / Studia Cartusiana, 4], Leuven, 2014, 129-172, p. 171.

¹⁰⁶ I am sure this short list is far from exhaustive. In a letter of the Herne Carthusian John Knibber (†1473) to his brother Nicasius (†1471), a Canon Regular of the Groenendaal priory who was active as *curatus* in the abbey of Saint Trudo in Bruges, the author cites from the *Espousals* and calls Ruusbroec a *vir sacerdotalis, contemplator gloriosus, and primus prior et fundator Viridis Vallis*; see Gaens, 'Fons hortorum', p. 57-58 (n. 27-28). An Erfurter manuscript contains a work by an anonymous, fifteenth-century Carthusian, in which Ruusbroec is defended against Gerson and in which both Ruusbroec and Nicholas of Cusa are called true followers of Dionysius the Areopagite; see C. Burger, 'Mystische Vereinigung – erst im Himmel oder schon auf Erden? Das Doppelgesicht der geistlichen Literatur im 15. Jahrhundert', in: B. Hamm, V. Leppin & H. Munzert, *Gottes Nähe unmittelbar erfahren. Mystik im Mittelalter und bei Martin Luther* [Spätmittelalter und Reformation. Neue Reihe, 36], Tübingen, 2007, 97-110, p. 107-108.

¹⁰⁷ Schepers, 'Ruusbroec in Latin', p. 257-258.

looks at the dissemination of the works of Henry of Coesfeld, it shows that his works were mainly copied in the Low Countries, the Rhine and Danube regions, mostly within the different “branches” of the Modern Devotion, and by reformist Crosiers (Low Countries, Rhineland) and Benedictines (Liège, Trier and the Melk-Tegernsee reforms). Not a single surviving manuscript originates from France or Southern Europe. The same can be said of Carthusian historiographical works, such as Henry Egger of Kalkar’s *Ortus et decursus* and derivations thereof. Even the very popular, devotional compilations of James of Gruitrode hardly penetrated France and Southern Europe.¹⁰⁸ I believe that the true question to be answered is, why, in the fifteenth century, some of the important institutional reforms in monastic life, leading to hundreds of new and reformed religious and semi-religious institutions (including many charterhouses), and the bulk of devotional literature, which erupted in the wake of authors such as John of Ruusbroec, and other, mystical and monastic writers, largely passed by the Roman cultural sphere. The role and importance of the Gerson censure in this will have to be carefully re-evaluated.

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¹⁰⁸ On the spreading of the works of these authors and other, reformist writings, see T. Gaens, ‘*Speculum Carthusianum*. Carthusian historiographical texts as mirrors for reform and conversion’, in: S. Excoffon & C. Zermatten (ed.), *Histoire et mémoire chez les chartreux (XIIIe-XXe siècle)*. Colloque international du CERCOR (24-27 juin 2015) [Analecta Cartusiana, 319], Saint-Étienne, 2017, p. 225-244.

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines an aspect of the Gerson–Groenendaal controversy in which Jean Gerson condemned parts of John of Ruusbroec’s work in letters addressed to the Herne charterhouse, quoting from a capitular sermon of the Carthusian prior and visitor Henry of Coesfeld. To better understand the nuanced position of the Carthusian in the matter, Gerson’s quotations are situated in Henry’s broader discussion of true and false devotion. By indicating the convergences between the Trinitarian and Christological thinking of the Carthusian and the ideas of the Brabantine mystical teacher, the essay concludes that there is no reason to assume that Henry had any mistrust about the good intentions of the Groenendaal prior. On the contrary, Henry of Coesfeld’s sermons and tracts (as well as those of other Carthusian authors of the Low Countries and the Rhineland) reflect a keen interest in Ruusbroecian and pseudo-Ruusbroecian texts. We hence conclude that the so-called effects of the Gerson controversy on the dissemination of Ruusbroec’s works must be carefully re-evaluated.

Address of author: Sint-Jansbergstraat 5, B-3545 Zelem-Halen (tom.gaens@twelve-monks.be)