Article

Christ’s Wounded Body, Sorrowful Soul and Joyful Spirit: The Interpretation of Christ’s Passion in a Forgotten 16th Century Classic of Mystical Literature

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Abstract: The Passion of Christ is not only an important theme in Christian theological and devotional literature, iconography, and music, but it is likewise the focus of considerable attention in contemplative, mystical literature. This contribution focuses on a specific interpretation of the suffering of Christ, which is to be found in an important but now somewhat forgotten mystical text, namely the Evangelical Pearl. This text is to be situated within the broad mystical network and initiatives of the Cologne Carthusians in the early sixteenth century. The Pearl has a remarkable interpretation of Christ’s passion, namely that—simultaneously—his body was in terrible pain, his soul was deeply sorrowful and his spirit was joyful. These reflections culminate in a radical theology of deification.

Keywords: Evangelical Pearl; 16th century mysticism; Carthusians of Cologne; Middle Dutch mysticism

1. Introduction

The Passion of Christ is not only an important theme in Christian theological and devotional literature, iconography, and music, but this central event in the history of salvation is likewise the focus of considerable attention in contemplative, mystical literature. In popularizing publications, “mysticism” is often associated with apophasis, silence and “imagelessness”, and then it is perhaps surprising therefore that mystical authors bring such a physical, visceral theme so centrally to the fore. While it is true that some mystical authors reserve meditation on the Passion for the lower rungs of mystical ascent, there are nevertheless many others in who wrote at great length on the suffering of Jesus Christ. The Brabantine mystical author John of Ruusbroec (1293–1381) articulates it thus, with an enlightening distinction:

“If, therefore, a man wants to become spiritual, he must forego all fleshly affection and cling to God alone with desire and affection and possess him in that way. This will drive out all encumbrance from images and all disorderly affection for creatures. And if he possesses God with affection, man will be freed from images inside, since God is a spirit and no man can make a proper image of him. Yet in his practice man should concentrate on good images, such as the passion of the Lord and all things that may rouse him to more devotion. But when he possesses God, man must enter into a bare imagelessness which is God”.

In an earlier paragraph, Ruusbroec had described the ambiguity of religious images, namely that they may be useful because they refer to the invisible God, but that they may also be problematic because people may become attached to these created images, with the unfortunate consequence that such images might become a distraction from the Creator to whom they are intended to refer. It is advisable therefore, Ruusbroec writes, to make a
distinction. In pursuing the virtuous active life, oriented to God, images may be useful and beneficial. In the encounter with God, however, they must obviously be relinquished since they are superfluous. Images that impose themselves as a hindrance or intermediary in the direct encounter with God are evidently problematic. The “image” of the suffering of Christ is never a problematic image, however, because this suffering necessarily refers to the One who suffers, and thus fosters and nourishes the relationship between the human person and Christ.

2. The *Evangelical Pearl*: A Forgotten 16th Century Classic of Mystical Literature

This contribution focuses on a specific interpretation of the suffering of Christ, which is to be found in an important but now somewhat forgotten mystical text, namely the *Evangelical Pearl*. This text is to be situated within the broad mystical network and initiatives of the Cologne Carthusians in the early sixteenth century.

The Cologne Charterhouse of Saint Barbara played an important role in the development, patronage, and circulation of mystical literature (Chaix 1981, p. 103ff). Prior Pieter Blommeveen (Petrus Blomevenna, 1466–1536) published several spiritual works, including a Latin translation of Hendrik Herp’s *Spieghel der volcomenheit* (*Directorium aureum contemplativorum*), in 1509. Later, the charterhouse engaged in far more extensive projects. The publication of the enormous *opera omnia* of Dionysius the Carthusian (c. 1402/3–1471) between 1530 and 1540 was evidently the most important of these projects. Under the priorship of Gerard Kalkbrenner, this line was continued. During this period, Dirc Loer (Loerius, c. 1500–1554) published the enormously popular *Theologia mystica* by Hendrik Herp (Harphius, c. 1410–1478) in 1538 and the equally influential *Evangelical Pearl* (first Dutch edition in 1535, the second edition in 1536, and the expanded edition of the so-called “Greater Pearl” in 1537/38). The most active member of the Cologne charterhouse in this period was undoubtedly Laurentius Surius (Laurens Sauer, c. 1522–1578). His monumental translation of Ruusbroec’s work was read across Europe, and even much further afield: in the seventeenth century, it was to be found in libraries in Lima (Peru) and Beijing (Faesen 2010, pp. 291–98). Moreover, he undertook the translation and publication of Suso (in 1555), and Tauler (cf. Tauler 1548). As mentioned, one of the important initiatives taken by the Cologne Carthusians in the second period was the publication of the *Evangelical Pearl*—a unique text with a complex history (Reypens 1928; Ampe 1983; McGinn 2008). The author, whose name is not mentioned in the edition, has never been identified. In the preface, written by Nicolas van Esch (Eschius, c. 1507–1578) to one of the later editions, the author is described as a woman who died on 28 January 1540 at the age of seventy-seven, that she lived in her father’s house and had taken vows, including a vow of obedience to a spiritual father. It is unclear to what extent this information is historically reliable (Schepers 2013). Indeed, we do not even know if the book was written by a single author; the *Pearl* may be a compilation like the *Institutiones Taulerianae*, which includes work by Tauler, Ruusbroec, Eckhart, etc., and which was also printed in cooperation with the Charterhouse of Saint Barbara. The origins of the *Pearl* are obscure. It does appear that the text had been written not long before it was edited in Cologne, since there are a few references to “Lutheran people” (Peerle 2021, p. 153). The author clearly sought to distance him- or herself from these “Lutheran” positions, but the book is generally not polemical in tone.

This extensive text consists of 170 chapters in a variety of literary genres, such as prayers, liturgical reflections and short mystical treatises. This to a large extent explains its popularity: it could be read both by beginners in the spiritual life and by more advanced, mystically gifted readers. The text’s central concern is God’s presence in the human person as a hidden and priceless pearl (cf. Mt. 13, 44), the search to identify this presence, to be transformed in union with God, and consequently to live a divinely inspired life. The text was influenced by a range of older sources, which are often integrated in very innovative ways (Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Eckhart, Marquard of Lindau, Richard of Saint-Victor, Ruusbroec, Tauler, etc.). The *Pearl* is thus a good example of the influence and
reception of the medieval mystical tradition in the Early Modern Period. The text was very influential, largely thanks to the edition and Latin translation made at the Charterhouse of Saint Barbara. It was later translated into French (1602) and German (1676 and 1698). The so-called *Institutiones Taulerianae* includes extensive fragments of the *Pearl*, and was translated into Spanish (1551), Italian (1568) and French (1587). The *Pearl* influenced many famous authors, such as Petrus Canisius (1521–1597), Ludovicus Blosius (Louis de Blois, 1506–1566), Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629), Benoît de Canfield (1562–1611), François de Sales (1567–1622), and Angelus Silesius (1624–1677). No comprehensive study has hitherto been devoted to this extremely popular and influential work.

3. The Interpretation of Christ’s Passion in the *Evangelical Pearl*

The *Pearl* has a remarkable interpretation of Christ’s passion, namely that—simultaneously—his body was in terrible pain, his soul was deeply sorrowful and his spirit was joyful. These are three relevant aspects that recur throughout the *Evangelical Pearl*. Part I, chapter 40 contains a somewhat longer treatment, but we find the most theologically explicit discussion in part III, chapters 13–17.

3.1. It may be helpful to recall what, in the Christian spiritual tradition, is meant by these three terms, which go back to an expression in 1 Thess 5:23 (τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχή καὶ τὸ σῶμα, σπορινὸς καὶ συμματικὸς καὶ συμπροσώπος). The term “body” requires no explanation, but “soul” and “spirit” might. “Soul” usually refers to the realm of human faculties, such as *memoria*, *intellectus*, and *voluntas*. Some authors also situate the “irascible power”, the “rational power”, the “appetitive power” and the “heart” here. The “spirit” refers to the most fundamental unity of these faculties (the *apex mentis*) in the being of the human person, i.e., the fact that the human person exists. This deepest unity is essentially relational, since it implies a continuous contact of the human person as a creature with God as Creator.

One could say that “soul” and “spirit” refer to the same interiority, but from a different point of view: “soul” from the point of view of the activity of the faculties, outwardly, and “spirit” insofar as they are relationally oriented to and connected to God, inwardly.

As many Christian authors point out, this tripartite structure is the natural structure of the human person (*Ruusbroec 1981b, pp. 287–89, lines b41–b68; see also Faesen and Arblaster 2017*). Our text now describes the condition of the body, soul and spirit of Jesus Christ. They are the same as in every human being (save for sin), although there is evidently one major difference in the “spirit”. Where with every person, in the “spirit”, the relationship with God means that this is a relationship with another Person, for Jesus Christ this means that this is a relationship with another nature. After all, in Jesus Christ there is one person, namely the divine Word, second Person of the Trinity.

The text explains in Chapter 37 of book I how this tripartite structure of Jesus Christ relates to that of us:

“You yourself taught me those three lives and you have preceded me in them in the most sublime way. After all, in the highest of your mind You were always exalted in the enjoyment of your Deity. Your memory was exalted in unimagined purity and filled with eternal joy. Your pure gaze penetrated the abyss of your divine being. And your will was sunk and encompassed in the abyss of your love and in real, immovable rest, where you are ever in accord with your holy threefold unity, and you knew and loved all things in yourself. You also led in your soul a progressing, virtuous life. It was all the time absorbed in real humility, and it bowed and bowed with all reverence and awe to your sublime, mighty Deity, whereby it was worked into a perfection of all virtues. You led a dying, working life in your pure body, for world and sensual lust had no life in it. For it was pure and not tainted by any sinful desire, and it was a dwelling place of your Deity and an instrument with which You have realized our redemption and salvation. It was obedient and submissive to You in all things, and willing to do what the spirit desired. And what your soul was urged to, you thereby
accomplished, in the most sublime perfection for our re-creation, to the glory of the holy Trinity”.

3.2. The Pearl then reflects on the passion of Jesus Christ according to this tripartite structure. Chapter 13 provides a short introduction to the section. Our soul—“always inclined to faults”—must remain close to the “Master Physician” and wash itself in the precious blood that he spilled for us. Indeed, nobody can ascend to the “mountain of the Godhead” except those who have washed themselves in the blood of the Lamb. “These,” the text explains, “are received by the Holy of Holies, are set before the face of the Lord, their original place, and receive their paternal blessing”. This brief introduction confirms a number of foundational elements of the Christian doctrine of the faith on the crucial importance of the salvific suffering of Jesus Christ. The formulation is a creative integration of several well-known biblical themes, which are developed further in the following chapters.

The text discusses the issue based on three facets of the person of Jesus Christ (his body, his soul, and his spirit), and we are told explicitly that these correspond to the active life, the spiritual life, and the divine life.

3.3. Chapter 14 is devoted to the first, namely Christ’s wounded body. The text surveys the wounded body starting with the feet and progressing to the knees, torso, heart, hands and arms, to Christ’s mouth, eyes and ears, and finally his head. The salvific significance of each body part is briefly mentioned, for example: “we should approach his feet, with which for thirty-three years He so humbly sought after us; now He has allowed himself to be nailed on the cross in order to remain near us forever”. The perceptive sixteenth-century reader of the Pearl would most probably have recognized that this passage creatively alludes to the famous hymn Salve mundi salutare, which was probably composed by Arnulf of Leuven (†1250), abbot of the renowned Cistercian abbey of Villers. This long hymn of seventy-four verses reflects in a similar (though not in all respects identical) way on the wounded body of Christ, moving from the feet to the head (ad pedes, ad genua, ad manus, ad latus, ad pectus, ad faciem). The final verses are particularly well-known because they inspired the later Passion hymn O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden by Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676), which was integrated into the Mattäuspassion by Johann Sebastian Bach. In terms of content, this chapter also alludes repeatedly to the thirteenth-century hymn, such as when the text refers to “his loving heart, which was opened with love as wide as heaven so that we might dwell therein”—the hymn develops the theme of dwelling in Christ’s heart extensively.

Although the thirteenth-century hymn refers repeatedly to an intimate and personal encounter with Christ, the chapter of the Pearl tends to remain on the exterior, as it were. This is no coincidence, since this chapter focuses specifically on the body:

“Note well, this is how the sensual lower man has climbed his ladder, by means of the body of Christ, and stands at the foot of the mountain; he can come no farther in this life. Therefore, we are people who are always beginning, and must remain in the active life, according to the humanity of Christ, who was always doing good”.

3.4. In chapter 15, the Pearl moves to the interior, namely to the interior suffering of the crucified Jesus Christ. The beginning of this chapter emphasizes the difference with the suffering body in the previous chapter:

“And how his soul, together with all loving souls, was opened and pierced, and what it felt, no one can describe: the interior suffering by which the soul of Christ was crucified and outstretched, was as different from his exterior suffering as heaven is from the earth. The exterior suffering was uncommonly great, but his interior suffering was immeasurably greater, insofar as He loves souls more than bodies. The wounds of his soul were ineffably greater, wider, and deeper and ran
much more with overflowing love and mercy than did the wounds of his body with blood”.\textsuperscript{11}

Our author describes this interior suffering primarily as a suffering out of love, and specifically of Christ’s love for humanity, which was not reciprocated:

“The cries of his soul penetrated to the secret abyss with the great sounds of his sighs and cries after lost souls, with many loving and appealing words, etc. The poverty and desolation of his soul was so great that it had no support, sustenance, nor consolation from his Godhead. But He hung, naked and exposed, pitifully abandoned by the Godhead and by all souls, his veins rent open from love, his members broken by the lost souls, so that he had not a single soul upon which He could rest his head, or with whom He could satisfy his thirsty soul”.\textsuperscript{12}

The text notes that the crucified Christ received no consolation whatsoever, and then glosses the loud cry of the crucified one: “My God, my God, why have You abandoned Me?” (Mt. 27:46), and specifically also the fact that he cried out “my God” twice.

The first cry was directed to the Father. The human soul of Jesus Christ experiences what the condition of sinners is, who have turned away from God, and whom God passionately loves, although his love is not reciprocated. The second cry was directed to humanity, which is deified by love, and can thus also be addressed as “God” (“O noble soul, which was made after my image and God’s; you who are my child, my sister, my bride, soul in which I have united myself with you, hidden in your soul’s image”).\textsuperscript{13} The latter cry is developed more extensively in the text, which describes Christ’s yearning cry of love to humanity, expressing a desire for unity (“I stand with the outstretched arms of affection and desire to embrace you and to press you to my heart, so you may feel the heat of my love, and so that I might clothe you in the raiment of my beauty, bedeck you as a bride, and make you one spirit with Me”).\textsuperscript{14}

The human person’s response to the interior suffering of Christ—this suffering out of love and yearning for the love of humanity—is likewise described in terms of love:

“If the soul understands this, she rises up with all her might and reaches out, embraces the interior cross, and desires with all her strength to cleave to her Bridegroom and to follow Him. She gives herself over to Him entirely so that He may possess her and rule her as He desires”.\textsuperscript{15}

The next chapter, chapter 16, contains a warning about this second stage, following a brief indication at the end of chapter 14. It would be wrong, the text says, if our “lower nature”—this refers to our physical nature—to were to attempt to appropriate this spiritual dimension:

“Man’s lower nature cannot come this far, for his nature is too weak and cannot bear it. If the human heart insisted on swallowing up that which is flooding the soul and what is wrought within her, then it would choke and fall into unconsciousness. Thereby the soul would be hindered in her ascent and the spirit would be lost in the entrance, and the lower faculties would no longer progress into Reality”.\textsuperscript{16}

It is therefore important, when meditating on the suffering of Christ, to seek the advice of spiritual teachers. In the text, these are called “mountain dwellers” (“of whom there are few”), because only those who are familiar with the three dimensions of the “mountain” can be genuine spiritual leaders. The point that the text seeks to make appears to be that body, soul, and spirit are three distinct dimensions that ought not to be mixed up or confused with one another. And the text especially underscores that the first dimension can be achieved through human initiative, whereas the others cannot. Human persons, as fundamentally receptive, may receive the latter only on the initiative of God:

“Thus you are guarded in all your ways, that is, if you savor nothing more in your passage upwards, downwards and inwards than you are granted or is promised
to you. So that you may be preserved herein, say and pray: “O Lord, incline your ear and hear me; preserve me in all my ways, for I can do nothing of myself. Preserve my soul, for it is sanctified by You. Preserve my spirit, for I have hoped in You, my Lord and my God”. If the soul has ascended in this way, as it is described above, she must remain there in her ground and go no farther forwards or backwards”.17

The text appears to warn against the desperate urge to generate interior, spiritual movements, and particularly through the use of certain physical practices.

3.5. Chapter 17 shifts the focus to the third dimension of the crucified Christ, namely his joyful spirit. To the contemporary reader, this dimension may appear somewhat surprising. The text begins with a confirmation that the spirit of the crucified Jesus Christ was completely joyful:

“... the spirit of Christ, who remains fixed and immovable in the perfect joy and delectation of his Godhead, in the essential unity of his higher powers, in plenitude of weal, which He never leaves even for an instant, no matter what suffering and abandonment his soul and body experience”.18

The majority of the exposition in this chapter concerns the consequences for the human person. Indeed, humanity partakes in the divine life precisely through the second Person of the Trinity’s adoption of human nature:

“It is here that our spirit is exalted and, with Christ’s spirit, is brought into the mountain of the Godhead; it returns to its true home and is welcomed back to its origin, embraced and surrounded by the Holy Trinity”.19

This deification has consequences for the whole human person, body, soul, and spirit:

“Here the spirit is inundated in the superessential good, in the light of the truth, fixed before the face of the Lord in simplicity of thought, purity of mind, and with imageless love, in endless contemplation of God in the spirit’s hidden ground and innermost recesses. In this superessential abyss, the spirit is overwhelmed and illuminated throughout, in knowledge of radiant truth, which flows through spirit, soul and body, heart and senses, and transforms a person in divine knowledge and clothes him with divine light, the first garment of purity”.20

The deification thus implies that also our spirit—whatever the pain of the body or the sorrow of the soul may be—remains (with Christ’s human spirit) united with the Father. Moreover, this aspect of deification is explicitly described as “common”. Although it is received in a unique way by each person, it is also something given to all people in common, and is therefore the foundation of community:

“There, the spirit sees itself surrounded by infinite light, and its vision penetrates to its hidden ground ( ... ). The spirit also recognizes the same in others, for all things exist in that light for it. That is, he looks at God simply, in the secret, deep abyss in the innermost recesses of the spirit and in all the grounds of the souls and the hearts of men, all of whom God desires to draw unto himself”.21

The text likewise emphasizes the Christological dimension, in terms and expressions that are traditional in Western Christian mystical literature. Deification is in essence a union with the person of Jesus Christ:

“... he transforms man and makes him by grace what Christ is by nature. He has united man’s will with his divine will; man’s desires with his divine desires; man’s intentions with his divine intentions; man’s nature with his divine nature. He is born in him, lives in him, walks in him, works therein, suffers there, rises and rejoices there in the fact that He has found a man after his own heart. In this, a man is emptied of all his acting and being acted upon, words and works, and has lost his form but not his essence, and he lives now no longer, but Christ lives in him”.22
Finally, the text develops the traditional theme of “mystical death”, and in a surprisingly accessible and yet sophisticated way:

“Just as when a good man dies, his soul is loosed from his body and blood, raised up, welcomed into God’s arms and introduced into heaven (for God, who Himself is the heaven of heavens in the soul, draws him unto Himself), so also the Godhead has illuminated this soul, filled her to overflowing, raised all her powers to Himself, encircling her with divine radiance, so that the soul lives more in God than in her own body, and the Godhead lives more in that body than does the soul herself. Her conduct is more in heaven than on earth, for she walks steadfastly in heaven with God, that is, in the original ground of the soul, which is a heaven in which God dwells. This is the heaven into which St. Paul was caught up, when he saw God directly, without means, in the third heaven (cf. 1 Cor. 12). That was in the primary essence of his soul, for St. Paul was not dead; his soul was in his body. But his soul was caught up in the primary essence of his soul where he saw God essentially, above all understanding and above all images, and above likenesses in his naked essence, just as he now sees Him in eternal life”. 23

The suffering of the crucified Christ results in his death, and it is therefore not surprising that the reflections on this suffering in the Pearl culminate in a description of mystical death, in which the human person is taken up entirely into the life of God.

3.6. It is essential for the exposition in the Pearl that the wounded body, the sorrowful soul, and the joyful spirit are one reality in the person of Jesus Christ, and that the unity of the active life, the spiritual life, and the divine life are explained in this way. Indeed, according to the Christology of Chalcedon, Jesus Christ is only one divine Person. This fundamental Christological insight is clearly present on the background of the exposition in the Pearl. When Christ’s physical pain and abandonment of soul are described, these are not separate from his joy—a joy which is real because his human spirit is fully and without separation united with his divine being, i.e., the Word, the second person of the Trinity. The dimensions of physical pain, abandonment of soul and joy of the spirit are all simultaneously present, though also clearly distinct.

Moreover, the meaning of each of the three dimensions can only be understood when seen from the perspective of their mutual interconnection, which is constituted by love. The suffering of the body and the soul is not mere suffering, but a suffering of love. And this love is not an ephemeral secondary attribute, but is rather the origin of everything that exists, namely God himself. In other words, though they are distinct, these three dimensions must be considered together in order to see their full meaning.

As mentioned at the beginning, these reflections seek to highlight the unity of the human person’s active life, spiritual life, and divine life. In this respect, the Pearl inherited the older mystical tradition that emphasized this unity. John of Ruusbroec is a good example of this earlier tradition. Many of his works explore these three dimensions and their mutual interconnections through the use of various metaphors. His Sparkling Stone is perhaps the clearest example, in which he describes the active life with the metaphor of the “faithful servant of God”, the interior, spiritual life with the metaphor of the “secret friend of God” and the contemplative life with the metaphor of the “hidden son”:

“But you should know that all faithful and good men are the sons of God. For they are all born out of the Spirit of God and the Spirit of God lives in them, and he moves and impels everyone in particular, according to his ability, towards virtue and good works in which he is pleasing to God. But because they have turned to God in different degrees and because their practice is different, I call certain people faithful servants, others secret friends, and some secured sons. Yet they are all servants and friends and sons, for they all serve and love and intend one God and they all live and work out of the free Spirit of God”.” 24
These distinct dimensions (active, interior, and contemplative) are each constituent parts of the same relationality, and they are thus inextricably linked, though not all people are conscious of each one simultaneously.

These issues periodically gave rise to considerable debate in the history of Christian reflection. The principal question in this respect is the extent to which these dimensions are chronologically sequential. This question is presumably partly inspired by the description of them as *via purgativa*, *via illuminativa*, and *via unitiva* (a classification first used by Origen).

These descriptions may appear to suggest that they are sequential stages, and that the prior stages are abandoned or become irrelevant as one progresses. Ruusbroec ardently opposed this misconception (e.g., Ruusbroec 1981a, pp. 115–21).

It is clear that the *Pearl*, when reflecting on Christ’s wounded body, sorrowful soul, and joyful spirit, expresses the same concern as Ruusbroec. Each of these dimensions are part of the same relationality, and therefore belong inextricably together.

4. Conclusions

In a period in which the Reformation was spreading like wildfire, the Cologne Carthusians published a series of remarkable texts—including the *Evangelical Pearl*—that may be considered syntheses of an old and rich spiritual tradition. These works are not polemical, but neither do they shy away from themes that were debated in the context of the Reformation. It is clear that the Carthusians attempted to elevate the theological disputes of that period to a higher, spiritual level and this to promote the spiritual unity of the Church in an ironic manner.

These contested themes undoubtedly include the question of images, imagelessness, and reflection on the suffering of Jesus Christ, and they are discussed repeatedly and extensively throughout the *Pearl*. The author—who remains anonymous—presents these themes as an organic unity of the wounded body, the sorrowful soul, and the joyful spirit of Jesus Christ. The passages analysed above, moreover, highlight the salvific significance of all three.

Those who turn to the image of the crucified Christ with these reflections in mind, need not run the risk of becoming needlessly attached to the image as such, or its merely physical aspects, and thus be distracted from its spiritual and salvific significance and from God himself. Indeed, as the text emphasizes, the second and third dimensions transcend human capacities. God is active here, while the soul and spirit are receptive.

These reflections culminate in a radical (and entirely orthodox) theology of deification, which continues a long tradition in Christian mystical literature, though no earlier authors are named explicitly. This climax is one of profound unity and communion between God and the human person. The anonymous author of the text and the Carthusians, who actively devoted themselves to circulating it, clearly invested this message with great importance.

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Notes

1 *Ende hier omme, sal de mensche goestelijc werden, soe moet hi alre vleeschelijcker liefden vertien ende ane gode alleene met loste ende met liefden cleven ende hem alse besitten. Ende daer mede wert verdreven alle verbeeldheitt ende alle ongheordende liefde ten creatuwen. Ende inden besitten gode met liefden, soe wert die mensche van binnen ongeheult; want god es een gheest die niemen eyghenlijc ghebeelden en can. Maer inden oefeninghen sal de mensche goede beelden vore nemen also dat doghen ons heeren ende alle die dinghe diene verwecken moghen te moere devocien. Maer inden besittene gode, so moet die mensche vallen op eene blote ongeheelttheit die god es.* Ruusbroec (1991, pp. 105–7).
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For the historical aspects (author, sources, edition, etc.) of the Pearl, see the first volume of the recent critical edition: (Peerle 2021).

Ende dese drie leven hebly mi selver geleert ende voor gegaen in die alder hoogste wise. Want in dat opperste deel was geests waerdie altoos verheven in dat gebryuken waer godheyt. U memorie was verheven in ongebeelder blootheyt ende vervelt met ewygher blijschap. Dijn reyn ghesicht door ghinck den afronge drijn goyldijckhen wesens. Ende dijnhen wil was gesonken ende ombevangen inden afrong dijnre minnen ende in weselcke onberuerlickhe ruste, daer ghy altyt antwoord dijnere heyliger driewuldiger euvvelichteyt, ende ghy bekendes ende mindes alle dingen in u selver. Ende ghy leydes in dijnre sielen een voortgaende duedechelie leven, ende si was altyt gesonken in weselcke ootmoedichheit, ende neycheden ende bayuchden haer met alder reverencien ende weerdichheit onder u hoge mogende godheyt, daer si van gevercht wert in volmaachtghed alder duedechen. Ghy leydes in u reyn lichaem een sverende werckende leven, want die werelt ende die sinlycke lust en had daer geen leven in, want het was reyn ende onbeheert van alle begeert van den sonden ende was een woninge dijnre godheyt ende een instrument daer ghy one verlossinge ende salichheit mede gevercht hebt. Ende het was u in allen dingen gehoorsaem en onderdanich ende bereyt te wercken dat dje geest eyschte. (Peerle 2021, pp. 84–85). Our translation.


The oldest known manuscript of the text, MS Brussels, Royal Library 4459–70, reads: Oratio, quam fecit dominus Arnulphus de Lovanio, quintus decimus abbas Villariensis; this text was edited in (Dreves and Blume 1909, vol. 1).

This theme is also a common subject of visual art, such as in the Bearing of Christ’s Body to the Tomb by a follower of Rogier van der Weijden (Paris, Louvre, inv. 20666).

zijn minnende herte, dat also wijde ontloken was als die hemel van minnen, opdat wi daerin souden woonen. (Peerle 2021, p. 275). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, pp. 240–41).

Siet, hierin is die sinlycke, nederste mensche opgeclommen in sinen geraet door dat lichaem Christi, ende staet op den voet des berchs, ende en mach niet voorder comen in dit leven. Ende daerom zijn wi altijt beginnende menschen, ende moeten blijven inden werckende leven na die menscheit Christi, die altijt werckende was dat goede. (Peerle 2021, p. 276). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, pp. 241–42).

Ende hoe dit die siele ende alle minnende sielen opgedaan ende ontloken worst ende int bevoelen worst gegeven, dat en can men nyet beschreven. Want dat inuwendiche lieden daer dye siele Chrisi in gecruyst ende uutgerecht was, dat was also ongelijk meer by zijn uutwendich liden als die hemel is vander aerden. Dat uutwendiche lieden was ongemeten groot, mer zijn inuwendich liden was also ongemeter meerder als hi die sielen meer minden dan die lichamen. Die wonden zijne sielen waren ontialtich meerder, wijder ende dieper, ende vloeyden veel meer van overveloegender minnen ende barnhertichheit dan dye wonden zijns lichaems van bloede. (Peerle 2021, pp. 276–77). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 242).

Dat roepen zijne sielen doorgaet den verborgen afrong met groten geluyt des suchtens ende schreypens na dye vervoelde sielen, met veel minnikhen ende trekende woorden etc. Dye armoede ende gelatentheyt zijere sielen was also groot, dat hi gheen onthout noch voetseel noch troost van zijne Godheyt en had. Mer hi hinc naect ende bloot, ende ellendich gelaten van dat heilich der heiligen, ende geset voor dat aensicht des Heren, ende denkhen ende aachten van dat heyligh der heyligen, ende getuigen ende bereyt voor dat te wercken ende in weseliche onberuerliche ruste, daer ghy altijt antwoord dijner heylighesteyt, ende u nommen ende onderdanich ende bereyt te wercken u gheeste ende van u gheest. (Peerle 2021, pp. 276, Peerle 2021, pp. 277). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, pp. 240–41).


Als dye siele dit verstaet, so recht si haer op met allen haren crachtyn, ende rect ust ende drucht haerselven inden inuwendigen cruce, ende begeert met allen crachten haren bruysdegom aen te hangen ende na te volgen, ende geeft haer geelic over, dat hi haer siele sach besitten ende regeren na zijne begeerten. (Peerle 2021, p. 278). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 243).

Hiertoe en mach die nederste mensch niet comen, want dye natuur is daer te crancck toe, ende si en mocht dat nyet lijden. Waert dat dat menschelichere herte dat inswelen woude, daer die siele mede overgoten is ende dat in haer gewrocht wert, het moest versmoren ende soude

17 . . . so wordy bewaert in al dijnen wegen, als ghi nyet meer en snaect in dijnen afganc ende oppanc ende inganc dan u ggeeven wort ende u geoorloft en is. Opdatmen hierin bewaert mach blijven, so salmen seggen ende bilden: 'O Heere, neecht dij ooren ende verhoort my, ende bewaert my in al mijne wandeelinghe, want ic van myselfen nyet en vermach. En de bewaert mijn siele, want si van u geheglicht is. Ende behouyt mijn gheest, want ic in u gehoepet hab, mijn Here ende mijn God.' Als dye siele aldus opgekommen is als voor geseet is, so mooste daer blijven in haren gront ende nyet voorder ingaen noch weder achterwaert. (Peerle 2021, pp. 278–79). Translation by Helen Rolfsen, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 244).


22 . . . ende verwandel den mensche, ende maect hem van gracien dat Christus is van natuurhe. Also heeft hi den wil vereenicht met sinen godliken wil, ende die begeerte met zijn godlike begeerte, die meyninge met zijn godlike meyninge, des menschen natuur met zijn godlike natuur, ende wort in hem gehoren, ende leeft daerin ende wandelt daerin, ende werct ende lietet daerin, ende verrijst ende verblijt hem daerin, dat hi eenen menschen gevouden heeft na zijnhre herten. Hieinen is die mensche te niet geworden van al sinen doen ende laten, woorden ende werkren, ende heeft verloren sinen sijn ende nyet zijn wesen; ende hi leeft teants niet, mer Christus leeft in hem. (Peerle 2021, p. 280). Translation by Helen Rolfsen, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 246).

23 Gelije een goet mensche, als hi sierfe, zijn siele sunt sinen lichaem ende bloede wort geloost ende getogen, ende wort ontfangen in die arnen Gods ende ingeleit inden hemel—want God is inder sielen ende trece in hem, dyge selve den hemel der hemelen is—also heeft die Godheit die siele doorlicht ende overgegaven, ende alle dye crachten aan hem getogen ende ovmangen met die godliche clareheit, dat die siele meer leeft in God dan in haren lichaem, ende die Godheit leeft meer inden lichaem dan die siele. Ende haer wandelinge is meer inden hemel dan inder aerden, want si wandelt stadelyck inden hemel met God, dat is: inden eersten gront der sielen, die eenen hemel is daer God stadelich in woont. Dit is den hemel daer Sint Pauwels in getogen was, daer hi eenen mensche gevonden hebet na zijnre herten, die mensche te niet geworden van al sinen doen en laten, woorden ende werkren, ende heeft verloren sinen sijn ende nyet zijn wesen; ende hi leeft teants niet, mer Christus leeft in hem. (Peerle 2021, p. 280). Translation by Helen Rolfsen, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 246).


25 One may think, for example, of the debate around so-called “quietism”, such as in the statements mentioned in the Constitution Ad nostrum from the Council of Vienne in 1312, the suspicion in which the Spanish Inquisition held the allumbrados, the problems Balthasar Alvarez (1533–1580) experienced in the Society of Jesus, or the papal bull Cum alias (1699), promulgated by Pope Innocent XII.

References


