

1959

# John of Ruysbroeck: his mysticism and influence upon Gerhardt Groote and John Tauler

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Dissertation

JOHN OF RUYSBROECK:

HIS MYSTICISM AND INFLUENCE UPON

GERHARDT GROOTE AND JOHN TAULER

by

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(A.B., Northeastern University, 1943;  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

1959

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## PREFACE

The mystic experience is the beginning of all mysticism, and this experience is subjective and authoritative. When Jean Paul Sartre speaks of all existentialists holding the common view that "subjectivity must be the starting point," he is touching upon that which differentiates the mystic from the student of mysticism, who knowing a great deal of the philosophy, psychology, or dialectic of mysticism, never experiences that which Augustine defines as "the flash of a trembling glance when my mind came to Absolute Being, That Which Is."

The mystic then endeavors to describe his subjective, and for him who received it, authoritative experience in words which will convey to his hearers or readers the depth and meaning of that experience. At this point the art of communication fails, and the man or woman who has experienced what is essentially ineffable is reduced to using symbols that can only hint at the beauty and depth of that experience. Then for mystic and audience alike, Goethe's definition must take over: "Mysticism is the scholastic of the heart, the dialectic of the feelings."

Ruysbroeck, in The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage says:

"And the coming of the Bridegroom is so swift that He is always come and is always dwelling within us with all His riches; and ceaselessly and ever and again He is coming in His own Person with new clarity, just as if He never were come before. For to be come consists in an eternal now, without time, which is constantly received in new joy and new delight."

Take this passage apart, philologically speaking, and it appears one mass of contradiction. To come indicates motion, an arrival at a place

where the subject was not before; always dwelling, connotes a continual presence which once come could only come again by a departure which is in no way indicated. To come indicates an action which must be completed in time, and could only be received in new joy and new delight if the original act of coming were repeated.

But let the spirit of that passage take over and heart and feelings will respond where the mind has scoffed. "The heart has its reasons which reason does not know."<sup>1</sup> Once heart and feelings accept the coming of the Bridegroom, the swiftness is understandable, representing the consuming present, when, in that original joy and delight all that was past becomes less than prologue, it is forgotten; and all that is to come is not anticipated. In that moment, the hope expressed by Faust, Verweile doch, du bist so schön! becomes the mystic reality.<sup>2</sup>

The authoritative part of the experience lies in the compulsion to share or instruct others in the Mystic Way. This is a paradox because the Bridegroom, to continue the Ruysbroeckian figure, comes to whomever He will and no amount of preparation, the mystics are in universal agreement at this point, can induce Him to come: but once He has come, those who have prepared for Him and received Him seem to be under a divine compulsion to share all of their knowledge in the light of their mystic experience with those who would prepare for it; but who may never receive it by their own endeavors.

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1. Pascal, Blaise, Thoughts, ed. Thomas S. Kepler (New York: World Publishing Co., 1955), p. 336.

2. Goethe, Faust (Stuttgart: Verlag der J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, n.d.), Part 2, Act V, line 524, p. 368.

Such a one is John of Ruysbroeck whose life spans almost the entire Golden Age of Mysticism and whose teachings and writings have directly influenced such men as Gerhardt Groote and John Tauler, and, through these men, have influenced the course of the Reformation. When one considers that Luther, Calvin, and Loyola were trained by men who had studied with the Brethren of the Common Life, and had been influenced by the Friends of God movement, the position of Ruysbroeck becomes clear and the judgment of Jones is validated: "Ruysbroeck is the link that joins the two movements--the Friends of God and the Brothers of the Common Life--together, and the spirit of both groups is found in him."<sup>1</sup>

With a renewed interest in mysticism on the part of professional writers and scholars, it is not a little surprising that so little concentration has appeared listed in "Microfilm Abstracts" and in "Doctoral Dissertations." Only ten theses or dissertations are listed since 1934 which deal with the general field, and only three have worked in the time span of this dissertation, none dealing with the Blessed John of Ruysbroeck.

A doctoral dissertation was submitted to the University of Michigan in 1952 by John E. Bingley entitled, "Mysticism and its effect on the attitudes towards literature and learning in the formative years of monasticism;" and in 1936 at Southern Baptist Seminary, John R. Stuckey submitted a dissertation on "A survey of mysticism until the Reformation;" in 1929, Grace Agnes Lee wrote a thesis for the M. R. E. degree on "The influence of the Brethren of the Common Life on three great Reformation leaders --Erasmus, Sturm, Loyola" at Boston University. One other doctoral disser-

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1. Jones, Rufus, Studies in Mystical Religion (London: 1909), p. 308.

tation by Claudia Louise Salley at the University of Michigan in 1953 touched upon Gerhardt Groote in "The ideals of the Devotio Moderna as reflected in the writings and the life of Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples."

In reading the writings of Ruysbroeck, many of which are in meter and some in rhyme, one is almost intuitively aware of the propriety of poetry to interpret the mystical writings; for poetry captures flavor and spirit, as well as maintaining intellectual integrity. The measure in the following study is English Heroic Verse, without rhyme, for in the words of Milton: "Rime being no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of Poem or good Verse, in longer Works especially, but the Invention of a barbarous Age, to set off wretched matter and lame Meter; . . ."<sup>1</sup> The first chapter, therefore, likewise imitates Milton in manner, if not in excellency, as an invocation, following the classic pattern, appears.

The second chapter which opens the body of the study defines mysticism in terms of Ruysbroeck's writings and establishes Ruysbroeck's place among the Christian mystics, together with a correlation of his own phraseology with the more commonly used terms of mysticism.

The third chapter presents the biographical data for the Blessed John of Ruysbroeck.

The fourth chapter considers Ruysbroeck's doctrine of God, his concept of the nature of Christ and the function of the Holy Spirit, together with his doctrine of man and concept of the Church as these various themes appear in his writings.

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1. Milton, John, Paradise Lost, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1935), p. 6.

The fifth chapter interprets Ruysbroeck's influence upon Gerhardt Groote and John Tauler, and leads to the summary and justification of the study.

Although Dean Inge believes that Ruysbroeck draws his knowledge from Eckhart, this great German mystic lies outside the scope of this study which is confined to the influences of Ruysbroeck on Groote and Tauler. While it is of more than passing interest to note that Eckhart was actually Prior at the school where John Tauler studied, there is no trace of Eckhart's influence on Tauler, while a few evidences of Ruysbroeck's impression upon Tauler are noted in one of the appendices.

The tremendous contribution of Evelyn Underhill to the literature of Mysticism cannot be overevaluated.

Her general work Mysticism has become one of the standards in the field replacing W. R. Inge's lectures on Christian Mysticism. While she is keenly aware of the psychological aspect of mysticism, she has not been blinded to the reality of the mystical experience. Her monograph on Ruysbroeck is by far the best in English; for Vincent Scully's A Medieval Mystic lacks objectivity.

Again, in the general field, the reader must be familiar with the two works by Rufus Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism and Studies in Mystical Religion. These are penetrating in insight and sympathetic by nature in contrast to the tongue in cheek attitude of Robert Vaughn whose tremendous reading in the mystics produced one of the first books in the field, Hours With The Mystics. It is unfortunate that Vaughn's reading resulted in a book cast in the form of dialogues which never quite arrive at maturity.

Any writer must depend upon the life of the Blessed John of Ruysbroeck as presented first by Henricus Pomerius. From this beginning all others draw their source material. One of the best monographs on Ruysbroeck was published in 1923 by A. Wautier D'Aygalliers entitled Ruysbroeck l'Admirable. He has captured the spirit of the times adequately and treats with sympathetic understanding Ruysbroeck's mysticism. His exposition of the doctrine of Ruysbroeck and of the originality of this mystic are full and complete and have established a standard against which all other works must be measured.

The investigation began with study of the life of Ruysbroeck, returning to original sources, wherever possible. Then followed a reading of his works in translation. The original writings are in Dutch; but complete works are available in Latin and in French and a goodly portion of the writings in English and in German. Next followed a study of Groote and Tauler in the same pattern, but of more limited scope; the study being made to ascertain the truth of Jones' premise cited above. Secondary sources proved an invaluable means of augmenting the originals, especially in regards to the writings; but wherever possible, these have been checked against available originals or standard translations. The conclusions that his influence would flow

Into the spirit of a time to come  
 . . . . . his ideas  
 Would come to flower in a way of life  
 Apart from speculation . . . . .

as through the teach-  
 ings of Gerhardt Groote, Ruysbroeck's love of work took hold of men; and the mystical concept of the spiritual marriage with Christ and the rest in God reached many through the preaching of John Tauler.

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## CHAPTER ONE

## THE SUMMONS TO THE QUEST

In an atomic age, when man's own mind  
 Is burdened by a power now unreleased<sup>1</sup>  
 That once surged in a single life of Man--  
 God touches me. Yielding to an impulse  
 Which I half fear,<sup>2</sup> I reach an open hand--  
 Anticipating a response from God  
 As personal at least as when friends meet--<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. The power of the atom was inherent in matter at all times. Only in the past few years has man discovered the way to release that power, and once released to harness it for good or ill. The power now unreleased refers to the power that was once released in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. That same power (i.e., to become the sons of God, John 1:12), is pictured as a burden upon man's mind, because that power is confined by our little faith.
  2. Cf., "The Hound of Heaven" by Francis Thompson, especially the line, "Lest having Him, I must have naught beside; . . ." quoted in Masterpieces of Religious Verse, James Dalton Morrison, ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), p. 57.
  3. Cf., the lines quoted by King George VI, in his Christmas message broadcast in 1939.  
 "And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:  
 'Give me a light, that I may tread safely into the unknown!'  
 And he replied:  
 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the  
 Hand of God,  
 That shall be to you better than light and safer than a  
 known way.'"

M. Louise Haskins

Quoted in Morrison, op. cit., p. 92.

To touch an open book,<sup>1</sup> Appalled by this,  
 Convinced I had been taken in--the faith  
 Evaporates, and shuddering I dismiss  
 The episode as fancy and address  
 Myself to routine tasks. The basic needs  
 Supplied, I rest myself, and sitting down,  
 My hand falls upon the book still opened.  
 The dim remembrance of a word flashes  
 Upon the inward eye,<sup>2</sup> and so my mind  
 Searches itself for a clearer vision:--  
 Finding a garden occupied by one  
 Who had been reading, I create the scene  
 Of Augustine's conversion,<sup>3</sup> and the word

- 
1. Cf., "Camerado, this is no book;  
 Who touches this, touches a man."  
 Walt Whitman  
 Quoted in American Poetry and Prose, Norman Foerster, ed.  
 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), rev. ed., II, 906.
2. "For oft when on my couch I lie  
 In vacant or in pensive mood  
 They flash upon the inward eye  
 Which is the bliss of solitude; . . ."  
 William Wordsworth  
 Quoted in Morrison, op. cit., p. 20.
3. "So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of  
 my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighbouring house a voice,  
 as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating,  
 'Take up and read; Take up and read.' Instantly, my countenance  
 altered, I began to think most insistently whether children were  
 wont in any kind of play to sing such words: nor could I remem-  
 ber ever to have heard the like. . . . Eagerly then I returned  
 to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I laid the  
 volume of the Apostle when I arose thence." Augustine,  
Confessions tr. Edward B. Pusey, "The Harvard Classics" (New York:  
 F. F. Collier and Son, 1909), VII, 141-142.

"Tolle lege" seizes me, now the book  
 Beneath my hand becomes alive. I find  
 A record of the past which points to God--  
 God in the life of man that made a man  
 Divine, as the Blessed John of Ruysbroeck  
 Drew meaning from the name engraved upon  
 The Sparkling Stone.<sup>1</sup> By curiosity  
 Impelled, I read the little book to find  
 Four men, one, an hireling who served himself;<sup>2</sup>  
 A faithful servant next, who loved the Lord;<sup>3</sup>  
 And then a secret friend compelled by love  
 To heed the quickening counsels;<sup>4</sup> then at last,  
 A hidden son who was completely nude--  
 A bare and imageless son--whose spirit  
 Transport beyond the flesh was one with God.<sup>5</sup>

- 
1. "And therefore the Spirit of our Lord speaks thus in the Book of the Secrets of God, which St. John wrote down: to him that overcometh, he says, that is to him who overcometh and conquereth himself and all else, will I give to eat of the hidden manna, that is, an inward and hidden savour and celestial joy; And will give him a sparkling stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. John Ruysbroeck, The Sparkling Stone, tr. C. A. Wynschenk Dom (London: John M. Watkins, 1951), cap. iv. Cf., Rev. 2:17.
  2. The Sparkling Stone, cap. vi.
  3. Ibid., cap. vii.
  4. Ibid., cap. viii.
  5. Ibid., cap. ix.

Confused by divers images, I sensed,  
 Uncomprehending the hidden spelling  
 Of the sacred name, holy name,--divine,  
 Intangible from which all elements  
 Received their form. Insensible to time  
 And space, as one completely labor worn  
 Lies down and in the moment before sleep,  
 Sense dulled, anticipates oblivion  
 So I anticipated God until  
 Passivity, to an echoing voice,  
 Vanished at command of the Holy One:  
 "Son of man," I was transported with joy;  
 "Son of man," I was overcome with love;  
 "Son of man," I was prostrate before God  
 "Stand upon your feet, I will speak to you."<sup>1</sup>  
 As a traveler sees his goal, you have seen.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ezekiel 2:1.

2. "I remember well  
 One journey, how I feared the track was missed  
 So long the city I desired to reach  
 Lay hid; when suddenly its spires afar  
 Flashed through the clouds; you may conceive  
 My transport. Soon the vapors closed again,  
 But I had seen the city, and one such glance  
 No darkness could obscure.

Robert Browning

Quoted in A Living Hope, arr. by Jesse Halsey (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1932), p. 335.

The journey is still yours, and will be yours  
Until the vision becomes your knowledge—  
Knowledge yielding to productivity  
Shows work, by which the vision of your faith  
Is justified. The completed cycle  
Faith, knowledge, work, will bring you here where now  
You stand, you will advance no more than this,  
But this will be the worth where now you feel  
You will both feel and know that I am God."

CHAPTER TWO  
THE MYSTIC WAY

A Definition of Mysticism

Man reaches eager, trembling hands to touch  
 Before and after. The lips of some sound  
 Me and mine,<sup>1</sup> magic words to have and hold  
 Mysterious power over the unseen.  
 These magi soar above the crowd, sustained  
 Like Simon Magnus, by contrivances  
 Hidden from curious eyes, but grossly real.  
 This magic power, by some exalted far  
 Beyond the selfishness of charlatan,  
 Directed toward humanity at large,<sup>2</sup>  
 Appears to be the mystic way; but set  
 By that great name<sup>3</sup> these virtues pale until

- 
1. ". . . we may class broadly as magical all forms of self-seeking transcendentalism. It matters little whether the apparatus which they use be the incantations of the old magicians, the congregational prayer for rain of orthodox Churchmen, or the consciously self-hypnotizing devices of 'New Thought': whether the end proposed be the evocation of an angel, the power of transcending circumstances, or the healing of disease. The object is always the same: the deliberate exaltation of the will, till it transcends its usual limitations and obtains for the self or group of selves something which it or they did not previously possess." Underhill, Mysticism, p. 71.
  2. "It is an individualistic and acquisitive science: in all its forms, an activity of the intellect, seeking Reality for its own purposes, or for those of humanity at large." Ibid.
  3. "Mysticism, whose great name is often given to these super-sensual activities, has nothing in common with this." Ibid.

The cheapness and the crudeness residue  
 Remain. Touching that residue, some minds,  
 Forgetting that the mind itself creates  
 The image of the senses, hesitate,  
 And then, Omar-like, proclaim that Nature  
 Triumphs,<sup>1</sup> and all phenomena can be  
 Explained; as if all nature and the mind  
 Were one great monolith on desert sand  
 Rising into Nothingness, nothing worth.<sup>2</sup>  
 Then, other minds, obsessed by their own worth,  
 Touch this same residue and interpret,  
 By vagaries of words, the mystic mind.<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. Alfred North Whitehead in Science and the Modern World relegates Nature to a dull position. "Nature gets credit which should in truth be reserved for ourselves; the rose for its scent, the nightingale for his song and the sun for its radiance. The poets are entirely mistaken. They should address their lyrics to themselves, and should turn them into odes of self-congratulation on the excellency of the human mind. Nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless, merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly." p. 80.
  2. "We would assert that there can be no essential difference between ecstasies whether produced by narcotics, or by hypnotic suggestion, or again, by what is known as religious ideas. Otherwise it would be necessary that human nature should vary in its very core." (De Montmorand, Rev. Philo, 1905) De Marquette, Jacques, Introduction to Comparative Mysticism (New York, Philosophical Library, 1949), p.
  3. This eremitic interpretation of mysticism has been genuinely strengthened by the activities of the great contemplatives. Although they themselves never fell into the error of confusing quietism and passivity with true mysticism.

An infant toying with eternal blocks,<sup>1</sup>  
 Building fantastic castles on the floor;  
 Toppling, rebuilding, break the heart's desire,  
 Not once seeing that the blocks unbuilt  
 Spell a name,<sup>2</sup> ineffable and sublime.

- 
1. J. B. Pratt in his book The Religious Consciousness endeavors to shape mysticism by psychology. His words illustrate this passage in the text. "Our point of view being here psychological we must seek for a definition which shall take mysticism as a psychological concept and make use of purely psychological differentia. And so far as I can see, if we are to do this--if we are to regard mysticism as a peculiar form of experience differing psychologically from other forms--we must give it a definition broad enough to include many things which are not specifically religious. One of the best short definitions of mysticism that have been suggested is 'the consciousness of a Beyond.' This is of course, indefinite, but by making it somewhat more elaborate and explicit we can construct a definition which though clumsy will, I think, fill all the essential requirements. I propose, therefore, that for our purposes, mysticism be defined as the sense of the presence of a being or reality through other means than the ordinary perceptive processes or the reason. It is the sense or feeling of this presence, not the belief in it, and it is not the result of sight or hearing or touch, nor is it a conclusion one reaches by thought; it is instead, an immediate and intuitive experience." p. 337. Professor Pratt continues for several pages to bring the knowledge of the "infant" [i.e., psychology] to bear upon mysticism with little success, a fact not surprising considering the scope of the book and the extent that his "training in psychology has provincialized [his] judgment and power of evaluation." preface, viii.
2. One critic accused Edwin Arlington Robinson of viewing the world as a prison house. When told of that criticism, he replied, "Not a prison house--but a kindergarten where we are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks."

"Psychology is a science of origins, not validity; and to claim for it the power of deciding upon the validity or truth of ideas is, in the end, to discredit it." E. Herman, The Meaning and Value of Mysticism (Boston, The Pilgrim Press, n.d.), p. 10. The preface is dated London, 1915, and penciled date in the Boston Public Library copy is June 30, 1916.

That some have failed to see upon the blocks  
 The letters spelling God, produced a way  
 Of life whose sensuality condemned  
 All longings of the soul as vain, and hope  
 For future life as a mild opiate,  
 Inducing rest, harmless to the body  
 Corporate when controlled. And mystics died,<sup>1</sup>  
 As other men; but what they saw--was it  
 "Some vast ocean empire of illusion"<sup>2</sup>  
 Where those adventurous thinkers went astray,  
 Or was it truth intuitively seen?  
 As Moses looked from Nebo's height to see  
 The promised land.<sup>3</sup> What shapes the Mystic Way

- 
1. "The spirit of the time may be right and then we can only murmur 'So much the worse for mysticism.' If it be dead and well dead, as animal sacrifice and patria potestas and feudalism are dead, then it is a subject only for psychological dissection or historical record. Yet it may not be dead. Perhaps the truth is that men no longer know how to use it; and then so much the worse for those who have forgotten." Charles A. Bennet, A Philosophical Study of Mysticism (New Haven, The Yale University Press, 1923), p. 3.
  2. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, [Barni, i, p. 304]
  3. "Every aspiring spirit has stood for brief but indelible moments upon the confines of a new world, has touched heights he was not competent to keep, has felt in one passing flash of intuition that all things were possible to him that believeth. Such meteoric illuminations have made him turn wistful eyes to the Mystic Way, only to be repelled once more by its sharply defined stages, its unfamiliar mechanism and its archaic trappings; above all, by its hateful suggestion of esotericism." Herman, op. cit., p. 34.
- "The spirit of man again and again wins heights which it is not competent to keep, and sees promised lands upon which it is not yet permitted to set foot." Ibid., p. 62.

To make it what it is? identify  
 The false, perceive the true, though hidden deep  
 Beneath external forms that, repellent  
 To our nature, seem akin to madness?  
 The beloved disciple set the content<sup>1</sup>  
 And each one chooses his own form of speech  
 To express that which he has known to be  
 True love; and thus for him the Mystic Way  
 Is that which draws him closest to his Love  
 His life records the struggle of the soul  
 To hold that Love.<sup>2</sup> And thus simply defined  
 The whole of Christian mysticism lies  
 In love identifying mind and soul  
 With God, and sharing sacrifice with Christ.  
 Intelligent and understandable<sup>3</sup>

---

1. II Jehn

2. "It is in our steady and unremitting struggle with the average that our salvation lies: to conform to the average is to lose one's soul." Herman, op. cit., p. 66.

3. "But its beginning and its end, its driving power and its substance is disinterested love. With St. Catherine of Genoa it desires, not anything that comes forth from God, but God only; with Dame Gertrude More it testifies that 'to give all for love is a most sweet bargain,' and cries out in its passionate moments, 'Let me love or not live.' Such love is continents removed from the flabby religious emotion that passes under that name. It is neither sentimental nor nebulous. It is the intelligent and deliberate identification of the soul with the mind and purposes of God, and involves a sharing of the sacrificial life of Christ. It imposes an inexorable discipline and commits to a war from which there is no discharge." Herman, op. cit., p. 68.

To those who have so loved; mysterious

To those who have not known that love in God.<sup>1</sup>

B. THE MYSTIC WAY: AN EVALUATION OF RUYSEBROECK'S  
PLACE AMONG THE CHRISTIAN MYSTICS

Rising above the minions of the earth

The saints loved visibly<sup>2</sup> stand heads above:

Looking after, to see the guiding past;

Looking forward, to glimpse the shining light;

But set amid the working of the day

They labor<sup>3</sup> with their hands for God and man.<sup>4</sup>

- 
1. Appendix A in Christian Mysticism by W. R. Inge lists twenty-six definitions of mysticism many of which stress a supra rationalism which can best be expressed by the analogy to love. This definition in no way limits the modes of expressing or communicating a knowledge of that love to others. It merely says what mysticism is and does not touch the how and why.
  2. "Surely the saints you loved visibly came  
To welcome you, that day in Picardy--  
Stephen, whose dying eyes beheld his Lord,  
Michael, a living blade of crystal flame,  
And all the flower of heavenly chivalry."  
Amelia Josephine Burr, Hearts Awake (New York:  
Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1919).
  3. "All records of mysticism in the West, then, are also the records of supreme human activity. Not only of 'wrestlers in the spirit' but also of great organizers, such as St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross; of missionaries preaching life to the spiritually dead, such as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius of Loyola, Eckhart, Suso, Tauler, Fox; of philanthropists, such as Catherine of Genoa or St. Vincent de Paul; poets and prophets, such as Mechthild of Magedeburg, Jacopone da Todi and Blake; finally, of some immensely virile souls whose participaion [sic] in the Absolute Life has seemed to force on them a national destiny. Of this St. Bernard, St. Catherine of Siena, and Saint Joan of Arc are the supreme examples." Underhill, Mysticism, p. 173.
  4. The Spiritual Marriage, lib. ii, cap. lxxiii. Cf. Underhill, Mysticism, p. 173.

They keep a youthful spirit, despite age;<sup>1</sup>

And if their language seems obscure and odd

They ask how human words can picture God.<sup>2</sup>

Among the blest whose knowledge was of God

One stands alone unrivalled in his grasp<sup>3</sup>

1. "From first to last he [the mystic] exhibits all the characteristics of youth; never loses—as that arrested thing, the normal adult must—the freshness of his reactions on the world. He has the spontaneity, the responsiveness, the instability of youth; experiences all its struggles and astonishments. He is swept by exalted feeling, is capable of ideal vision and quixotic adventure: there is 'colour in his soul.'" Underhill, The Mystic Way, p. 49.
2. Dom Cuthbert Butler in the Prologue of his book Western Mysticism, has a concise and excellent presentation of the language problem that faces mystics. He says in part, "The obscurity and apparent extravagance of their language is due to their courage in struggling with the barriers and limitations of human thought and language in order to describe in some fashion what they experienced in the height of the mystic state." p. 5.
3. "Students of mysticism from the pages of the Areopagite onwards will scarcely discover anything for which they cannot recall a parallel elsewhere. But there are many who maintain that Blessed John stands alone, unrivalled, in his grasp of what we may term the metaphysics of mysticism, in the dedication and sureness of his touch when describing the phenomena and progress of the mystic union, and in the combined beauty, simplicity, and loftiness of his language and style." The Catholic Encyclopedia (The Gilmary Society, New York, 1912), XIII, p. 281. Art. "Ruysbroeck" by Vincent Scully.

"Jan van Ruysbroeck . . . is the greatest of the Flemish mystics, and must take high rank in any list of Christian contemplatives and saints." Underhill, Introduction to John of Ruysbroeck, Trans. by C. A. Wynschenck Dom (London: John M. Watkins, 1951), p. xi.

"Next to Meister Eckhart in depth of life and in the massiveness of his spiritual impact of all the mystics of this fourteenth century movement is Jan Ruysbroeck, the greatest Flemish mystic. Eckhart is more Gothic and daimonic, in the good sense of that word, than Ruysbroeck is, but Ruysbroeck is more serene in spirit and clearer both in vision and in style than Eckhart. Together they are 'the Heavenly Twins' in the circle of 'the Friends of God.' If one could completely grasp and assimilate what these Discursi of the mystical life have reported of it, he would know all that one needs to know of mysticism." Rufus Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism, p. 194.

Of love so deep that human attributes  
 Must die in blessedness to be reborn  
 As love demands.<sup>1</sup> His name is lost but called  
 By his little village name of Ruysbroeck<sup>2</sup>  
 John has earned an honored place and the Church  
 Tardily has called him Blessed<sup>3</sup> where once  
 The learned Gerson called him heretic.<sup>4</sup>  
 Such stigma dies but slowly in the hearts  
 Of those who serve the Mother Church; but he  
 Himself proclaimed his faithfulness<sup>5</sup> serving

- 
1. ". . . when the spirit beholds a Darkness into which it cannot enter with the reason . . . and this is an unfathomable abyss wherein man must die to himself in blessedness, and must live again in virtues, whenever love and its stirring demand it." Ruysbroeck, The Sparkling Stone, p. 220, 1951 edition.
  2. "Of his father we know nothing; John's only family name, van Ruysbroeck, is taken from his native hamlet." Catholic Encyclopedia, loc. cit., p. 280.
  3. "A long and oft-interrupted series of attempts to secure official acknowledgment of his heroic virtues from Rome was crowned at length by a Decree, Dec. 1908, confirming to him under the title of 'Blessed' his cultus ab immemorabili tempore." Ibid., p. 281.
  4. For a complete refutation of Gerson's charges, see Ullman, Reformers before the Reformation, II, pp. 46-49.
  5. "Likewise, it is correct to say that Ruysbroeck's mysticism and ecclesiology support and clarify each other. He knows the human faults and schismatic shames of Mother Church. But he also knows her Petrine foundation, her apostolic power and order, and her ultimate invincibility." Ray C. Petry, Late Medieval Mysticism ("The Library of Christian Classics"; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 290.

"And next I will say that all good men are united with God through means. These means are the grace of God, and the sacraments of Holy Church . . ." Ruysbroeck, The Book of Supreme Truth, cap. iii.

Mankind with grace and God with greatest love.<sup>1</sup>  
 Thus, feeding "upon His Immensity,  
 Which cannot be devoured; and yearning  
 After His Infinity which cannot  
 Be attained"<sup>2</sup> John's own exercise of love  
 Flashed like lightning in the sky--above  
 All reason, activities of the soul are wayless<sup>3</sup>  
 Loving the love that loves, paying a debt  
 That never can be paid.<sup>4</sup> Contemplation  
 Earned him a mystic's name, and all his works  
 Reveal identity with God;<sup>5</sup> but life  
 Bestowed the name of Blessed for his deeds  
 Of love and kindness, laboring to bring  
 Man from darkness unto light, from falseness  
 Unto truth. To some he was ignorance

- 
1. "One of the greatest of Christian seers, one of the most manly and human of the mystics, it is yet as a lover, in the noblest and most vital sense of the word, that his personality lives for us. From first to last, under all its external accidents, we may trace in his life the activity--first instinctive, and only gradually understood--of that 'unconquerable love,' ardent, industrious, at last utterly surrendered, which he describes in the wonderful tenth chapter of The Sparkling Stone, as the unique power which effects the soul's union with God." Underhill, Ruysbreeck, p. 34.
  2. The Sparkling Stone, cap. x.
  3. Idem.
  4. The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, p. 59.
  5. "The chief representative of that theistical, but still predominately contemplative and transcendental Mysticism is Ruysbreeck [sic] a highly influential man." Ullmann, op. cit., p. 31.

Personified,<sup>1</sup> unlearned illiterate--

While others trace the strains of Augustine,

Bernard and Dionysius, and mystic

Victorines, Dominicans, Franciscans

Mingle in his writings--hardly the strains

Of ignorance<sup>2</sup> whichever judgment's passed

1. Denis the Carthusian (1402-1471) says 'I call him the Divine Doctor; he had no teacher but the Holy Ghost. He was ignorant and illiterate; Peter and John were the same.' Quoted in Baille's Reflections from the Mirror of a Mystic, Earle Baille (London: Thomas Baker, 1905), pp. 9-10.

"Ce moine possédait un des plus sages, des plus exacts, et de plus subtils organes philosophiques qui aient jamais existé . . . il sait, à son insu, le platonisme de la Grèce, le soufisme de la Perse, le brahmanisme de l'Inde et le bouddhisme de Thibet." Materlinck cited by W. R. Inge in Christian Mysticism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 172.

Dean Inge believes that Ruysbroeck gets all his philosophy from Eckhart and his manner of expounding it shows no abnormal acuteness.

2. Rufus Jones has come a complete cycle in his understanding of Ruysbroeck's education or learning. In his book Studies in Mystical Religion, 1909, he adopted the view of Denis augmented by Ruysbroeck's own statement every word he ever wrote had been under the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost. In the Flowering of Mysticism, he reverses that judgment recognizing the many influences that met in Ruysbroeck which indicated a formal training.

Eric Colledge in his Introduction to his translation from the Dutch of Ruysbroeck's Spiritual Espousals, more commonly called The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, speaks thus: "Great though his debt was to St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, the Victorines of Paris and others, and even though the use of the vernacular as a means of instruction was already traditional in the Low Countries, still Ruysbroeck gained for himself his 'miraculous' reputation for the ease and facility with which his thought seemed to grow and clothe itself in his own words." p. 39.

That concerns his training and his knowledge  
 One must confess that through his mysticism<sup>1</sup>  
 His every word speaks God's salvation sweet.<sup>2</sup>  
 The deepest paradox of work and rest  
 Lies at the heart of God.<sup>3</sup> This paradox  
 He used to educate the human soul  
 Along a wayless way to the Unwalled.<sup>4</sup>

---

1. Cf., supra., Chap. II, Part I, lines 55-60.

2. Surius, preface, "His every word is a work of salvation; it is God alone who speaks." Cited in Baille, op. cit., p. 10.

3. "But the inward-drawing touch draws us out of ourselves, and calls us to be melted and moulded in the Unity. And in this inward-drawing touch, we feel that God wills us to be His; and therefore we must renounce ourselves and leave Him to work our blessedness. But where He touches us by the outpouring touch, He leaves us to ourselves, and makes us free, and sets us in His Presence, and teaches us to pray in the spirit and to ask in freedom, and shows us His incomprehensible riches in such manifold ways as we are able to grasp." The Sparkling Stone, cap. x.

Cf., the prayer of Henry S. Nash, "Bless us, O God, with the vision of Thy being and beauty, that in the strength of it, we may work without haste and without rest; . . ." A Minute of Prayer, ed. by Christopher Cress. (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1954) p. 54.

4. "That which is wayless is above reason, not without it,  
 And it perceives all things without wonder.  
 Wonder is far beneath it,  
 And the life of contemplation is without wonder."  
The Twelve Beguines, cap. viii.

Dom, op. cit., p. 257 note.

"Contemplation is a knowing that is in no wise,  
 Forever dwelling above the Reason. . . .  
 It is not God,  
 But it is the Light whereby we see Him.  
 Those who walk in the Divine Light of it  
 Discover in themselves the Unwalled.

The Twelve Beguines, cap. viii.  
 Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 93.

C. A CORRELATION OF RUYSBROECK'S PERASEOLOGY  
 WITH THE GENERALLY ACCEPTED  
 THREE STAGES OF MYSTICISM.

1. The Active Life defined as Purgation

By virtue of his breath man lives, and life  
 Contains enough of challenge to assert  
 Demands upon a man, his life and goods.  
 But once the power of his soul awakes  
 And he embarks upon an inward quest,  
 He leaves the trappings and the suits of woe  
 For that within his life which passeth show.<sup>1</sup>  
 Three things must mark the quest, a conscience clear,  
 Obedience to God and Church and Will,  
 And desire for God's own glory great.<sup>2</sup>  
 These found in any man and he shall know  
 The grace of God; that instant he is good,

---

1. Cf. Hamlet: Act I, scene II.

2. Ruysbroeck, The Sparkling Stone, cap. 1.

"The first which a good man must have, is a clear conscience without reprehach of mortal sin. . . .

The second thing which pertains to a good man is that he must in all things be obedient to God, and to Holy Church, and to his own proper convictions. . . .

The third thing which behooves every good man is that in all his deeds he should have in mind above all else, the glory of God."

And all his past becomes as light in God.<sup>1</sup>  
 From that time on his self-surrender marks  
 No vapid acquiescence but a choice  
 Valiant and heroic.<sup>2</sup> Now must follow  
 The first great mystic step, as old delights  
 Delight no more, because the soul has found  
 A higher way.<sup>3</sup> And now the Active Life  
 Becomes Reality and such a gift  
 Must be received again, not once or twice,

- 
1. "Behold, these three things, when they are possessed in this way make a man good. And whosoever lacks anyone of these three is neither good nor in the grace of God; but whenever a man resolves in his heart to fulfil these three points, how wicked soever he may have been before, in that very instant he becomes good, and is susceptible of God, and filled with the grace of God." Idem.
  2. "Thus in his [Ruysbroeck's] system the demand upon man's industry and courage is made from the very first. The great mystical necessity of self-surrender is shown to involve, not a limp acquiescence, but a deliberate and heroic choice." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 95.
  3. "When our endeavour and will are one with the will of God, then we attain the first step on the ladder of love and the holy life." Ruysbroeck, The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, cap. 1.

This first step is the most difficult to explain to anyone not acquainted with spiritual joy. To them, purgation means renunciation and sacrifice, when in reality, it is a fulfillment of the parable of Jesus concerning the treasure in the field or the pearl of great price. It is finding a higher satisfaction in doing the will of God than in yielding to one's own desires, and it is experiencing a deeper sorrow in disobeying God's will as revealed to that person that any other joy can not displace. It is a deliberate choosing involving no sacrifice.

But in all its works stretching out towards God.<sup>1</sup>  
 Awakening has caused the man to see  
 And seeing, seek the Active Life until  
 A further step be shown. So now he strives  
 To emulate the virtue of his Christ.<sup>2</sup>  
 The first, humility, to meet the needs  
 Of men as if he were a servant.<sup>3</sup>  
 Then, the greatest of these, whereby the Christ  
 Opened eyes and lips and cast out devils  
 With an unfathomable love for us.<sup>4</sup>

- 
1. "The constructive side of the Purgative Way has consisted in the replacement of this egoistic indrawing energy by these outflowing energies of self-surrender, kindness, diligence, and the rest; summed up in that perfection of humility and love, which 'in all its works, and always, stretches out towards God.'" Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 109.
  2. "Now if we would follow Christ our Bridegroom in virtue, so far as we are able, we must consider in what wise He was inwardly and the works which He wrought outwardly; that is to say, His virtues and the deeds of these virtues." Ruysbroeck, The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, cap. ii.
  3. "And he was ever ready for all men in whatever inward or outward need they might be: as if he were the servant of all the world." Ibid.
  4. "His charity we cannot fathom and understand, for it flows out of the unfathomable fountain of the Holy Ghost, and transcends all that creatures have ever experienced of charity; for Christ was God and man in one Person." Ibid., cap. iv.

St. Paul's great chapter on the attributes of charity has completely overlooked one concept that Ruysbroeck stresses, namely, that love creates a debt which can only be repaid by love, and thus a constant struggle to love the Love that loves possesses the ghostly man. That this is unfathomable and incomprehensible to those who have never experienced it, Ruysbroeck readily admits. Cf. The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, pp. 59-60.

These two and patience that adorned the Christ  
 Bespeak his coming that is wholly past.<sup>1</sup>  
 He comes again with graces and new gifts  
 From God, by His own mercy answering  
 Our need.<sup>2</sup> As He was humble, so the man  
 Who seeks the inward life must overcome  
 And cast out Pride;<sup>3</sup> obedient unto God<sup>4</sup>

- 
1. "These then were Christ's inward virtues: humility, charity, and patient endurance. These three virtues Christ our Bridegroom practised during all His life, and He died with them, and paid our debt according to justice. And of His generosity He has opened His side. Thence flow forth the rivers of well-being and the sacraments of bliss. And He has ascended in power, and sits at the right hand of the Father, and reigns in eternity.  
  
"This is the first coming of our Bridegroom, and it is wholly past." Ibid., cap. v.
  2. "The second coming of Christ our Bridegroom takes place every day within good men; often and many times, with new graces and gifts, in all those who make themselves ready for it, each according to his power. . . . Its wherefore is fourfold: God's mercy and our destitution, God's generosity and our desire. These four things cause the growth of virtue and of nobleness." Ibid., cap. vi.
  3. "And he is humble in his devotions, both outwardly and inwardly, before God and before all men, so that none are offended because of him. And so he overcomes and casts out Pride, which is the source and origin of all other sins." Ibid., cap. xii.
  4. Ruysbroeck's concept of obedience embraced the Catholic concept which included obedience "to Holy Church, to the sacraments, to the prelates and their teachings, to their commandments and their counsels and to all the good customs practised by Holy Christendom." Ibid., cap. xiii. This will be more fully treated in Chapter Four under the heading "The Doctrine of the Church as Revealed in the writings of Ruysbroeck."

In patience, in meekness, renouncing self<sup>1</sup>  
 Assuming kindness and compassion  
 So that a fellow-feeling with all men  
 May grip his heart. And zeal and diligence  
 Give birth to temperance and soberness  
 As purity prepares his whole to meet  
 With God to find fulfillment for his life.<sup>2</sup>  
 The purging of the soul of man is done  
 Not in an eremitic solitude  
 But in an active life which will prepare  
 The seeker for an inward life of grace--  
 Fellowship with the Father of us all.<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. These and the following virtues are used by Ruysbroeck to illustrate the Active Life. They are representative of the tasks which a spiritual director would impose so that the virtues might be realized as purgative process continues. Ruysbroeck treats of each virtue in a brief paragraph as the Active Life finally culminates in a desire to know the nature of the Bridegroom.
  2. "When a man through the grace of God is able to behold, and his conscience is clean, and he has considered the . . . comings of Christ our Bridegroom, and when he has gone out with the virtues: then there ensues the meeting. . . . In this meeting lies all our bliss, the beginning and end of all virtue; and without this meeting no virtue has ever been fulfilled." Ruysbroeck, The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, cap. xxv.
  3. "It is plain that the Active Life in Ruysbroeck's system answers more or less to the Purgative Way, considered upon its affirmative and constructive side, as a building up of the heroic Christian Character." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 115.

## 2. The Interior Life defined as Illumination

The Active Life, governing man's conduct,  
 Yields to illumination when the school  
 Of faith has done its work.<sup>1</sup> This second age  
 In one who seeks to lead the ghostly<sup>2</sup> life  
 Is called an Inward Life Interior  
 And hidden from the eyes of man. It aims  
 To bring right vision and right thought to man.<sup>3</sup>  
 Thus to prepare the vision and the thought  
 Christ comes again--three times--to stir the man.  
 The first an inward urge which "gives and takes  
 Makes rich and poor, brings weal and woe"<sup>4</sup>

- 
1. "Next the period of education completed, and those new powers or virtues which are the 'ornaments of the spiritual marriage' put on, the trained and purified consciousness emerges into that clear view of Reality in which it lives and moves, which is known sometimes as 'the practice of the Presence of God' or more generally, as Illumination." Underhill, The Mystic Way, p. 53.
  2. Connoting for Ruysbroeck as well as other mystics a life inspired by the Holy Ghost, i.e., spiritual.
  3. "Ruysbroeck's stages of mystical experience are readily identifiable. The active life presents the way of purgation and ethical purification. Here is the range of self-disciplined service and self-conquest. The interior life is one of illumination and intellectual purification as over against the ethical purification of the active life. The aim here is right vision and right thought, even as right conduct preponderates in the active way. Late Medieval Mysticism (London: S. C. M. Press, Ltd., 1957), p. 289. Ed. R. C. Petry.
  4. The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. 11, cap. v.

Cf., the parable of the talents.

"This streaming of God into us demands of us a flowing out and a flowing back, with all these riches, into that same source from which that torrent has flowed. And in this torrent God gives to us and shows to us great wonders; but He asks back from the soul all His gifts, increased beyond anything that any creature could accomplish." Ibid., lib.ii, cap. vi.

To him who seeks an inward life of trust.  
 The second time he comes with increased gifts  
 Like unto a torrent and then demands  
 Them back.<sup>1</sup> The higher powers of the soul  
 Embrace the Lord in unity of love,  
 As twice before He came, He comes again.  
 He brings a unity within which "draws  
 Together soul and body, heart and sense."<sup>2</sup>  
 This focusing of power brings a peace,  
 A fire of love, flamed by the breath of God.<sup>3</sup>  
 Men living inward lives know inward love  
 Which easily forgoes all things to gain  
 That which it loves.<sup>4</sup> Thus is devotion born

- 
1. "The third way in which our Lord comes inwardly is by an inward stirring or touch in the unity of the spirit, wherein are the higher powers of the soul; wherefrom they flow forth, and to which they return again, and with which they always remain united in the bonds of love and through the natural unity of the spirit." Ibid., lib. ii, cap. vii.

This terminology is reserved by many mystics for the third stage of unification. For Ruysbroeck, this unification in spirit is not part of the superessential life which is seeing God with God.

2. The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. ii, cap. ix.
3. "Inwardness is a sensible fire of love, which the Spirit of God has blown to a flame, and which urges a man from within; and he knows not whence it comes nor what has befallen him." Ibid., lib. ii, cap. x.
4. "Sensible love forsakes all creatures as regards pleasure, not as regards need. Inward love feels itself moved from within by the Eternal Love; and this it must ever cherish. Inward love easily forgoes and despises all things that it may obtain that which it loves." Ibid., lib.ii, cap.xi.

To move and draw a man in service true  
 Bestowing blessedness from God alone.<sup>1</sup>

One dark valley still remains, its passage  
 Must be taken by all who climb the way.

And in the darkness of the Night, the Soul<sup>2</sup>  
 Feels itself forsaken and temptations  
 Rise to plague and to despair. Forsaken  
 By the Lever, a nameless fear, half-doubt  
 Lest failure come, sets in, and Job himself  
 Becomes example of the faith that saves.<sup>3</sup>

This suffering abandonment should be  
 An inward joy.<sup>4</sup> To assuage this sorrow  
 Christ comes, a living fountain flowing forth,  
 As brooks into the powers of the soul,<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid., lib., cap. xii.

2. "This is the period of spiritual confusion and impotence, the last drastic purification of the whole character, the remaking of personality in accordance with the demands of the transcendent sphere, which is called by some mystics the Dark Night of the Soul, by others the 'spiritual death,' or 'purgation of the will.' . . . Spiritual man is driven from his old paradise, enters on a new period of struggle, must evolve 'another storey to his soul.'" Underhill, The Mystic Way, p. 55.

3. The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. ii, cap. xxix.

4. "Of all this suffering and abandonment the man should make an inward joy; and he should give himself into the hands of God, and should be glad because he is able to suffer for the glory of God. . . . And if he has indeed followed the way of the virtues straight to this degree, even though he has not passed through all the states which have been pointed out heretofore, it is not needful, if he feels within himself the source of the virtues: which is in activity, humble obedience; and in passivity, patient resignation." Idem.

5. Ibid., lib. ii, cap. xxxiv.

Nourishes the memory, and drenches  
 Understanding, and finally flows forth  
 A will with every means of grace absorbed.<sup>1</sup>  
 Through the valley refreshed by brooks of grace  
 Man is established in the bonds of love  
 Thus set he turns to God and all the saints<sup>2</sup>  
 Still, not content because compassion burns  
 He turns to sinners Pagans, Jews and all<sup>3</sup>  
 Unbelievers that they may love his Christ.  
 His friends in Purgatory next demand  
 Consideration, then his ardent prayer  
 Receives in ghostly wise an answer sure,

- 
1. This living fountain is described in chapters XXXV to XXXIX and culminates in Ruysbroeck's oft repeated demand that "the fountain head of grace ever demands a flowing back into the same source from whence the flood proceeds." Ibid., lib. ii, cap. xxxvii. Cf., The Sparkling Stone, cap. viii., The Book of Supreme Truth, cap. xiii.
  2. "Now understand this: this man shall go out to observe God in His glory with all saints. And he shall behold the rich and generous outflowing of God with glory, and with Himself, and with inconceivable delights towards all the saints, according to the longing of all spirits." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. ii, cap. xl.
  3. "Now, since this man bears a common love to all, he prays and beseeches God that His love and His mercy may flow forth towards Pagans, and towards Jews, and towards all unbelievers, that He may be loved and known and praised in heaven, and that our glory, our joy and our peace may spread to all the ends of the earth." Ibid., lib. ii, cap. xli.

The Spirit's thrust and prayer abate at once.<sup>1</sup>

Finally towards himself and all good men

He goes out and possesses peace in God.<sup>2</sup>

- 
1. "Then the man sometimes becomes so intense and so ardent in his prayer that he receives in ghostly wise the answer that his prayer has been heard. And with the coming of this sign the thrust of the Spirit and the prayer abate at once." Ibid., lib. ii, cap. xlii.
  2. "And then he shall turn wholly inwards upon himself with all the saints and with all the just, and possess in peace the unity of his spirit, and therewith the most high Unity of God, wherein all spirits rest." Idem, lib. ii, cap. xliii.

### 3. The Superessential Life defined as Unification.

Since we are heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ

We can partake of His Divinity.<sup>1</sup>

Christ taught, not of Himself, but God, and said:

"If any man willeth to do His will"<sup>2</sup>

That he should know the words, and greater works

Perform. This is not for a favored few

But any man who truly seeks the Way

And follows faithfully can be at one

With God. And Ruysbroeck walked this Mystic Way.

Finding life that he called "more than being"<sup>3</sup>

Unattainable through skill or power

Of works, a gift from God to whom He will:<sup>4</sup>

Carrying ourselves to God, sacrifice

Perpetual, emerging from ourselves,

And our created nature, we possess

---

1. Cf., 2 Peter 1:4.

2. John 7:17.

3. Overwesen or super-essential. While The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage sets forth this concept in the four brief chapters of Book III, it is more completely treated in The Sparkling Stone under the images cited in Chapter One of this text: hirelings, faithful servants, secret friends, and hidden sons.

4. "And no one can attain to this through knowledge or skill, nor with any exercise, but only he whom God will unite with Him in spirit, and will illumine with Himself, is able to contemplate God and no-one else." The Spiritual Espousals, p. 179.

God, in an everlasting death to self.<sup>1</sup>

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord"<sup>2</sup>

This gift of God can only come to one

Whose feet have walked along the wayless way<sup>3</sup>

Super-essence can not be told in words

To know it we must ourselves be in it

Losing all distinction,<sup>4</sup> ever working

Toward a goal they can never earn, yet love

Demands unceasing vigilance to help

1. "In our approach to God, we must carry with us ourselves and all our works, as a perpetual sacrifice to God; and in the Presence of God, we must forsake ourselves and all our works, and, dying in love go forth from all creatureliness into the superessential richness of God: there we shall possess God in an eternal death to ourselves." The Sparkling Stone, cap. ix.
2. Revelation 14:13.
3. "Now this active meeting and loving embrace are in their ground fruitive and wayless; for the abysmal Waylessness of God is so dark and so unconditioned that it swallows up in itself every Divine way and activity, and all the attributes of the Persons, within the rich compass of the essential Unity; and it brings about a Divine fruition in the abyss of the Ineffable." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. iii, cap. iv. Cf. supra., Chapter II, section B, note 4, p.
4. It is at this point that many critics attack Ruysbroeck. Yet he repeatedly states that creatures losing all distinction united to God, never become God. This union "is wild and desolate as a desert, and therein is to be found no way, no road, no track, no retreat, no measure, no beginning, no end, nor any other thing that can be told in words. And this is for all of us Simple Blessedness, the Essence of God and our super essence, above reason and beyond reason. To know it we must be in it, beyond the mind and above our created being; in that Eternal Point where all our lines begin and end, that Point where they lose their name and all distinction, and become one with the Point itself, and that very One which the Point is, yet nevertheless ever remain in themselves nought else but lines that come to an end." The Seven Cloisters, cap. xix.

Each man along the Way to God.<sup>1</sup> And thus  
 Man's highest blessing consummates in God,  
 The inevitable result of love.<sup>2</sup>  
 One further truth remains--to apprehend  
 The love of God--a pouring out of good  
 Which good flows back to God, then add to this  
 Immersion in a wayless depth where God  
 Bestows beatitude, and essence dies  
 In solitude and ignorance complete,  
 Where light turns dark and contemplation  
 Yields to essential blessedness alone.  
 Essential unto the Creator God  
 Beyond all essence for his creature man.<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. "But there are found some foolish men who would be so inward that they would neither act nor serve, even in those things of which their neighbor has need. Behold these are neither secret friends nor faithful servants of God; but they are altogether false and deceived. For no man can follow the counsels of God who will not keep His commandments." The Sparkling Stone, cap. vii.
  2. "Now this rapturous meeting is incessantly and actively renewed in us, according to the way of God; for the Father gives Himself in the Son, and the Son gives Himself in the Father, in an eternal content and a loving embrace; and this renews itself every moment within the bonds of love. For like as the Father incessantly beholds all things in the birth of His Son, so all things are loved anew by the Father and the Son in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. And this is the active meeting of the Father and of the Son, in which we are lovingly embraced by the Holy Ghost in eternal love." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. iii, cap. iv.
  3. "And in consequence of this enlightened men have found within themselves an essential contemplation which is above reason and without reason, and a fruitive tendency which pierces through every condition and all being and through which they immerse themselves in a wayless abyss of fathomless beatitude, where the

Thus unified the synthesis appears  
 That man has utilized at last the whole  
 Of all his complex being: Body, heart  
 And soul.<sup>1</sup> And once united

"These with God shall ebb and flow,  
 Having and joying, they shall empty go;  
 They shall both work and passively endure,  
 And in their superessence rest secure.  
 They shall go out and in, and find their food,  
 And, drunk with love, in radiant darkness sleep in God."<sup>2</sup>

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Trinity of the Divine Persons possess their Nature in the essential Unity. . . . There they fall from themselves into a solitude and an ignorance which are fathomless; there all light is turned to darkness; there the three Persons give place to the Essential Unity, and abide without distinction in fruition of essential blessedness. This blessedness is essential to God, and superessential to all creatures; for no created essence can become one with God's Essence and pass away from its own substance." The Book of Supreme Truth, cap. xii.

1. "So the Superessential Life is the simple, the synthetic life, in which man actualizes at last all the resources of his complex being. The active life of the response to the Temporal Order, the contemplative life of response to the Transcendent Order, are united, firmly, held together by that 'eternal fixation of the spirit'; The perpetual willed dwelling of the being of man within the Incomprehensible Abyss of the Being of God, qui est per omnia saecula benedictus." Underhill, Raysboeck, pp. 184-185.
2. The Book of the Supreme Truth, cap. xiii.

## CHAPTER THREE

## THE LIFE OF THE BLESSED JOHN OF RUYSBROECK

## The Active Life, (1293 - 1317)

Groenendael, where once my brothers found me  
 Rapt in ecstasy, my writing tablet  
 On my knee—to their startled eyes it seemed  
 The tree and I were unconsumed though wrapped  
 In flame,<sup>1</sup> and the burning bush of Moses  
 Was verified to them.<sup>2</sup> My Groenendael,  
 My valley green from which I see the world  
 Through eyes of memory, old dim eyes  
 Of more than eighty years.<sup>3</sup> Nativity  
 To me has always been of Christ, not man.  
 Perhaps because my father left no mark,<sup>4</sup>

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1. "No authentic portrait of Ruysbroeck is known to exist; but the traditional picture represents him in the canonical habit, seated in the forest with his writing tablet on his knee as he was in fact found one day by the brethren--rapt in ecstasy and enveloped in flames which encircle without consuming the tree under which he is resting." Vincent Scully, "Ruysbroeck," The Catholic Encyclopedia, XIII (1912), 281.
  2. Exodus 3:2.
  3. Ruysbroeck's dates: (?), 1293 - December 2, 1381.
  4. "We know nothing of his father." Evelyn Underhill, Ruysbroeck (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1915) p. 7.  
 "Of his father we know nothing; John's only family name, van Ruysbroeck, is taken from his native hamlet." Scully, loc. cit., p. 280.

And I myself when one with God, no son  
 Or daughter in the flesh. Yet I was born  
 In Ruysbroeck when John the First was ruler  
 Of the land.<sup>1</sup> Ruysbroeck, near the river Senne,  
 A half-day's journey from Hal or Brussels:  
 Porphyry quarry<sup>2</sup> to adorn the church  
 Or raucous city life to rape the soul  
 Of man. From the sublimity of life  
 Serene---far beyond the sense of being<sup>3</sup>  
 In the flesh, I retrace the ways I walked  
 To remember the long-forgotten years.  
 The home I left, the home I found, and now  
 All this is recreate<sup>4</sup> because I've seen  
 A vision of my mother, who like one  
 Before<sup>5</sup> told her son that where she then was  
 Soon he too would be, and I understand.<sup>6</sup>

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1. John the First, Duke of Brabant, 1261 - 1294.
  2. There was a porphyry quarry at Hal. Cf. "Brabant," Encyclopedia Britannica (14th ed.) III, 997-998.
  3. Super-essential is considered beyond essence or being, not need, as in non-essential.
  4. Deliberate use of verb as a noun.
  5. Monica to Augustine.
  6. "He had attained the good old age of eighty eight, when his mother appeared in a vision to warn him to make ready for the approaching end." Vincent Scully, A Medieval Mystic (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1911), 118.

My mother, my good and pious mother<sup>1</sup>  
 Who loved not wisely but too well,<sup>2</sup> from whom  
 I fled, even more than from the village.  
 Village--a collection of one room huts  
 Grouped around an humble chapel<sup>3</sup> but here  
 Was I born, and here I lived and waited  
 Until the first faint stirrings of a life  
 Divine called me through restless turbulence<sup>4</sup>  
 To my uncle's home in Brussels. There love  
 Did not smother me, but brought to flower  
 The growing plant. This was no escapade  
 But rather an elopement<sup>5</sup> which would end  
 In spiritual marriage, an union

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1. " . . . his mother is described as a good and pious woman, devoted to the upbringing of her son--a hard task, and one that was soon proved to be beyond her." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 7.
  2. " . . . von seiner verwitweten Mutter bis zu seinem elften Jahre erzogen wurde, ihr aber dann entlieft, da sie ihn wohl allzu zärtlich hielt." Gabriele Dolesich, Die Mystik Jan van Ruysbroecks des Wunderbaren (Habelschwerdt [Schlef.]: Franke's Buchhandlung, 1926), p. 1. "Les biographies, qui parlent longuement de sa mère sont muets sur son père ce qui a fait supposer que Jean était un enfant naturel." A. Wautier d'Aygalliers, Ruysbroeck l'Admirable (Paris: Perrin et Cie., 1923), quoting K. Emelens, introd. aux Oeuvres de Soeur Hadewyck, editées par le prof. Vercouille, p. 158.
  3. "Représentons-nous une agglomération de pauvres huttes d'argile ou de bois, groupées autour d'une humble chapelle. Ces primitives habitations se composaient le plus souvent d'une seule pièce." Wautier, op. cit., p. 156.
  4. Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 9.
  5. The word s'enfuir used by Wautier, op. cit., p. 161, connotes elopement and justifies the statement in the text. The Latin of Pomerius simply states: sicut ille civium turmas in deserto latuit. Pomerius, lib. i, cap. ii, in Analecta Bollandiana.
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Implicit in Saint Matthew's words, "Ecce  
 Sponsus venit, exite obviam ei."<sup>1</sup>  
 It was here I learned, at my uncle's house,  
 That ties of blood could give and not possess.  
 My dear uncle there became my teacher  
 Great in love as he shaped my tender years.<sup>2</sup>  
 Together with a younger friend<sup>3</sup> we lived  
 The active life. From the first my teacher  
 Set my thoughts beyond the scope of knowledge  
 To a sphere where concern for earthly wealth<sup>4</sup>  
 Did not exist. It was no easy task,

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1. Matthew 25:6.
  2. Ruysbroeck went to Brussels when he was eleven years old. "Toujours est-il que Jean Hinckaert l'accueillit avec joie (gaudenter suscepit) et se chargea de son éducation." Wautier, op. cit., p. 162.
  3. It has generally been accepted that Francis van Coudenberg was younger than John Hinckaert but older than Ruysbroeck. Evelyn Underhill clearly implies this as she describes the interrelationship between the three in these words: "The lovers of Ruysbroeck should not forget how much they owe to the men who received, loved, influenced and educated the brilliant, wayward and impressionable child." Ruysbroeck, p. 11. However, Wautier, quoting Hererologium Viridisvallis states that "Coudenberg naquit en 1296 et mourut en 1386," (op. cit., p. 162) which would make Coudenberg eight years old at the time Ruysbroeck came to his uncle's home in Brussels. This would also clarify the later Groenendael experience when Hinckaert, because of his advanced age, did not join Ruysbroeck and van Coudenberg in following the rule of the Augustinian Canons, but "refused to burden the young community with a member who might be a drag upon it and could not keep the full rigor of the rule." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 23.
  4. "He [Hinckaert] had distributed his wealth, given up all self-indulgence and now, with another and younger Canon of the Cathedral named Francis van Coudenberg, lived in simplest, poorest style a dedicated life of self-denial, charity and prayer." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 10.  
 "Hinckaert s'était complètement détaché des vanités du siècle en même temps qu'un de ses amis, Franco de Coudenberg, (de Frigidmonte). Les deux amis auraient constitué une petite association mystique à laquelle se serait joint le jeune Ruysbroeck." Wautier, op. cit., p. 162.

Because the days were good when I was born.  
 No dead language stifled hope, and man's love  
 For his own fellow-man had been reborn.  
 The royal rights, long held divine, were bound  
 By common law for common good. This age  
 Proclaimed the dawn of Flemish Liberty.<sup>1</sup>  
 Think me no fool to turn my back on this,  
 But rather one possessed by such a glimpse  
 Of a true treasure, that all this seems dross.  
 Lured by a sparkling stone and a new name,  
 A stone of shining white and red like fire  
 Which is given to him who overcomes,  
 I prepared for life.<sup>2</sup> My mother followed,

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1. "Stallaert and Van der Hagen call this age the 'cradle' of political, moral, and intellectual life of Belgium and say that it witnessed the dawn of Belgian liberties. The cruelties and crimes of earlier days were, they continue, checked by law. The commons (third estate) were introduced into the administration of the communes. The common law took on fixed form. Agriculture was improved and commerce and industry were extended. Wealth was increased, and prosperity general. The fine arts were cultivated and architecture was magnificent. One national language, a vernacular, displaced Latin for use in public documents. An abundant native literature and many literary centers were created." Frederick Eby and Charles Flinn Arrowood, The History and Philosophy of Education Ancient and Medieval (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940), p. 715. Quoting Stallaert and Van der Hagen, De l'Instruction publique au moyen âge, p. 97.
  2. "AND WILL GIVE HIM A SPARKLING STONE, AND IN THE STONE A NEW NAME WRITTEN WHICH NO MAN KNOWETH SAVING HE THAT RECEIVETH IT. This stone is called a pebble for it is so small that it does not hurt when one treads on it. This stone is shining white and red like a flame of fire, and it is small and round and smooth all over. . . . Now to him who overcomes and transcends all things, this sparkling stone is given; and with it he receives light and truth and life." Jan van Ruysbroeck, The Sparkling Stone, trans. C. A. Wynschenk Dom (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1916), pp. 187-188.

Monica-like, and would have lived with us.

Denied in this, she joined a Beguinage,

Rejoicing to the very day she died

At every step I made along the way

To ordination in the Church of God.<sup>1</sup>

Which ordination she knew in her soul

And as I raised the Host in my first Mass

I saw her, lately dead, released from pain

And entered into Heaven by the power

Of the sacrifice I first offered there.<sup>2</sup>

Each sacrifice renewed a conscious hope--

The same that led the Blessed Francis on

To find Alverno's solitude a heaven--<sup>3</sup>

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1. "Die Mutter war ihm inzwischen in die Stadt gefolgt, hatte ihn gefunden und sich anfangs mit der Trennung von ihm nicht einverstanden gezeigt. Dann aber war sie in ein Beghinenhaus gezogen, von wo aus sie die weitere Entwicklung des Sohnes verfolgen konnte." Dolezal, op. cit., p. 1.

Wautier intimates that his mother's entrance into the Beguine house was a melancholy affair. His argument is weak and the text holds to the joy with which Ruysbroeck's mother probably regarded her son's progress towards ordination.

2. "Again and again he saw in dramatic vision the soul specially dear to him. . . . At the moment in which he finished saying his first Mass, this vision returned to him; and he saw his mother's spirit, delivered from Purgatory by the power of the sacrifice which he had offered, entering into Heaven--an experience originating in, and giving sharp dramatic expression to, that sense of new and sacred powers now conferred on him, which may well at such a moment have flooded the consciousness of the young priest." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 15.
3. "Two years before his death Francis went up Mount Alverno in the Apennines with some of his disciples, and after forty days of fasting and prayer and contemplation . . . 'he had a vision . . . a cross, and the seraph was nailed to it . . . Francis felt sharp pains mingling with the delights.'" E. C. Butler, "Francis of Assisi," Encyclopedia Britannica, (11th ed.) X, 938-939.

To be like Christ in all humility.<sup>1</sup>  
 My thoughts directed inward came to be  
 Reflections of the grace Divine, freely  
 I turned my will to God and purged my soul  
 Of mortal sin through the sacred office  
 Confessing and confessed.<sup>2</sup> For many years  
 Content, my friends and I served Saint Gudule's.  
 Simplicity and poverty the keys  
 To contentment almost divine.<sup>3</sup> One day  
 I heard two men, the first exclaimed, "My God  
 Would that I were as holy as that priest!"  
 (Even in remembrance, a touch of pride  
 That others should see holiness in me,  
 Makes me close my eyes and breathe a prayer  
 To Holy Virgin and her Son that I  
 May be truly humble.) "For my own part,"

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1. "Il cherchait, nous dit Surius, à ressembler au Christ par son humilité; ce souci il l'étendait jusqu'à son maintien modeste et reserve et a son vetement dont il se preoccupait si peu qu'il paraissait a tous un misereux digne de mepris." Wautier, op. cit., p. 172, quoting Surius, Vita Ruysbrochii, cap. iiii.
  2. "For all who wish to see in a ghostly and supernatural manner three things also are needful. The first is the light of Divine grace; the second is a free turning of the will to God; the third is a conscience clean from any mortal sin." Jan van Ruysbroeck, Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, tr. C. A. Wynshenck Dom (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1916), p. 6.
  3. "For twenty-six years in all Blessed John lived as a secular priest in Brussels. Content with his modest chaplaincy in the Church of St. Gudule, and with his holy companions, Hinckaert and van Coudenberg, continuing happily in apostolic simplicity and poverty the Common Life on which he had entered a mere child, Ruysbroeck passed his days in peaceful retirement . . ." Scully, A Medieval Mystic, p. 8.
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His companion answered, "I would not share  
 His lot, for gold nor wealth of all the world--  
 For then no pleasure could I know on earth."  
 I recall thinking of his ignorance  
 Of the delights which God bestows by grace  
 And what he missed--insensate to the taste  
 Of God's sweetness in the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>  
 My priestly duties marked an active life  
 While contemplation cried for quiet thought;  
 But Brussels was no Groenendael, and life  
 Was filled with routine duties, commonplace  
 Enough, until a woman's fancy tried  
 To cheapen with natural expressions  
 The love of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Blommaerdinne, whose teachings  
 The Holy Father called heretical.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Cf. Pomerius, lib. ii, cap. iv; Surius, cap. iii; Wautier, p. 172; Scully, A Medieval Mystic, p. 8; Alfred Anger, "Étude sur les mystiques des Pays Bas au moyen âge," Mémoires Couronnes et autres Mémoires (Bruxelles: F. Hayez, April, 1892), XLVI, 164.
  2. "In describing her numerous visions the poetess boasts of very intimate relations with Christ and the saints, and claims the gift of prophecy and the power of working miracles." Herman Haupt, "Blommaerdinne," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1952) II, 205.
  3. "The following is one of their characteristic propositions condemned by Clement V. in the Council of Vienna, A.D. 1311-1312: 'That those who are in the aforesaid grade of perfection and in the spirit of liberty (contemplatives) are not subject to human authority and are not obliged to obey any of the precepts of the Church, because (as they say) where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.'" Scully, A Medieval Mystic, pp. 12-13.

I wrote in bitterness, more bitterness  
 Than I have ever used, called people fools  
 Delude by a silver throne and lust  
 Miscalled seraphic love.<sup>1</sup> But all my words  
 Served only those whose faith, already tried  
 Stayed firm and those who followed Blommaerdinne  
 Believed enough to touch her shroud and seek  
 The cure of sickness.<sup>2</sup> Faith in Mother Church  
 Helped me defend a mystic truth against  
 A psychic trick the Quietists use: their love  
 Immersed in natural repose,<sup>3</sup> unheard  
 The cries of man and God, as indolence  
 Is mistaken for true piety,  
 Fruition of our God which gives to man

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1. Cf. Scully, A Medieval Mystic, pp. 13-14; Wautier, op. cit., pp. 170-186, passim.
  2. "During his stay in Brussels (1317-1343) Ruysbroeck conducted a strong polemical campaign against her, which, however, did not prevent people from coming after her death to seek the cure of diseases by touching her shroud." Haupt, loc. cit.
  3. "That 'love cannot be lazy' is a cardinal truth for all real mystics. . . . Even that profound repose in which they have fruition of God, is but the accompaniment or preliminary of work of the most strenuous kind, and keeps at full stretch the soul which tastes it; and this supernatural state is as far above that self-induced quietude of 'natural repose'--"consisting in nothing but an idleness and interior vacancy, to which they are inclined by nature and habit"--in which the quietists love to immerse themselves, as God is above His creatures. . . . Ruysbroeck in fighting the 'Free Spirit' was fighting the battle of true mysticism against its most dangerous and persistent enemy,--mysticality." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 20.

Wealth of truth and virtue which must be spent  
 On those in need.<sup>1</sup> Our Lord has said the word:  
 As much as you have done it for the least  
 That service you have rendered unto Me,<sup>2</sup>  
 As servants faithful to the living God.<sup>3</sup>  
 How I hated, and needs must purge my soul  
 Of hatred, even now when I have seen  
 More clearly than before, the Way of Life;  
 I sense revulsion at God-mockers who  
 Deny the worth of human need and seek  
 Through unactivated contemplation  
 To find their selfish end--their Unity  
 In God; a Unity which God himself  
 Gives only as He wills to those who Love.  
 Through the years, my soul possessed by visions<sup>4</sup>  
 Climbed a seven-step ladder--a Ladder

- 
1. "The man who is sent down by God from these heights into the world is full of truth and rich in all virtues . . . and therefore he must always spend himself on those who have need of him; for the living fount of the Holy Ghost, which is his wealth, can never be spent." Ruysbroeck, The Sparkling Stone, pp. 220-221.
  2. Matthew 25:40.
  3. "But there are some foolish men who would be so inward that they would neither act nor serve, even in those things of which their neighbor has need. Behold, these are neither secret friends nor faithful servants of God; but they are altogether false and deceived. For no man can follow the counsels of God who will not keep His commandments." Ruysbroeck, The Sparkling Stone, p. 197.
  4. ". . . and he passed through the great oscillations of consciousness which mark the mystic way." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 16.

Of Spiritual Love;<sup>1</sup> but ecstasy  
 Enjoined a man-concern that could not die.  
 To Blommaerdinne there came the world's success,  
 And all my faith was needed as the crowds  
 Lampeoned and ridiculed.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps in part  
 This moved us to seek the silent forest.  
 Groenendael, where with companions I found  
 A quiet unaffected by the world,  
 Where I still can hear the forest praying;<sup>3</sup>  
 Where the heart of God has met my own heart.  
 A debt to pay: to love the love that loves,<sup>4</sup>  
 And yet once paid is ever reincurred.  
 The recent vision of my mother showed<sup>5</sup>  
 In foresight unmistakable that soon  
 The debt would be discharged. I now recall  
 The hopes and purposes that made the glen  
 A haven where God met with mortal men.  
 We went, not to hide--we were sure of God--

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1. Ruysbroeck, The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, tr. F. Sherwood Taylor (Westminster, England: Dacre Press, 1944).
  2. "Il est probable que cette polémique fut ardente et passionément suivie de part d'autre. Ruysbroeck fut chansonné et ridiculisé dans les rues de Bruxelles." Nautier, op. cit., p. 179.
  3. "Les ducs de Brabant possédaient au coeur de la forêt de Soignes un ancien rendez-vous de chasse de Jean II concédé pour l'instant à l'ermite Lambert: Groenendael ou le Vau-Vert." Ibid, p. 198
  4. Ruysbroeck, The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, p. 59.
  5. Cf., supra, p. 2, note 6.

But as Saint Francis at Alverno purged  
 Himself in holy prayer, and as Saint Paul  
 Fled from Damascus and Jerusalem  
 Until his vision shaped his life, so we  
 Trimmed our lamps that they might shine  
 More brightly to the end of days.<sup>1</sup> Amen.

Groenendael, sacred ground where walked two men,  
 Holy men, who served the Lord: John Busco  
 Who received the hunting lodge, hallowed it  
 Before I cut my teeth.<sup>2</sup> The second saint

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1. Pomerius, lib. i, cap. vi. "Venit itaque cum sodalibus suis in Viridemvallem, tanto serenius arcana coelstia contemplaturus, quanto quietus ab omni strepita mundanae turbationis soli Domino vacaturus. Unde et ibidem more aquilae renovata mentis juventute coepit tam clare in aeterni solis radios aciem figere intellegentiae quod vix homo super terram volutas sui contemplationis potest extremam consequi perfectionem. Excedit enim mentas humanae indaginis quod frequenter eructuat in suis codicibus de divinis. Nec potest humanae rationes facultas, manens infra limites proprios, illuc vel semel se erigere quo ipse novit supra se positus crebro liberrime avolare. Quibus autem ista videntur minus vera aut credibilia, credent ut videant et intelligant, vitaquam ut idem pater consulit habere studeant cum exercitio affectus si velint consequi tam luminosos radios intellectus." Analecta Bollandiana, loc. cit., p. 287.
  2. "L'ermitage fut cédé à Jean de Busco ou des Bois en 1304. . . .L'acte de donation stipulait qu'après la mort de Busco, l'ermitage devait être occupé par un autre religieux, ad serviendum ibi Deo." Wautier, op. cit., pp. 198-199. In a note, Wautier quotes as follows from Miraeus, opera diplomatica, t. II, p. 779: "Nos Joannes . . . Joanni de Buscho eremitaе domum nostram sitam in nostro nemore Zoniae in loco dicto Groenendael (gallice Vauvert) et fossatum quod hactenus de licentia nostra ibidem fecit, cum spatio intra fossatum dictum contendo, tenendam quamdiu vixerit conferimus. Ita ut, si eum alibi transferri vel mori contingat, ex tunc in posterum alter religiosus ad serviendum ibi Deo perpetuis temporibus morabitur." Datum die Veneris post Assumpt. Virg. Mar. 1304."

Was Arnold of Diest who saw this place  
 Where those who honored God would come to be  
 The fertile seed of holiness for men.<sup>1</sup>  
 My fifty years had all seemed good, and God  
 Had blessed me in my work, despite the loss  
 To Bloemardinne. That which I had not had  
 I did not miss. Francis brought the paper  
 During Easter week giving Groenendael  
 To us,<sup>2</sup> and contemplation which had been  
 So much a part of life before, became  
 The center of our being. Rule we had,  
 Though none imposed by Holy Mother Church,  
 A burning passion for perfection held  
 Us thrall to Christ,<sup>3</sup> thralldom consummated  
 Only in betrothal as the Bridegroom  
 Came daily to inspire our mortal souls

- 
1. "Cet endroit, mes chers frères, sera sous peu un monastère où fleuriront des hommes dévots et religieux, qui feront honneur à Dieu et seront la semence féconde d'une sainte génération." Wautier, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
  2. "L'acte de cession du Vau-Vert, sur le territoire de Hoelaert, fut signé à Bruxelles, le quatrième jour des fêtes de Paques 1343, au bénéfice de Franco Frigido Montanus." *Idem.* At this time, Ruysbroeck was fifty years of age, not sixty as Pomerius reports through error, an error continued by Dolezich, *op. cit.*, p. 2. The phrase in Pomerius reads: "Postquam autem jam sexagenarius multis in seculo per suae conversationis eminentiam potioris vitae fuisset speculum et exemplar . . . ." *Analecta Bollandiana*, *loc. cit.*, p. 287.
  3. "They entered into possession on Wednesday of Easter week, 1343; and for five years lived there, as they had lived in the little house in Brussels, with no other rule save their own passion for perfection." Underhill, *Ruysbroeck*, p. 22.

To grow in grace.<sup>1</sup> This, the second coming  
 Of our Lord was brought to pass through pity  
 In the heart of God, and necessity  
 In the soul of man; through God's own mildness,  
 And our unending longing, restlessness  
 For Him in whom we find our rest and peace.<sup>2</sup>  
 Our heart's desire, to find a unity  
 Alone with God, attracted curious men.  
 Some came to share devotion, some to scoff,  
 And not a few, remembering the lodge,  
 Would leave the hunt and come demanding food.  
 We, being bound only by our own rules,  
 Had no recourse to Benedictine law  
 Respecting solitude.<sup>3</sup> When the Prior  
 Of Saint Victor's Abbey looked askance  
 Upon our way of life, acknowledging  
 The contention our world apart had caused  
 The clergy in the towns, where some approved

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1. "But let us speak of their growth in new graces and in new virtues from day to day, and of a present coming of Christ our Bridegroom, daily in our soul." Ruysbroeck, The Spiritual Espousals, tr. Eric Colledge (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., no date), p. 57. Cf. The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, pp. 17-18.
  2. "There are four reasons: God's pity, and our necessity; God's mildness, and our longings." Colledge, op. cit., p. 57. Cf. the sentence from the opening of Augustine's Confessions: "Thou hast created us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee." bk. 1, cap. vii.
  3. "But perpetual invasions from the outer world, not only of penitents and would be disciples . . . but of huntsmen . . . and pleasure parties . . . soon forced them to adopt . . . definite attitude towards . . . enclosure." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 22.

And some cast blame; but the good Prior thought  
 Proceedings savoured more of heresy  
 Than of decorum proper to the priests  
 Of God.<sup>1</sup> Sensing no small injustice, still  
 To strike a balance, we accepted rule,  
 Rule of the Augustinian Canons,  
 With Francis, provost, and myself the prior.<sup>2</sup>  
 But John, my uncle, with an insight born  
 Of God, sustained by Him, renounced the life  
 He loved. His friends, knit close by ties more strong  
 Than blood or kinship, were severed as he  
 Took refuge in a forest cell that none  
 Who claimed of Groenendaël a home should fail  
 Through weakness and infirmity to hold  
 The rigor of the rule. In two short years  
 John Hinckaert was with God.<sup>3</sup> My heart rejoiced

- 
1. "Les départ des deux chanoines et de leur chapelain avait profondément troublé le clergé bruxellois, les uns approuvant les cénobites, les autres les blâmant. Ce fut un beau tapage dans le petit monde ecclésiastiques: tempesta valida et vehemens valde." Wautier, op. cit., p. 205.  
 " . . . the Prior of the Abbey of Saint Victor at Paris had addressed to them strong remonstrances, on account of the absence of rule in their life and the fact that they had not adopted a religious habit; a proceeding which in his opinion savoured rather of the ill-regulated doings of the heretical sects, than of the decorum proper to good Catholics." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, pp. 22-23.
  2. "There they were presently joined by disciples and formed a small community, which was eventually placed under the rule of the Augustinian Canons. Goudenberg became the provost and Ruysbroeck the prior . . ." Ruysbroeck, The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage, p. xiv.
  3. The rule of the Augustinian Canons was adopted March 10, 1349 and Hinckaert died May 18, 1350.

At his release from suffering. His love  
 Of life was caught in his last wish: he gave  
 To the monastery he would not join  
 An income of twelve florins.<sup>1</sup> My uncle,  
 My blessed uncle, my sainted teacher.  
 Holy Mary, Mother of God, I pray  
 Now for his soul's repose, as I prayed then  
 At the hour of his death. The years slipped by,  
 My life changed. Meditation burst anew  
 Upon my being, and created God  
 In all I saw. Fruits of meditation  
 Were my reward as visions ever lured  
 Me from an earth morass. No pantheist I,  
 And yet the gentle forest, mountain height,  
 Valley depth called me ever to my God.<sup>2</sup>

- 
1. "Mais la mort entra bientôt dans le paisible ermitage: accablé d'âge et d'infirmités, Jean Hinckaert s'endormit le 18 mai 1350, laissant au monastère outre son souvenir une rente perpétuelle de 12 florins." Wautier, *op. cit.*, p. 207. The florin was a gold coin first minted in Florence in 1282 weighing about fifty-five grains.
  2. Ruysbroeck's use of nature to emphasize his points may be illustrated from any of his books. The following one from The Spiritual Espousals is typical. "Now understand: when the sun sends its rays and its light into a deep valley between two high mountains, and the sun then stands in the height of the firmament, so that it can illuminate the floor and the depths of the valleys, then three things take place. The valley is given more light, and light is reflected from the mountains, and there is more heat: and it becomes more fertile than flat and even land. And in just the same way, when a good man reflects in the depths of his being upon his littleness, and acknowledges that he has nothing and is nothing and can do nothing of his own power, he cannot remain still, nor can he advance in virtues; and when he acknowledges also that he frequently lacks virtues and good works, in this he acknowledges his poverty and his need, and so he makes a valley of humility." cap. xiii. p. 58.
-

To some these years at Groenendael might seem  
 Devoid of incident, so calm they were  
 As day by day, serene and unafraid  
 I waited, worked, loved, and shared the Spirit  
 With all who came.<sup>1</sup> And many came to ask  
 The way to God, as if I knew a way  
 The beloved disciple overlooked:  
 Saying, "Little children, love each other."<sup>2</sup>  
 I remember writing these truthful words:

"Those who follow the way of love  
 Are the richest of all men living:  
 They are bold, frank, and fearless,  
 They have neither travail nor care,  
 For the Holy Ghost bears all their burdens.  
 They seek no outward seeming,  
 They desire naught that is esteemed of men,  
 They affect not singular conduct,  
 They would be like other good men."<sup>3</sup>

Names of those who came as friends are legion:  
 Naghel, Tauler, Groot. Foremost in my heart--  
 As Clara stood to Francis--Dame Margaret  
 Stood to me. Ten years ago I last wrote  
 To the Convent of Poor Clares in Brussels,  
 To show her love, the seven steps of love,

- 
1. "The thirty eight years which Ruysbroeck passed at Groenendael were, from the point of view of the earthly biographer, almost devoid of incident. True, he formed many friendships with the most spiritual men of his time, and seems occasionally to have left his priory in order to visit them." Ruysbroeck, The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, p. xvi.
  2. I John, passim.
  3. The Twelve Beguines, cap. ii, quoted by Evelyn Underhill in the Introduction to The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, p. xvii.

Whereby through God's great grace we live in Him  
 And He in us, and we are all as one  
 With Him in love.<sup>1</sup> I have held her foremost  
 In my heart because through teaching her  
 The Spirit deepened in my soul, and God  
 Revealed to me the secret depths of love.  
 I did not teach; but God inspired in me,  
 Through the Holy Ghost, every word I wrote.<sup>2</sup>  
 This inspiration humbled me, I worked  
 At tasks for which I had no aptitude,  
 Because I felt the need for lowly toil.  
 My indulgent brothers in the garden  
 Often told me that as I weeded more  
 In prayer than knowledge, flowers and feed,<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. "And through our virtuous lives and the grace of God we live in Him and He in us, with all His saints; and so we are all a unity being made one with Him in love." Ruysbroeck, The Seven Steps, p. 63. Evelyn Underhill in the Introduction to The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage lists The Mirror of Eternal Salvation: written before 1359; The Seven Cloisters: written before 1363; and The Seven Degrees of Love: written before 1372; these three are considered as a group of works "forming a graduated instruction on the ascetic and mystical life . . . [seemingly] written for Dame Margaret Van Meerbeke, a nun in the Convent of Poor Clares at Brussels." p. xix.
  2. "At ubi prior mansuetus et humilis haec verba audivit, ita respondit: Magister Gerade, [Grootse] sciatis veraciter quod nunquam verbum in libris meis posui, nisi ex instinctu Spiritus sancti." Analecta Bollandiana, loc. cit., p. 289.
  3. "Many stories are told of his humility, kindness, and wisdom. He insisted on working at the humblest tasks in the monastery garden, carrying loads of dung and weeding the beds. His efforts were regarded with a reverent indulgence by his fellow gardeners, to whom they were something of a burden; for he worked with one hand, while telling his beads with the other, nor did he distinguish the flowers and vegetables from the weeds, but pulled up all in his holy and humble ardor." Ruysbroeck, The Seven Steps, p. 14.
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As well as weeds, lay on the compost pile.  
 Pictures crowd my memory until it seems  
 As if my life, my whole, long life on earth  
 Were pressed in these last few weeks of darkness.<sup>1</sup>  
 Those who complained of poverty and lack  
 Of this world's goods were symbolized to me  
 By one to whom I said, "Think, dear sister,  
 Of the most perfect way to serve the Lord:  
 It is to give Him thanks for all that comes,  
 And through complete humility to know  
 His good will."<sup>2</sup> The many times my brothers,  
 Knowing the poverello strain in me,  
 Would see the snow and ask about my birds,  
 And save me bits of bread so I could feed  
 My feathered friends of God.<sup>3</sup> The Parisians,  
 Curious, youthful students of the way,  
 Who thought that I could give a rule of life  
 And were dismayed when I replied, "You are  
 As holy as you wish to be." And they

- 
1. In his old age his bodily sight grew dim and he had difficulty in celebrating Mass, not only from this cause, but also by reason of the ecstasy that so often seized upon him." Ruysbroeck, The Seven Steps, Introduction, p. 15.
  2. "A une femme qui se lamentait sur sa pauvreté, son incapacité à secourir les pauvres, son peu de goût pour la vie spirituelle, il dit, se gardant bien de s'arrêter à toutes ces doléances où se complaisait évidemment la pauvre créature: "Sache, ô fille très chère, que le meilleur moyen de servir Dieu, c'est de lui rendre grâce pour tout ce qui nous arrive et de se soumettre humblement à son entier bon vouloir." Wautier, op.cit., p. 242; Pomerius, Analecta Bollandiana, loc. cit., p. 292.
  3. Ruysbroeck, The Seven Steps, Introduction, p. 14.

Abashed would leave, until my brothers came  
 And asked me to make plain the simple words.  
 "The Measure," I replied, "of holiness,  
 Depends upon your will, and you yourself  
 Can see the quality of your own will.  
 Thus, you alone can perceive the value  
 Of your own holiness." "Tantum enim  
Quisque sanctus est . . ." and they understood,  
 "Quantum afficitur bonitati."<sup>1</sup>  
 These memories change, and with a mighty leap  
 My soul leaves far behind the mortal sights.  
 Our Blessed Lord appears, and without sound,  
 Nor sight, nor sense of smell, nor touch, nor taste,  
 I know His love for me; I also see  
 The Virgin, clear, although my mortal eyes  
 Are almost blind, and the celestial saints  
 Are visitors unguided by the sun.  
 A Voice spoke, though I did not hear a word,  
 Others heard: "This is My beloved son,  
 In whom I am well pleased."<sup>2</sup> No frightened start,  
 No wasting, and no sleep of tiredness

- 
1. Pomerius, lib. ii, cap. xiii, Analecta Bollandiana, loc. cit., p. 293.
  2. "Frequenter etiam Dominus noster Jesus Christus eum visitans, crebris ac magnis consuevit fidelem suum famulum dotare muneribus gratiarum, ita ut etiam quodam tempore sibi apparens visibiliter eum beatissima Maria virgine, ejus gloriosa genetrice, et omnibus sanctus coelestis curiae, magna familiaritatis dulcedine ipsam spiritus jocunditatem, illo in tempore sibi praestitam, etiam vocaliter ipsum alloquens fertur talia sibi dixisse: Tu es filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi bene placui." Pomerius, lib. ii, cap. xxiv, Analecta Bollandiana, loc. cit., p. 301.

For me, only the vision of a life  
 So abundant rich that I can not wait,  
 And so I rid myself of this old shell.<sup>1</sup>  
 With a vigor and eagerness of soul  
 I am in truth, as I have been in faith  
 At last,  
     at one  
         set free,  
             in love  
                 with  
                     GOD.

- 
1. "His death, says Pomerius, speaking on the authority of those who had seen it, was full of peaceful joy, of gaiety of heart; not the falling asleep of the tired servant, but the leap to the more abundant life of the vigorous child of the Infinite, at last set free." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 34.

## CHAPTER FOUR

A. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD AS REVEALED IN  
THE WRITINGS OF RUYSBROECK

God permeates this universe of ours.  
 Some mystics find him in their soul and make  
 As St. Theresa did, divine duets,<sup>1</sup>  
 Finding Reality in visions sweet.  
 Others cannot stay within a circle,  
 Self-contained; wider visions call their souls,  
 And through the sense impression of the world  
 They use both intellect and heart to learn  
 A formula of faith.<sup>2</sup> The greatest ones  
 Have found that God is near and far. Once learned  
 This paradox, self-evident, becomes  
 The corner stone, such a one is Ruysbroeck,

- 
1. "In mystical literature such self-contradictory phrases as 'dazzling obscurity,' 'whispering silence,' 'teeming desert,' are continually met with. They prove that not conceptual speech, but music rather, is the element through which we are best spoken to by mystical truth. Many mystical scriptures are indeed little more than musical compositions." William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925), pp. 420-421.
  2. "Mystical writers are of two kinds. One kind . . . deals almost wholly with the personal and interior experiences of the soul in the states of contemplation, and the psychological rules governing those states; above all, with the emotional reactions of the self to the impact of the Divine. . . . But the other kind of mystic . . . cannot, on the one hand remain within the circle of these subjective and personal conceptions, and, on the other content himself with the label which tradition has affixed to the Thing that he has known. Underhill, Ruysbroeck, pp. 52-53.

Who found his God to be a common light  
 A common splendour touching every man.<sup>1</sup>  
 With His prevenient grace, as, reaching up  
 Man strives, so God descends in radiant light.<sup>2</sup>  
 An apostolic mystic,<sup>3</sup> he must strive  
 To share his vision with all ghostly men.  
 He has seen God so deep, so wide, so high,  
 So fathomless, that words can only hint,

- 
1. "Thus God is a common light and a common splendour, enlightening heaven and earth, and every man each according to his need and worth." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, cap. 1.
  2. "If a man does all he can, and cannot do more because of his feebleness, it rests with the infinite goodness of God to Finish the work. Then, straight as a sunbeam, there comes a higher light of Divine grace, and it is shed into the soul according to its worth, though neither merited nor desired. For in this light, God gives Himself out of free goodness and generosity, the which never creature can merit before it has received it. And this is an inward and mysterious working of God in the soul, above time; and it moves the soul and all its powers. Therewith ends prevenient grace, and begins the other grace, that is to say, the supernatural light." Idem.
  3. "There is a fundamental orderliness in the Ruysbroeckian universe which, though it may be difficult to understand, and often impossible for him to express without resort to paradox, yet reveals itself to careful analysis. He tries hard to describe, or at least suggest it to us, because he is a mystic of an apostolic type. . . . The note is never, as with many subjective visionaries, 'I have seen,' but always, 'We shall or may see.'" Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 55.

In addition, Ruysbroeck's mystic experiences have given him an abiding faith in the abilities of man to achieve the inward life. Step by step he traces the development that he has himself followed in the hope that those to whom he is writing may likewise find fruition in God. While each stage of development depends upon the preceding step, the entire process from the awakening to the fruition or unification in God, requires the action of God, through Father, Son, or Holy Ghost, to be consummated.

Through paradox, the vision of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>  
 The mystic, through his Christian faith, may gaze  
 In spirit upon God, Eternal Power,  
 Creator, and the Lord of heav'n and earth,<sup>2</sup>  
 And sense the paradox of rest and work<sup>3</sup>  
 Transcendent in a Unity Divine,  
 Immanent through the Holy Ghost.<sup>4</sup>

- 
1. "The most high Nature of the Godhead may thus be perceived and beheld: how it is Simplicity and Onefoldness, inaccessible Height and bottomless Depth, incomprehensible Breadth and eternal Length, a dark Silence, a wild Desert, the Rest of all saints in the Unity, and a common Fruition of Himself and of all saints in Eternity. And many other marvels may be seen in the abysmal Sea of the Godhead; and though, because of the grossness of the senses to which they must be shown from without, we must use sensible images, yet, in truth, these things are perceived and beheld from within, as an abysmal and unconditioned Good. But if they must be shown from without, it must be done by means of diverse similitudes and images, according to the enlightenment of the reason of him who shapes and shows them." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. ii, cap. xxxvii.
  2. "But now we see what it is to adore God: it is, in the Christian faith, with great reverence and above reason, to gaze in the spirit upon God, the Eternal Power, Creator and Lord of heaven and earth and all that in them is." The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, p. 32.
  3. "The divine Persons in the fecundity of Their nature are one God eternally in action, and in the simplicity of Their essence, they are Godhead, perpetual rest; and so with respect to His Persons, God is an eternal operation, but with respect to His essence, eternal rest." Ibid., p. 58.
  4. "The most high and superessential Unity of the Divine Nature, where the Father and the Son possess Their nature in the Unity of the Holy Ghost—above the comprehension and understanding of all our powers, in the naked being of our spirit—is a supernal stillness, wherein God broods above all creatures in the created light. . . . From this mutual contemplation of the Father and of the Son, in the eternal radiance, there flow forth an eternal content and a fathomless love, and that is the Holy Ghost, . . . God inclines Himself towards each creature . . ." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. ii, cap. xlviiii.

The attributes of God are Power and Might,  
 Alpha and Omega for all creatures;<sup>1</sup>  
 Father of light, who speaks a single word  
 Commanding eyes to See!<sup>2</sup> And once obeyed  
 That Voice can never be denied and God  
 Possesses man and burdens him with love.<sup>3</sup>  
 Suggestive language to enchant the soul<sup>4</sup>  
 And set the door ajar admitting light  
 Revealing Darkness, Nakedness, and then  
 In Nothingness, vanquished and vanquishing.

- 
1. "The enlightened man shall also mark and behold the attributes of the Father in the Godhead: how He is omnipotent Power and Might, Creator, Mover, Preserver, Beginning and End, the Origin and Being of all creatures." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. ii, cap. xxxvii.
  2. "For the heavenly Father wishes that we should see, because He is a Father of light. (Of. St. James, 1:17) And therefore He speaks eternally, without mean and without ceasing, in the secret places of our spirit, one single unfathomable word and nothing more. And in this word He enunciates Himself and all things. And this word is nothing else than 'See'; and this is the going-out and the birth of the Son of everlasting life in Whom men recognize and see all blessedness." The Spiritual Espousals, p. 181.
  3. This conception of the burden of God's love to man has never been more beautifully expressed than in Ruysbroeck's The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love. "Love the love that ever loves you. Thence comes a great inward impatience, and an action which can never be complete; for the more we love, the more we long to love; and the more fully we pay the debt that love demands, the deeper in debt we lie. Love is never silent, but ever and without ceasing cries: Love ye love."
 

"This contest of love is unknown to those who have not the sense of such things." pp. 59-60.
  4. ". . . oblique, suggestive, musical language which enchants rather than informs the soul; opens the door to experience, but does not convey any accurate knowledge of the Imageless Truth." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, pp. 58-59.

God's own essence flows forth in purest love.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond the Triune God, the Blessed John

Within a fathomless abyss has found

God's Simple Being in Eternal Rest.<sup>2</sup>

1. "And here he meets God without intermediary. And from out the Divine Unity, there shines into him a simple light; and this light shows him Darkness and Nakedness and Nothingness. In the Darkness, he is enwrapped and falls into somewhat which is in no wise, even as one who has lost his way. In the Nakedness, he loses the perception and discernment of all things, and is transfigured and penetrated by a simple light. In the Nothingness, all his activity fails him; for he is vanquished by the working of God's abysmal love, and in the fruitive inclination of his spirit he vanquishes God, and becomes one spirit with him." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. ii, cap. lrv.
2. "But the Simple Being of God, according to the nature thereof, is an Eternal Rest of God and of all created things." The Twelve Beguines, cap. xiv.

B. THE NATURE OF CHRIST AS REVEALED  
IN THE WRITINGS OF HUYSERGECK

If God's own Essence flows in purest love  
Creating heaven and earth, then through His Son,  
Who is His Eternal Wisdom honored  
Of the Father, He renews our spirit<sup>1</sup>  
Day by day. Calling from eternity  
By His well-beloved Son, the Father  
Chooses us, and writes with Love's forefinger  
Our own names in His book of life. All songs  
Of men or angels answer Him with power.<sup>2</sup>  
In time's own fullness, Christ has come to earth  
To fulfill the Father's mercy, chambered  
In the body of a glorious temple.  
A sacred marriage there took place with Christ

- 
1. "Also we perceive by the Christian faith that God our Almighty Father formed and created heaven and earth and all creatures for His own honour; that through His Son, Who is His Eternal Wisdom, He has likewise created and renewed us; that He has ordained and regulated all things to His same eternal honour, . . ." The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, p. 30.
  2. "Our Heavenly Father has called and chosen us from all eternity in His well-beloved Son, and has written our names with the finger of His love in the living book of His Eternal Wisdom; wherefore we must evermore answer Him with our whole power in reverence and eternal veneration. This is the beginning of all songs, whether of angels or of men, which shall never more cease." Ibid., p. 47.

The bridegroom joining to Himself the bride.<sup>1</sup>  
 Throughout the ages those whom Christ has saved  
 Enjoy a unity with all the saints  
 And with the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.<sup>2</sup>  
 One, in simple Nature in the Godhead  
 Yet Father and the Son in attributes  
 Eternally distinct--the Begotten  
 Cannot beget--throughout eternity  
 The Father has a Son, and evermore  
 The Son a Father.<sup>3</sup> Then in Christ we find  
 A human nature, too; whereby He shared

- 
1. "But when God thought the time had come, and had mercy on the suffering of His beloved, He sent His Only Begotten Son to earth, in a fair chamber, in a glorious temple; that is, in the Body of the Virgin Mary. There He was married to this bride, our nature, and He united her with His own person through the most pure blood of this noble Virgin. The priest who married the bride was the Holy Ghost; the angel Gabriel brought the offer; the glorious Virgin gave her consent." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. i, Prologue.
  2. "[Man] ever has a natural and a supernatural towards this same unity, [the essential and supernatural unity of his spirit] and this same unity through the gifts of God and through simplicity of intention, shall have an eternal loving tendency towards that most high Unity, where, in the bond of the Holy Ghost, the Father and the Son are united with all saints." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. ii, cap. xxxvi.
  3. "But the relations which make the personal attributes remain in eternal distinction. For the Father begets distinction. For the Father incessantly begets his Son, and Himself is unbegotten; and the Son is begotten, and cannot beget; and thus throughout eternity the Father has a Son, and the Son a Father." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. ii, cap. xxxvii.

A labour unto death.<sup>1</sup> With the Father  
 Possessing grace, made like us to suffer,  
 Denied the Godhead's rest, with the Father  
 Sharing as persons the Eternal work.<sup>2</sup>  
 In the union of the Godhead Christ holds  
 Honor and glory, as the Son He pays  
 The exercise of love that we may seek  
 The holy life.<sup>3</sup> Climbing the high mountain,  
 On Tabor's height<sup>4</sup> we find through Jesus Christ,

- 
1. "A man who lives this life in its perfection, as it has here been shown, and who is offering up his whole life, and all his works, to the worship and praise of God, and who wills and loves God above all things, is often stirred by a desire to see, to know, and to prove what, in Himself, this Bridegroom Christ is; Who for man's sake became man and laboured in love unto death, and delivered us from sin and the devil, and has given us Himself and His grace, . . ." Ibid., lib. 1, cap. xxvi.
  2. "When therefore Christ, in accordance with His humanity, was most perfectly like God in grace and divine gifts, He also in glory holds the most excelling likeness; since of His fulness have we all received, whatever now we are in grace, and shall be hereafter in glory. For He Himself without cessation, by the operation of the Father, was urged from unity to all virtues, and to the needs, bodily as well as spiritual, of all men; and again from desire and love's impatience, flowed back again within. Nevertheless by reason of the Father's operation He was unable to repose in unity; . . ." The Kingdom of the Lovers of God, cap. xxvi.
  3. "We should also honour and adore our dear Lord, Jesus Christ, God and Man in a single Person; for His humanity, which is one with us, God Himself has honoured, blessed, transported, exalted, and united to Himself above all that He has created. By this sublime union with God, the Body and Soul of Christ are filled full, yea, are fullness itself of all grace and of all gifts; . . . So indeed God the Father honours his Son." The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, pp. 30-31.
  4. "And so, that the Name of Christ may be exalted and glorified in us, we should follow Him up the mountain of our intelligence, even

The Son of God, the Father pouring forth  
 His grace to draw us toward the Unity  
 Which is our native Origin at once<sup>1</sup>  
 In time and beyond it, a Wayless Way,  
 Above all reason; one being, one life  
 One blessedness with God in Love's embrace.<sup>2</sup>

---

as Peter, James, and John followed Him on to mount Thabor.  
 Thabor means in our tongue an increase of light." The Spark-  
ling Stone, cap. xii.

1. "And therefore, if we ever remain with Jesus on mount Thabor, that is, upon the mountain of our bare thought, we should continually experience a growth of new light and new truth; for we should ever hear the voice of the Father, who touches us, pouring forth with grace, and drawing us inward into the unity." Idem.
2. "And so soon as we are uplifted through the Son into our Origin, we hear the Voice of the Father, which draws us inward and enlightens us with eternal truth. . . . And all things are fulfilled and all things are made new; for when we are baptized into the wide embrace of the Love of God, the joy of each one of us becomes so great and so special that he can neither think nor care for the joy of anyone else; for then each one is himself a Fruition of Love, and he cannot and dare not seek for any thing beyond his own." Idem.

C. THE FUNCTION OF THE HOLY GHOST  
AS REVEALED IN THE WRITINGS OF RUYSSEROECK

God permeates this universe of ours:  
From first to last, as the Unchanging One  
Whose attribute is rest, the Godhead One.  
But as the Persons of the Trinity  
By fecund nature are One God at work  
So in simple essence they are at rest.<sup>1</sup>  
The Holy Ghost conceived the Son<sup>2</sup> and so  
Conceives in us the inward life and wakes  
The slumbering soul. The Holy Ghost then writes,  
A moving Finger moving on<sup>3</sup> and words  
Cannot describe the ocean of content,  
The burning brilliance of the Sun Divine,  
The boundless liquefying Fire of Love,<sup>4</sup>

- 
1. The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, p. 58.  
Cf., supra, chap. iv, section A, note 3, p. 54.
  2. "Moreover we may thank and praise our Lord Jesus Christ for the worthiness of Mary. His dear Mother; whom He chose as such from the whole world, and of whom He deigned to be conceived by the Holy Ghost, to be carried and to be born of her, . . ." The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, p. 35.
  3. "He Himself is the Finger of God, Who founded heaven, earth, and all creatures according to their nature." The Kingdom of the Lovers of God, p. 180.
  4. "Moreover, He is a most vast ocean wherefrom all good things have flowed. . . . He is a burning and brilliant Sun Divine, . . . He again is a boundless Fire, wherein all introverted spirits are transformed and illumined in grace and glory, liquefied in the furnace of divine unity like unto gold, each enjoying and tasting God in accordance with their condition and dignity, . . ." Idem.

Which is the Holy Ghost co-existent  
 With the Father and the Son and sharing  
 In Eternal work. One unbegotten  
 Nor begetting but pouring forth from God  
 The Father and the Son as their own breath,  
 He moves the Soul to seek Him seeking it.<sup>1</sup>  
 This Vitality Divine stirs the soul,  
 An energetic love to penetrate  
 The heart of man.<sup>2</sup> Sabellius could teach--<sup>3</sup>  
 But Ruysbroeck learned his truth from life itself.  
 The rich experiences of his soul  
 Caused him to see the Godhead's unity:  
 Admit the paradox of rest and work,

- 
1. "And the Father and the Son breathe forth one Spirit, Who is their common Will or Love. And this Spirit begets not, nor is He begetten; but must eternally pour forth from both the Father and the Son. And these three Persons are one God and one Spirit. And all the attributes with the works which flow forth from them are common to all the Persons, for They work by virtue of Their Onefold Nature." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. ii, cap. xxxvii.
  2. "The Holy Spirit is the source of the Divine vitality immanent in the universe. It is an outflowing torrent of Good which streams through all heavenly spirits; it is a Flame of Fire that consumes all in the One; it is also the spark of transcendence latent in man's soul. The Spirit is the personal, Grace the impersonal, side of that energetic Love which enfolds and penetrates all life; . . ." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, pp. 62-63.
  3. "Sabellianism: A theory of the Godhead named after its first advocate, Sabellius, a third-century churchman, who affirmed that there is but one divine essence which became operative in three temporally successive manifestations: as Creator and Law-giver in the Father, as Redeemer in the Son, and as Life-Giver in the Holy Ghost." Francis Gerald Ansley, Art. "Sabellianism" in Encyclopedia of Religion (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1945).

Adore the Persons of the Trinity<sup>1</sup>

And in the inward gladness of his soul<sup>2</sup>

To know the attributes and works were One.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Cf., The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, pp. 30-31.
  2. "And thence springs a particular inward gladness of the spirit, and a high trust in God, and this inward gladness envelops and drenches all the powers of the soul and the most inward part of the spirit." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. ii, cap. xxxvii.
  3. Supra, p. 62, note 1.

## D. THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

## AS REVEALED IN THE WRITINGS OF RUYSBROECK

Man, who has fallen into sin, is led  
 By the pity and ruth of God to life:<sup>1</sup>  
 A life adorned with grace, that man might serve  
 Obediently in veneration,<sup>2</sup>  
 Honoring the Creator's Name, and thus,  
 The inward man repays the Love of God,  
 While evil men cannot receive the gift.<sup>3</sup>  
 For men who live in mortal sin,<sup>4</sup> or hold  
 Some error in their creed,<sup>5</sup> or vaunt their faith,<sup>6</sup>

- 
1. "Secondly, when he says "Hath led" that is "Led back," he signifies the fall and wandering, or going astray of man, and the sympathy, pity and ruth of God, in that He restores man from his fall into original sin, and leads him back from his wandering to the way, and from death to life." The Kingdom of the Lovers of God, "The Subject of the Contents."
  2. "Furthermore God created human nature and adorned it with grace, that it might occupy that place, and might gain humility, obedience, service, praise, love, and veneration, which wicked spirits have lost by the contrary vices." Ibid, cap. i.
  3. "There are six kinds of men who do not accomodate themselves according to their powers, as natural decency demands, to the perception of those supernatural and divine gifts." Ibid., cap. vii.
  4. "There are men of the first kind who live in open mortal sin, and having forsaken God, turn themselves to the pleasures and delights of the body, . . ." Idem.
  5. "The second kind are faithless or dishonest persons who hold and pursus some error against the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed . . ." Ibid., cap. viii.
  6. "Of the third kind there are false men and hypocrites who do good works simply for temporal gain." Ibid., cap. ix.

Possessing earth and seeking heaven,<sup>1</sup> or waste  
 Their liberty<sup>2</sup> offending God with pride,<sup>3</sup>  
 Cannot be saved except that there appear  
 Within their hearts a touch of Light Divine.<sup>4</sup>  
 Thus aware of man's own imperfections,  
 Ruysbroeck strives to actualize the truth:  
 That man, aware of God within his life,  
 Can merge in nothingness; and walk a path  
 That is no way; stand naked, clothed in light;  
 Discover in himself, the unwalled world.<sup>5</sup>  
 Once awakened, man leads an active life,  
 Until prepared by faith to contemplate;  
 Not passive thought; but action merged with love,  
 To find Eternal Rest in ceaseless work.<sup>6</sup>

- 
1. "Of the fourth kind are perverse men, crafty and evilly cautious or wrongly clever, who strive to possess earth and merit heaven." Ibid., cap. x.
  2. "Of the fifth kind are slaves or men of a servile condition, . . . devoid of liberty, base and unworthy of divine grace." Ibid., cap. xi.
  3. "Of the sixth kind there are the naturally proud, . . . frequently refined in life and outward manners, in natural contemplation lofty and easy, and ever devoted to their own will." Ibid., cap. xii.
  4. "When man first feels upon his soul the touch of the Divine Light, at once, and in a moment of time, his will is changed; turned in the direction of Reality and away from unreal objects of desire." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, p. 79.
  5. Cf., The Twelve Beguines, cap. viii. Supra, chap. 2, p.16 , note 4.
  6. "Man is not here invited to leave the active life for the contemplative, but to make the active life perfect within the contemplative;

Before his awakening, man lived in sin,  
 Sin of the flesh;<sup>1</sup> but the soul's great warfare  
 Breaks forth at his rebirth.<sup>2</sup> A mortal foe  
 Is Brother Ass, the body, both despised  
 And feared, yet loved and prized, an instrument  
 In God's service.<sup>3</sup> The human side of man  
 Is cased in clay, the spirit seeks its God;  
 Finds union, drawing in and flowing forth,

---

carrying up these apparent opposites to a point at which they become one. It is one of Ruysbroeck's characteristics that he, as few others, followed mysticism out to this, its last stage; where it issues in a balanced, divine-human life." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, pp. 69-70.

1. "You know that God made man of two natures, body and soul, or flesh and spirit: and these two make up one person in the human nature, conceived and born in sin. And although God made the soul pure and unspotted, yet it is stained with original sin by its union with the body. Therefore we are all born in sin from our mother's womb." The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, pp. 20-21.
2. "And though the spirit loves the flesh according to its natural generation, yet when we are born again of the Spirit of God, spirit and flesh are at odds and strive together; the flesh indeed desiring things contrary to God and to the spirit, and the spirit together with God desiring things contrary to the flesh." Ibid., p. 21.
3. "Therefore we should hate and despise our body as our mortal enemy, who would lead us away from God into sin; yet we should love and prize this body and our life of sense as being an instrument for the service of God." Idem.

Ever unified, ever separate.<sup>1</sup>

Created capable of Love and drawn

By Love,<sup>2</sup> consumed and fed by Love,<sup>3</sup> and called

To merge into the Unity of God.

1. "The iron doth not become fire nor the fire iron; but each retaineth its substance and its nature. So likewise the spirit of man doth not become God, but is God-formed, and knoweth itself breadth and length and height and depth." The Twelve Beguines, cap. xiv.

"Yet the creature does not become God, for the union takes place in God through grace and our homeward-turning love: and therefore the creature in its inward contemplation feels a distinction and an otherness between itself and God." The Book of Supreme Truth, cap. xi.

2. "It is Love which breaks down the barrier between finite and infinite life. But Love, as he understands it, has little in common with the feeling-state to which many of the female mystics have given that august name. For him it is hardly an emotional word at all, and never a sentimental one; rather the title of a mighty force, a holy energy that fills the universe--the essential activity of God." Underhill, Ruysbroeck, pp. 72-73.
3. "It is the nature of love ever to give and to take, to love and be loved, and these two things meet in whomsoever loves. Thus the love of Christ is both avid and generous . . . as He devours us, so He would feed us. If He absorbs us utterly into Himself, in return He gives us His very self again." The Mirror of Eternal Salvation, cap. vii.

E. THE CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH  
AS REVEALED IN THE WRITINGS OF HUYSERONCK

After each awakening the Spirit works  
Unresting, flowing forth and drawing in  
The soul of man. Peaks of contemplation  
Look down upon the Holy Mother Church,  
And from the soul's abyss, blind eyes look up  
To Holy Church, and on the Wayless Way  
She stands, both giving and receiving life.<sup>1</sup>  
Obedience to her commands<sup>2</sup> reveals  
Humility. The inward life must die  
Without obedience,<sup>3</sup> finding its light  
In faith and concord with the Holy Church.<sup>4</sup>

- 
1. "Now at this time, I cannot set forth my meaning more clearly. In all that I understand, or feel or have written, I submit myself to the judgment of the saints and of Holy Church; for I wish to live and to die as a servant of Christ, in the Christian faith; and I desire to be by the grace of God, a life-giving member of Holy Church." The Book of Supreme Truth, cap. xiv.
  2. ". . . they imagine themselves to be set above the law and above the commandments of God and Holy Church." Ibid., cap. iv.
  3. "From this humility there springs obedience, for none can be inwardly obedient save the humble man.  
  
"Obedience means an unassuming, submissive, and pliable humour, and a will in readiness for all that is good. Obedience makes a man submit to the biddings, the forbiddings, and the will of God; it subjects the senses and the animal powers to the higher reason, so that a man may live decently and reasonably. And it makes men submissive and obedient to Holy Church, to the sacraments, to the prelates and their teaching, to their commandments and their counsels, and to all the good customs practised by Holy Christendom." The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib. i, cap. xiii.
  4. ". . . and ever keeping harmony and concord with the Holy Church, . . ." The Twelve Beguines, cap. xiv.

That those who serve the Holy Church can fail  
 Pursuing error and forsaking truth  
 Is evident,<sup>1</sup> such men engrossed in pride;  
 Practicing the moral virtues, pity  
 And compassion will burn in fires of hell.<sup>2</sup>  
 To believers all things are possible,  
 And walking in the ways of Holy Church,  
 Obeying God, and flying from all sin,  
 Observing fasts and holy days, one finds  
 The life of works, and over this the Church  
 Has rule supreme.<sup>3</sup> Beware of idleness

- 
1. The worldly condition of the Church is considered extensively in Ullmann, Reformers Before the Reformation (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1855), pp. 49-54.
  2. "The second kind are faithless or dishonest persons who hold and pursue some error against the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed, or against the Seven Sacraments of the Church, or who differ in some respect from the Catholic Church, or hold an opinion contrary to it, or maintain it publicly or privately: if they determine to persist thus tenaciously, and so die in it, even though endowed with all the moral virtues, and engaged in all acts of pity and compassion, and are esteemed for as great a clearness of intellect as any mortal who has ever lived, nevertheless, they are to be plunged into the flames of hell." The Kingdom of the Lovers of God, cap. viii.
  3. "If you would keep the commandments of God, it is necessary that you believe and trust in God and purge your conscience of all sin according to the Christian law and the ordinance of Holy Church. You must in all good will obey God and your superiors, complying with the usage and good practice of Holy Church, according to your powers and right discretion in accordance with the ordinary ways and conduct of good men and custom of the land in which you dwell. Learn the ten commandments and live by them. Shun and fly from the seven deadly sins, lest offending God, you merit the pains of hell. Observe the fasts and holy days and be obedient and ready in all good things within your power." The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love, pp. 41-42.

And perversity of nature,<sup>1</sup> the church  
 Exacts obedience and industry  
 Enlightening the Mystic Way to truth.  
 And through this Holy Church whom he obeyed  
 The Blessed John asked faithful ones to pray  
 His beginning and wretched middle course  
 Might find a blessed end in Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

- 
1. "And therefore, as I told you heretofore, you should beware of those self-deceived men who, by means of their idle vacancy, and with their bare and simple gaze have found the Divine Essence within themselves in a merely natural way; and who pretend to be one with God without the grace of God and without exercise of virtue, and without obedience to God and to Holy Church." The Book of Supreme Truth, cap. xiv.
  2. "Pray for him who has composed and written this, that God may have mercy upon him. That his poor beginning, and his and our wretched middle course, may be brought to a blessed end, this may Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, bestow upon us all. Amen." The Book of Supreme Truth, cap. xiv.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## RUYSBROECK'S INFLUENCE UPON GROOTE AND TAULER

## A. THE BACKGROUND AND LIFE OF GERHARDT GROOTE

Three years before the vale of Groenendael  
 Enfolded in its solitude the priest  
 Of St. Gudule, northward from that valley  
 Some hundred miles, a burgomeister's son  
 Was born, to bear the name of Gerhardt Groote.<sup>1</sup>  
 A mind too powerful to hold was thrust  
 Into a feeble frame that burned in zeal.<sup>2</sup>

- 
1. The birth of Gerhardt Groote is related in time to the founding of the monastery at Groenendael to establish a continuity with the preceding chapters. He was born in a house on the Brink in Deventer some hundred miles north of Groenendael, probably in October, the only son of Werner Groote and his wife Helwig. His father was Sheriff and Burgomeister of the town which was at that time a town of considerable importance. Cf., Ullmann, op. cit., II, 61.

In the German edition of The Imitation of Christ, there is a life of Gerhardt Groote which states that Gerhardt was the heir or legitimate son of Werner Groote. "Im Oktober des Jahres 1340 wurde ihm, nach einem unehelichen Kinde, ein Erbsohn geboren und auf den Namen Gerrit (Gerhard) getauft." Gerrit Grote, Die Nachfolge Christi (Freiburg: Otto Walter, 1947) p. 11.

Cf., a Kempis, Vita Gerardi, vii, i.

2. "Feeble in body, but endowed with excellent powers of mind, he was destined for a career of study." Ullmann, Ibid., II, 61.

Three times had Leo ranged the sky in heat  
 Of summer, since the Angel Death had walked  
 With John in Groenendael, when once again  
 The mystic three was proved, and Gerhardt died.<sup>1</sup>  
 But bound within the limits of these years,  
 Leaping the confines of his feeble flesh,  
 This man unleashed devotion on his world.<sup>2</sup>  
 Yet a little while, he walked the path  
 Marked by the world for recognition sweet.<sup>3</sup>  
 The lore of science and theology  
 Was his, as in his eighteenth year of age  
 He wore a master's gown and heard applause  
 As first he shared the product of his mind.<sup>4</sup>

- 
1. The chronology tabulated reads thus:  
 October, 1340, the birth of Grootc.  
 Easter week, 1343, the settlement of Groenendael.  
 December 2, 1381, the death of Ruysbroeck.  
 August 20, 1384, the death of Grootc.
  2. "The devotion of Ruysbroeck, freed from the element of dubious speculation, was represented by the Brethren of the Common Life." Henry C. Sheldon, History of the Christian Church (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1894, 5 vols.), II, 468.
  3. "Affluently furnished with the gifts of fortune, it appeared that he would travel the usual path of worldly minded clergymen." Ullmann, op. cit., p. 62.
  4. "After obtaining the degree of master in his eighteenth year, Gerhard in compliance with the wish of his father, returned home, furnished with all the knowledge of theology and the canon law which his age possessed, and likewise not averse to the science and practice of magic. Actuated by scientific zeal, however, he shortly after repaired to Cologne, where he further prosecuted his studies, and made his first appearance as professor with applause." Idem.

From Paris to Cologne he journeyed far  
 In search of wisdom. Then, returning home,  
 Susceptible to worldly vanity,  
 The power of devotion slumbered deep  
 Within his breast; unheeded, but still seen:  
 As once he watched a public game, and one  
 Had said, "You must become another man."<sup>1</sup>  
 A simple word; but not without effect.  
 The heart of life contains the germ of death;  
 And from the door through which he did not pass,<sup>2</sup>  
 A friend kept watch as sickness ran its course.  
 The learned pious prior did not fail  
 To show concern with earnestness, and spoke  
 Of vanity and death's eternity<sup>3</sup>  
 To find response; and as his body healed

- 
1. "The first incident transpired at a public game at Köln. A stranger, apparently one of the unnamed 'Friends of God,' stood by Groot's side and said softly: 'Why standest thou here?—thou oughtest to become another man.'" Donald Freeman, "Education and the Reformation" (Typescript copy, 1957), p. 21. This phrase "another man" is used twice by Thomas a Kempis in his brief Vita Gerardi.
  2. "This conversion, which took place in 1374, appears to have been due partly to the effects of a dangerous illness and partly to the influence of Henry de Calcar, the learned and pious prior of the Carthusian monastery at Munnikhuizen near Arnhem, who had remonstrated with him on the vanity of his life." Edward Cuthbert Butler, art. "Groot, Gerhard" Encyclopedia Britannica (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica Co., 1910, 11th ed.), XII, 614.
  3. "In an interview they had at Utrecht, Henry took the opportunity of admonishing him with deep earnestness, on the vanity of earthly things, and on death, eternity, and the chief good." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 63.

Gerhardt's will was merged with God's in faith  
 To learn the way of truth that he might teach  
 The truth to those that he would learn to love.<sup>1</sup>  
 In the monastery's cold seclusion<sup>2</sup>  
 His spirit warmed. Thus in contemplation  
 He found the Mystic Way that Ruysbroeck walked,  
 Embodied in Eternal Work<sup>3</sup> for God.  
 Forth he went, refusing ordination  
 As a priest,<sup>4</sup> accepting deacon's orders  
 Only that he might instruct in public.  
 His earnestness of spirit won him love;  
 For neither pay nor duty could command  
 The deep concern of him who sealed his words

- 
1. "His object was first to learn for himself what he was afterwards to teach to others. a Kempis, op. cit., vi, 1.
  2. "In order to concentrate the powers of his mind, he retired into the Carthusian monastery at Monchhuysen in Gelders, and there spent three years in serious self-reflection, the study of Holy Scriptures, and the most rigorous penitential exercises. Dressing himself in a long coarse garment of hair cloth, totally abstaining from the use of flesh and other lawful things, and passing a considerable portion of his nights in watching and prayer, he forced his feeble body into complete subservience to his spirit." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 63.
  3. Supra, p. 65, n. 6.
  4. "So high was his idea of the priesthood and of its immense responsibility, that he used to say, 'I would not, for all the gold of Arabia, undertake the care of souls even for a single night.' Hence he would only consent to be ordained a deacon—an office which conferred on him the right of publicly instructing the people." Ullmann, op. cit., II, pp. 63-64.

By every action of his life in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Such deep concern, and the response it drew

From those who heard, provoked a bitterness

In those, who given charge to care for souls,

Themselves corrupt in sin, revealed no light--

They could not stand beside the light of Grootes.<sup>2</sup>

1. "Here was a preacher who spoke, not because it was his professional duty, nor for the sake of the pay, but freely and gratuitously, and because impelled by the zeal of love, in whom it was impossible not to mark deep concern and intense seriousness, and who sealed by the actions of his life the sentiments taught him by his own experience." Ullmann, *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

"Es fehlte draussen in der Welt an Aposteln der Laien, an Bussweckern für Klerus und Volk. Mönche und Geistlichkeit besaßen keine missionarische Kraft mehr: 'Da es hierzulande,' schreibt der niederdeutsche Biograph, 'an guten Predigern, die so lebten wie sie lehrten, gross gebrach, wurde ihm geraten, dass er . . . unserem Herrn nicht allein seine Seele, sondern viele Seelem sollte gewinnen.'" Grootes, *Die Nachfolge Christi*, pp. 16-17.

2. "The impartiality of his censures, which he directed not only against the prevailing sins of the laity, but also against heresy, simony, avarice, and impurity among the secular and regular clergy, provoked the hostility of the clergy, and accusations of heterodoxy were brought against him." Butler, *loc. cit.*

B. GROOTE'S VISIT TO GROENENDAEL  
AND THE FOUNDING OF THE  
BRETHREN OF THE COMMON LIFE

Under the Bishop of Utrecht,<sup>1</sup> Gerhardt  
Had preached in moral purity and faith;  
But charges brought suspension, and despite  
A public protestation,<sup>2</sup> he was banned  
From preaching in the towns. He recognized  
The power of the Church, obeying it  
In every aspect of its law.<sup>3</sup> And thus  
An obstacle was placed before the man  
But in a quiet sphere of work he found  
A more congenial home.<sup>4</sup> Some years before

- 
1. "Although entertaining a sincere respect for the Spiritual profession and its better members, he attacked with the most unsparing severity the corrupt manners of the clergy, especially of such as led unchaste lives; in consequence of which, many enemies rose against him, and in spite of his own modest protest, and the zealous intercession of a friend and admirer with the Bishop of Utrecht, prevailed upon that otherwise well-disposed prelate, to withdraw from Gerhard his general license to preach." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 66.  
Cf., a Kempis, op. cit., xviii, 1.
  2. "It was in vain that Groot emitted a Publica Protestatio, in which he declared that Jesus Christ was the great subject of his discourses, that in all of them he believed himself to be in harmony with the Catholic doctrine, and that he willingly subjected them to the candid judgment of the Roman Church." Butler, loc. cit.
  3. "They are our superiors, we will do what is right, and obey their commands." a Kempis, op. cit., ix, 1.
  4. "But as in general the apparent obstacles to good serve only to promote it, so in the present case, the restraint put upon Gerhard, only directed his activity into the proper channel, in which it was productive of far more important consequences. He now confined himself to a quiet and circumscribed, but more secure sphere of labour, in which his mind found a more congenial home." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 66-67.

Swayed by some writings of the Blessed John<sup>1</sup>  
 He journeyed south to visit Groenendael.<sup>2</sup>  
 And there he found the Blessed John whose works  
 He knew.<sup>3</sup> Surprised by the simplicity  
 Of monastery life in the green vale  
 Gerhardt in reverence conversed with John,<sup>4</sup>  
 Received from him assurance of the truth  
 He taught.<sup>5</sup> And John's release from willfulness  
 So pressed upon his heart he later wrote,  
 He never loved or honored any man

- 
1. "Alius equidem non minus famosus magnae devotionis magister quidam, nomine Gerardus Magni (alias Groot vulgari cognomine) (2), fons et origo modernae devotionis in Bassa Almania inter canonicos regulares, cum de dicta prioris opinione laudabili doctrinaque mirabili comperisset, nisus est eum personaliter cum magno desiderio visitare, ut vel secum cretenus confereno de suae opinionis tam longe effusa redolentia affectatum haberet experientiam." Pomerius, Vita, cap. viii, in Analecta Bollandiana, pp. 288-289.
  2. The visit cannot be exactly dated, some source placing it in 1381 others as early as 1378. Butler cites the first date with a parenthetical, perhaps earlier, while Ullmann uses 1378. Quite probably more than one visit was involved, hence the confusion.
  3. ". . . in the year 1378, he visited the monastery of Gränthal, in order to become acquainted personally with one whom he had long known by his writings, the far-famed mystic, Ruysbroek." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 67.
  4. ". . . Gerhard tarried for several days with the kind and much experienced old man, conversed with him on passages of Scripture and other subjects connected with the inward life, and received deep impressions both from his discourse and personal qualities, as well as from all around him." Idem.
  5. Supra, p. 48, note 2.

So warmly as the blessed prior John.<sup>1</sup>  
 And not alone the man; but all his ways  
 In executing menial tasks,<sup>2</sup> or called  
 To share authority with all who worked  
 Within the rule of Augustine.<sup>3</sup> His life  
 Affirms the deep impress of Groenendael.<sup>4</sup>  
 The Brethren of the Common Life were born  
 Of Groote's desire to imitate the man  
 Who shaped the goals of brotherhood for him.  
 His first pursuit, the copying of books  
 Used young men destined for the Church and served

- 
1. "He wrote afterwards to the brethren in Gr nthal that he never loved or honoured any mortal so warmly as their prior, and that he was willing to serve him for a footstool both in the present life and in that which is to come." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 68.
  2. Supra, p. 48, note 3.
  3. The Carthusian-trained Groote was deeply impressed with the rule of the Augustinian Canons. Supra, p. 45, notes 2 and 3.  
 "Auf Anraten seines Freundes, des grossen Mystikers Ruysbroek, den er oft besucht hatte, bestimmte er die Augustinerregel." Gerrit Grote, op. cit., p. 23.
  4. "The connection between the two is self-evident, and has been expressly affirmed by Thomas a Kempis. He relates that, impressed by the edifying and simple life of Ruysbroek and his brethren, Gerhard thenceforth felt himself determined to form an institution of a similar kind." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 68.  
 Cf., a Kempis, Vita Gerardi, xv, iii.

A threefold end:<sup>1</sup> to multiply the books,  
 Give work, and shape the minds of youth. Thus grew  
 Fellowship without institution  
 Until a young disciple dreamed a dream  
 Of living in a common house and dared  
 To bait the Master with a common fund.<sup>2</sup>  
 To cultivate a common piety  
 The House subjected Brethren to a rule  
 Obedience to which was unconstrained  
 Observed through freedom of the will alone.<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. "Hence, he had long before employed young men, under his oversight, as copyists, thereby accomplishing the threefold end of multiplying these good theological works; giving profitable employment to the youths, and obtaining an opportunity of influencing their minds." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 69.

Of., a Kempis, op. cit., ix, ii.

2. "The immediate impulse from without to the institution of fellowship, was as follows: The young Florentius, whom we have already mentioned, then vicar at Deventer, one day said to Gerhard, 'Dear master, what harm would it do were I and these clerks, who are here copying, to put our weekly earnings into a common fund and live together?'--'Live together!' replied Gerhard, 'the mendicant monks would never permit it; they would do their worst to prevent us.'--'But what,' said Florentius, 'is to prevent us making the trial? Perhaps God would give us success.'--'Well, then,' said Gerhard, 'in God's name commence. I will be your advocate, and faithfully defend you against all who rise up against you.' In this manner they formed themselves into a private society; and as their manner of living in community was imitated, they grew at length into an extensive confederation." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 70.
3. "Combined for the cultivation of genuine piety, they procured for themselves the means of a simple livelihood, . . . From this source, and from donations and legacies made to them, arose the Brother-Houses, in each of which a certain number of members lived together, . . . Their whole rule was to be observed not from constraint, but from the sole motive of good-will constantly renewed, and all obedience, even the

Under Gerhardt's guidance,<sup>1</sup> the Brethren gave  
 Gratuitously of their knowledge deep  
 Making the arts attainable to all  
 Both rich and poor, and added life  
 To form as education breathed anew  
 The purer, nobler spirit of the age.<sup>2</sup>  
 Possessing knowledge in the healing art  
 He journeyed to the town where he was born  
 And there himself was stricken with the plague.<sup>3</sup>  
 Thus limited by God, beyond which point  
 He could not pass;<sup>4</sup> the Master Gerhardt Groot

---

most unconditional, was to be paid freely and affectionately, and for God's sake." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 70-71.

1. "The initiation of this movement was the great achievement of Groot's life; he lived to preside over the birth and first days of his other creation, the Society of Brothers of Common Life." Butler, loc. cit.
2. "The Brethren of the Common Lot, on the contrary, not merely gave instruction gratuitously, and thereby rendered the arts of reading and writing attainable by all, both rich and poor, and not merely promoted in every way the progress of the more indigent class of students; but what was of most consequence, they imbued education with quite a new life and a purer and nobler spirit." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 72.
3. "The plague which at the time was raging in Deventer, attacked one of his friends. Gerhard, who possessed some experience in the medical art, hastened intrepidly to his help; and was himself smitten." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 77.

It is interesting to note the comparable cycles in the life of Groot and Luther in so far as birth and death are concerned. Each died in the village where he was born and each was embarked upon an errand of mercy.

4. a Kempis, Vita Gerardi, xvi, i-ii.

Completed life, and from St. Mary's Church,<sup>1</sup>  
 Matriculated into Heaven itself.  
 The mystic, pure and practical, was born  
 From Ruysbroeck,<sup>2</sup> whose spirit thus was planted  
 In the Brother Houses, to live again  
 In masters' minds and pupils' hearts, until  
 The Reformation tree should grow,  
 And find its roots in Groote and Blessed John.<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. "In this manner, Gerhard breathed his last in his native city, upon the 20th of August 1384, and at the age of forty-four. He was interred with great solemnity in the church of St. Mary, which had often rung with his living voice, and the sorrow for him was universal." Ullmann, op. cit., II, 77-78.
  2. "Having himself received the impulse from John Ruysbroeck, he transplanted the spirit to his favourite disciple Flerentius, and he in his turn to Thomas a Kempis." Ibid., p. 79.
  3. ". . . that he [a Kempis] trained himself to an existing school and tradition, and that his blossoms derived their sap from a stock whose roots were Ruysbroeck and Gerhard Groot." Ibid., pp. 79-80.

### C. THE BACKGROUND AND LIFE OF JOHN TAULER

The thirteenth century waned as John was born  
 In Strassburg.<sup>1</sup> Cathedrals great had risen,  
 Symbols of the church's strength and power;  
 And Christian lands were ruled by Christian kings  
 Whose temporal powers were second to the Pope.  
 And men of wealth would give the church their sons.<sup>2</sup>  
 But not against his will did John embrace  
 The cloister walls.<sup>3</sup> No trace of Eckhart's thought  
 Betrays the fact, the Mystic Meister ruled

- 
1. Of his birthplace there is no doubt. Most authorities give the year about 1300 but Carl Schmidt whose monograph Johannes Tauler von Strassburg, (Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1841) is generally accepted as definitive uses the year 1290, citing as follows: "Im Jahre 1340 sagt der Laie, welcher einen so grossen Einfluss auf Tauler ausgeübt hat, letzterer möge funfzig Jahr alt seyn, und Tauler bestätigt es: , es mag alds bey sein; ' so kömmt für das Geburtsjahr 1290 heraus . . . --Andre nehmen, aber ohne Grund, 1294 an." p. 1, note 2.
  2. "This at least is certain, our friar was the son of a wealthy man; for he tells us himself that he could have lived on his patrimony if he so desired. The family was evidently religious; Tauler joined the Order of Preachers and his sister became a nun in the Dominican convent of St. Nikolaus in undis, in Strasbourg." James M. Clark, The Great German Mystics (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949), p. 36.
  3. "He was not forced into the cloisters against his will, but had a genuine sense of vocation. 'Once when I saw the holy brethren who keep the rules of the Order strictly, I would gladly have done likewise,' he wrote many years later to Margareta Ebner." Idem.

One medieval concept of salvation consisted of following the monastic life, cenobitic or eremitic, as the surest way to heaven. Pain and mortification were viewed as an earthly purgatory and, if intense enough, release would bring the angels who would take the soul to heaven where for a given length of time it would suffer no pain but be deprived of the beatific vision. Thus Tauler's willingness was based in the theology of the day.

The very cloister.<sup>1</sup> Paris and Cologne  
 Would pour their stream of thought into his mind<sup>2</sup>  
 Until Thomistic thought shaped by "Nature's  
 Master" and the Fathers with the mystics  
 Shone through his writings and his sermons clear.<sup>3</sup>  
 The Emperor and Pope were locked in strife  
 And Strassburg suffered interdict for years.<sup>4</sup>

- 
1. While Clark states that Tauler was "certainly his pupil in the wider sense of knowing the master through his writings and his teachings, and he was profoundly influenced by them," (*Idem*) Ullmann (*op. cit.*, p. 204), states with greater clarity, "Of this, however, we find no certain traces in his writings. His mode of thinking is of quite a different kind from that of Eckart, being the mysticism, not of speculation, but of sentiment. It does not, with pantheistical boldness, suppose man directly identical with the Divine Being, but subjects him to God and his government, in child-like and devoted piety."
  2. "He was evidently a youth of promise and was sent to the studium generale at Cologne to complete his studies." Clark, *Ibid.*, p. 36.  
 "Seine Zeitgenossen nennen ihn einen Meister der heiligen Schrift; wo und wann er aber den Titel eines Doctors der Theologie erhielt, ist unbekannt; wenigstens kommt sein Name weder unter den Pariser noch unter den Cöllner Doctorer vor." Schmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.
  3. "Indessen ist ihm doch die Scholastik nicht fremd geblieben, und wenn er auch ausser seinem grossen Ordensgenossen, dem 'Meister Thomas,' beinach gar keinen Scholastiker in seinen Predigten und Schriften anführt, so beruft er sich doch nicht selten auf Aristoteles, den Philosophen des Mittelalters, welchen er 'den natürlichen Meister, oder den Meister von Natur' nennt. Die jenigen Schriftsteller, zu welchen er sich am meisten hingezogen fühlte, und welche er auch wohl schon sehr frühe zum Gegenstande seiner Studien machte, waren die mystikochen und speculativen unter den kirchlichen Autoren, Pseudo-Dionysius, die Victoriner, S. Bernhard, von Allen aber Augustin; auch die Neuplatoniker waren ihm nicht unbekannt; Proklus erscheint mehrmals in seinen Predigten." *Ibid.*, p. 3
  4. "In 1324 Strassburg with other cities was placed under a papal interdict." Encyclopedia Britannica, XXVI, 452.

Sometime, before the interdict was raised  
 Knowledge passed to power in Tauler's life,  
 The oft told story of a layman's part--  
 Of the Friend of God from the Oberland--  
 Cannot be true; but truth is relative,  
 And something of heaven came down to earth  
 To touch John Tauler's lips; for then he preached  
 With power of the Holy Ghost. Amen.<sup>1</sup>  
 The Friends of God who, staunch within the church,<sup>2</sup>  
 Repented of the evils of the day;  
 Found firm support in one who preached the Word,  
 To set the world ablaze with fiery tongue.<sup>3</sup>  
 He urged an imitation of the Christ,  
 And preached of poverty, as Francis did.  
 Indignant at the interdict, he urged  
 The priests to serve the dying ones, in faith

- 
1. This spurious Vita or Historie is quite moving and the text of the first conversion sermon is Behold the Bridegroom cometh which will be discussed shortly in relation to Ruysbroeck. It can be found in Susanna Winkworth's translation of the Life and Sermons (London: H. R. Allenson, 1905).
  2. "It is in the highest degree unlikely that Tauler, a Dominican friar, should oppose the papal instructions. For him obedience to the See of Rome was axiomatic." Clark, op. cit., p. 38.
  3. "They (Tauler and Heinrich von Nördlingen) have set the world ablaze with their fiery tongues," wrote Christina Ebner in the Dominican nunnery of Engeltal near Nürnberg about 1350." Ibid., p. 39.

And opposition to the Holy See.<sup>1</sup>  
 Tradition speaks of illness suffered long<sup>2</sup>  
 Before release from pain--in the cloisters  
 He loved so well his body lay--his stone  
 Adorns a church he never knew,<sup>3</sup> and thus  
 Reform has claimed a man whose faithfulness,<sup>4</sup>  
 Attested by a hundred words, must stand  
 Against attempts to read a faith unborn  
 Into the thinking of his thought divine.

- 
1. "But in ecclesiastical matters of a practical kind, the zeal of his love for the people changed into a zeal of indignation at their false leaders. He expressed himself strongly against letting the poor and ignorant die under excommunication without any fault of theirs; and emitted several consolatory tracts exhorting priests to administer them the sacraments before their decease." Ullmann, op. cit., II, p.211.
  
  - "Denifle has pointed out that it was permissible to give the last sacraments to the dying even at a time of interdict." Clark, op. cit., p. 38.
  
  2. Clark says ten weeks, Ullmann twenty.
  
  3. "Tauler died on June 16th, 1361, according to the inscription on his tombstone. . . . An old tradition affirms that he died after a ten weeks' illness in the garden of the convent of St. Nikolaus in undis, where his sister was a nun. He was buried in the cloisters of the Dominican friary. His tombstone is now in the new Protestant Church, which was built on the same site." Clark, op. cit., p. 40.
  
  4. "As a general rule, Tauler avoids the semblance of heresy. When dangerous ground is to be trod, he defines his terms and keeps well within the limits of the strictest orthodoxy." Ibid., p. 45.

D. THE TRADITION OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
TAULER AND RUYSBROECK

When dates are known,<sup>1</sup> and circumstances tend  
To lend a credence to a tale part-true,  
The mind of man takes wings to bring to pass  
The heart's desire. Tradition can be true  
Or false, and anyone can marshal facts  
To weld a chain of circumstance, which done,  
Encircles probability, not truth.  
But when the weight of scholarship is known  
Probably true outweighs probably false.<sup>2</sup>  
To assume that Tauler and the Blessed  
John of Ruysbroeck had once met face to face  
Is not amiss; for when the light of God  
Illumined him, would not he seek to see  
The man whose thoughts had turned his feet to God?<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. The dates of Tauler, 1290-1361; and of Ruysbroeck, 1293-1381.
  2. Evelyn Underhill in Ruysbroeck is the only author consulted who states: "The tradition which places among these disciples the great Dominican mystic Tauler is probably false; though many passages in Tauler's later sermons suggest that he was strongly influenced by Ruysbroeck's works, which had already attained a wide circulation." p. 31.
  3. "In all probability, it was after his conversion to mysticism that he travelled to Gränthal to see Ruysbroeck. This visit, presupposing as it does a secret bias to the views of the Mystic, could scarcely fail to confirm him in them. (Cf., Underhill's recognition of Ruysbroeck's influence in note above.) Tauler was a far better scholastic than Ruysbroeck; but Ruysbroeck, having practiced it from his youth up, was greatly his superior in power and depth of contemplation." Ullmann, op. cit., pp. 206-207.

The once great preacher humbled in his cell  
 For four and twenty months, and then released  
 To preach, became a laughing stock in town  
 Because his tongue was tied.<sup>1</sup> But grace divine  
 Was manifest in these afflictions dire.  
 The first great sermon of his life in Christ  
 Was based upon the book, the Blessed John  
 Had called The Adornment of the Marriage—  
 A spiritual nuptial with the Christ.  
 His body followed then his heart. He sought  
 The Blessed John in Groenendael<sup>2</sup> and learned  
 To love the imitation of the Christ  
 To bring a content to this way that one  
 Had brought before;<sup>3</sup> but in the mystic's hands  
 Had proven destitute,<sup>4</sup> and faith and works  
 Were joined in the Eternal Paradox.<sup>5</sup>

- 
1. The Latin Life of Tauler relates that in the year 1346, a Master of Theology was preaching when a layman discovered that he was without grace. Asking the preacher to teach how a man could attain perfection and nearness to God, the layman copied the sermon as it was preached and then pointed out that the preacher was a Pharisee. Recognizing the truth of the accusation, he retired to his cell to seek humility. After two years, he was visited by the layman again and urged to preach. The attempt was a dismal failure. Three days later he preached on the theme "Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him," and produced a great impression. Resumes of this life may be found in Clark and Ullmann and in its entirety in Winkworth.
  2. "According to Surius, the biographer of Ruysbroeck, he often went to Groenendael near Waterloo to see the great Flemish mystic, but there is no indication of the date of these journeys." Clark, op. cit., p. 39.

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3. St. Francis of Assisi.
  4. "In this manner Tauler, although not the first who did so, introduced with peculiar efficacy and success the important doctrine of the imitation of Christ, and of the adoption of his life of poverty and active love, as an essential element, into the sphere of mysticism, securing to it by that means a rich practical content of which, in the hands of Ruysbroeck, it was as yet destitute." Ullmann, op. cit., p. 208.
  5. Supra, p. 62.

## CHAPTER SIX

## SUMMARY AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The vision dim has now become a truth,  
 Perceived in knowledge, as the Mystic Way  
 Has opened, and Ruysbroeck's thought unfolded.  
 An apostle he, of mystic action,  
 Alluring men to try his way of life:  
 To suffer Augustinian restlessness,  
 Until the great awakening sets to work  
 Purgation, through the Active Life; and next,  
 Illumination lights Interior Life;  
 To meet in Unity, the Life he called  
 Beyond all essence, one with God in God.  
 His place within the mystic scheme of things  
 Is honored more by one who knows his life  
 Than those who walk in ignorance. To trace  
 That life has been to see the mystic strands  
 Unite to bring an emphasis more strong  
 To the Eternal truth, that God is love.  
 And not content to hold that love within  
 He poured his soul upon the written page.  
 His thoughts of God and Christ revealed the heart  
 That had a debt to pay: to love the love

That loves, once paid, but ever reincurred.  
Inspired by the Holy Ghost he wrote  
Of all he knew, the failings of the Church  
The weakness of the shepherds of the flock;  
But staunchly held the right of Mother Church  
And never slipped in heresy. His love,  
Transmitted through his person, would yet flow  
Into the spirit of a time to come:  
Through Gerhardt Groote and Tauler, his ideas  
Would come to flower in a way of life,  
Apart from speculation, drinking deep  
Of life's well-springs in ways he never knew.  
A vast unrest would he create through those  
Who caught his mystic vision of God's love  
And in the light of it they worked, sans rest,  
Sans haste, contributing to a groundswell:  
As teachers dared to teach that love excelled,  
And friars dared to censure Mother Church,  
For inhumanity to man. From him  
The fountainhead, has flowed three precious rills:  
The first, the rill of education, feeds  
The second rill of practised piety,  
While together they feed the rill of faith  
Which to the fountain basin flows a stream  
To flood a church reformed in agony.  
Still divided the men who love the Church

As Christ's own Blood and Flesh must raise their eyes  
Above the fountain basin to the Head  
And in the Mystic spray catch sight of God  
Tracing a rainbow in the mist to say  
That His own essence flows in purest love  
To all who thirst for Him. The time will come  
When words will prove no barriers, and we  
Shall nothing be, except in Him whose love  
The mystic tries again. Words will fail and fail  
But love will never fail; for God is love.



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## A B S T R A C T

The life and writings of the Blessed John of Ruysbroeck lie at the heart of the Golden Age of Mysticism. The purpose of this study has been to present his life and an interpretation of his writings in the form of a narrative poem, thoroughly documented according to accepted dissertation practice, and to show that his life and writings exerted influence upon Gerhardt Groote and John Tauler.

The result of the study indicates that Ruysbroeck had a clear conception and structure for his mystical thought presenting a doctrine of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a doctrine of man, and a conception of the Church, which, while illuminated in many instances with mystic insight, are still conformable to the spirit and intellect of the fourteenth century.

His way of resolving the Eternal Paradox of Rest and Work captured the imagination of Groote and Tauler. Groote, working through the Brethren of the Common Life and infusing the *Devotio Moderna* through the brother houses of the Low Countries, exemplified the work concept as he had learned it through the Augustinian Canon regula at Groenendael. Tauler captured Ruysbroeck's concept of union with God as expressed in The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage and The Sparkling Stone and translated that concept from speculation into action as his sermons fired the people who came to hear him.

Thus through the educational methods of the Brethren and the preaching zeal of the Friends, the concepts of Ruysbroeck gained the attention of the people of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, contributing to the groundswell which eventuated in the Reformations.

Justification for the use of poetry in this study may be found in the fact that much of the work of Ruysbroeck was originally cast in a verse structure which is not unpleasing, although the poems were never accepted by students of literature for their literary quality.

The whole of Christian mysticism lies  
In love identifying mind and soul  
With God, and sharing sacrifice with Christ.

This definition of Christian Mysticism drawn from the writings of Ruysbroeck and cast into poetic form indicates the structure of the entire study, a merging of mind and spirit. The mind studying to learn, and the spirit eager to communicate.

A debt to pay: to love the love that loves,  
And yet, once paid, is ever reincurred.

This thought expressed in poetry summarizes over a page of Ruysbroeck's prose in The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love without doing an injustice to the passage.

. . . . . One unbegotten  
Nor begetting; but pouring forth from God  
The Father and the Son as their own breath  
He moves the Soul to seek Him seeking it.

This description of the function of the Holy Spirit actually compresses almost an entire chapter of The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage.

These excerpts from the body of the dissertation, illustrate the manner and style of communication.

Included in the study is a complete biographical sketch of John of Ruysbroeck and briefer summaries of the lives of Gerhardt Groote and John Tauler. These biographies augment the actual works and give a clearer conception of the times in which they lived than could be obtained without them. The study concludes with the vision that

. . . . .The time will come  
When words will prove no barriers, and we  
Shall nothing be, except in Him whose love  
The mystic tries to gain. Words will fail and fail;  
But love will never fail, for love is God.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Donald Hubbard Freeman was born on Bay State Road in Boston on October 7, 1919. His parents, Alice Mabel (Hubbard) and Ernest Alan Freeman were living at 72 Brighton Avenue, Allston, but moved in 1924 to 185 Trapelo Road in Belmont. He went through the public school system in Belmont, graduating in 1937.

Following graduation, he was employed at the Belmont Printing Co., and the Belmont Citizen. In March of 1938 he began working at the Mono-Process Co., in Waltham, a type-setting concern. In September of 1939 he enrolled in Northeastern University receiving in November 1943 the A. B. degree. During his course of study at N. U. on the co-operative plan, he held his job at the last named company, working days for the ten week work period and nights for the ten week school period. In spite of the heavy work load, he participated in the Dramatic Society, the Debating Society, and the Northeastern News. He served as editor-in-chief of the News during his Senior Year. In February 1944, he enrolled at B.U.S.T. at 72 Mt. Vernon Street, graduating with the S.T.B. degree in June, 1947. He was ordained deacon of the Methodist Church in 1946 and elder in 1948, receiving both ordinations at the hands of Bishop Lewis O. Hartman. He has served churches in Jamaica Plain, Somerville, Medford, Fairview Chicopee, Worcester, and is presently pastor of Starrett Memorial Methodist Church in Athol. He has served on the Board of Education, the Board

of Missions, and is a member of the Inter-Board Council of the New England Conference of the Methodist Church, and is also a member of the Historical Society.

In September, 1944, he married Grace Estelle Reemie, a graduate of B. U., College of Music, Mus. B. in 1942, M. Mus. in 1949, and they have one child, a daughter, Donelle, born April 18, 1953.

Appendix A:  
The Definition of Mysticism Used in the Text

The definition that "Christian mysticism is love identifying mind and soul with God and sharing sacrifice with Christ," is adequate for an appreciation of Ruysbroeck and his mysticism. It is unfortunate that the great mystics themselves have, of necessity, concentrated on their experience and that we must rely upon students of mysticism, viewing the phenomena from a non-participating standpoint for definitions.

The historian, the psychologist, the philosopher, the theologian, viewing the observable evidence of the Mystic Way, then attempt to express that which they have seen evidenced in the life of the mystic in abstract terms according to Aristotelian or Kantian logic. This results in the development of a Mysticismus<sup>1</sup> which in many ways has made the reality of the experience secondary to history, psychology, philosophy or theology, a result the mystics themselves would deplore. For while their thought and lives may assume a pattern which may be readily catalogued, the beginning of all mysticism, for the mystic, is his own personal experience. This subjective experience is more real to him than any form of speculation.

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1. The German dyslogistic ending ismus can be clearly appreciated by reference to Deissmann's Paulus. "Neben der ungeheuren Diskussion über die literarischen Fragen, insbesondere über die Echtheit der Paulusbriefe und das Verhältnis der Apostelgeschichte zu den Paulusbriefen, ist es hauptsächlich das sogenannte 'System der paulinischen Theologie' oder der 'Paulinismus' gewesen, denen das heisse Ringen dreier Generationen gegolten hat. . . . Ein grosses ungelöstes Rätsel hat die doktrinaire Paulusforschung zudem hinterlassen: die offene Frage, inwiefern dem von ihr ermittelten 'Paulinismus' jene Lebenskräfte innewohnen, die mis-

The Christian mystic identifies this experience as a great outpouring of love. St. John of the Cross speaks of a soul going forth, being led by God, "for love of Him alone, enkindled in love of Him, upon a dark night, which is the privation and purgation of all its sensual desires."<sup>1</sup> Strangely enough, the Dark Night of the Soul, so prominent in the Spanish mystics, and frequently found in the female mystics, plays only a minor role in Ruysbroeck's thinking. His knowledge of the love of God is more positive and joyous than that of some of the ascetic mystics.

Francis de Sales speaks of devotion as love. (Devotion being identified as a way of life, in this instance might well be called mysticism.) "True, living devotion, Philothea, presupposes the love of God, and hence it is nothing else than the love of God."<sup>2</sup> This love of God, which is so characteristic, that we readily identify "God is love" as a divine revelation,<sup>3</sup> is a prerequisite for the mystic. The true Christian mystic will always attribute whatever insights he may receive of the nature of reality as he sees it, not to his own striving; but to the love of God being made manifest in his consciousness. Hence the definition of Noack cited by Inge that "Mysticism is formless speculation,"<sup>4</sup> is of no value to the mystic.

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sionierend, weil hinreissend, auf einfache Menschen in der Grossstädten der antiken Mittelmeerwelt wirken mussten." p. 3. Deissmann then goes on to say that he would be afraid the people of Ikonium, Thessalonika, and Corinth would have the same experience as Eutychus of Troas if they were made to listen to a christological, harmonological, eschatological paragraph of modern "Paulinismus."

1. St. John of the Cross, The Ascent of Mount Carmel, tr. E. Allison Peers (London: Burns, Oates, Washbourne, Ltd., 1953), p. 18.
2. St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life, tr. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 1955), p. 36.
3. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God, and everyone

The first phrase of the definition used herein states what mysticism is in terms of essence; the second phrase, "identifying mind and soul with God," embodies the goal of Ruysbroeck's mysticism. He has been called an apostle of mysticism because he is so insistent that the Mystic Way be learned. He outlines the Active Life and the Interior Life in logical development as if one naturally followed the other. At each stage of development, however, he is careful to assert that the progress of the soul is not assured by the labor of the mind. "If a man does all he can, and cannot do more because of his feebleness, it rests with the infinite goodness of God to finish the work."<sup>1</sup> For every reaching up of the hands of man there must be a reaching down of the hands of God. When the creature thus meets the Creator the fruition of the mystic experience is consummated. In time, it may last but a moment, this identification of the self with God; but from it stems the last concept contained in the definition: "sharing sacrifice with Christ."

If love is the essence of Ruysbroeck's mysticism, and the identification of mind and soul with God is the goal of his mysticism, then is the sharing sacrifice with Christ the authenticating seal of the reality of his experience. Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Hamlet these words:

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that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love." I John 4: 7-8.

4. Inge, op. cit., p. 338.

1. Ruysbroeck, "The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage," cap. i.

" . . . The spirit that I have seen  
 May be a devil; and the devil hath power  
 T'assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps  
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
 As he is very potent with such spirits,  
 Abuses me to damn me."<sup>1</sup>

The pamphlet war with Bloemardinne, in which Ruysbroeck fought the battle of true mysticism against mysticality, sharpened his thinking. This thought reached its greatest clarity in a paradox: eternal rest and eternal work. The identifying self with God would take place in an eternal rest; while sharing sacrifice with Christ would be an eternal work.

Bloemardinne advocated quietism while Ruysbroeck conceived of the super-essential life as an accompaniment or preliminary of the most strenuous work. He condemned the natural repose as an idleness and interior vacancy. The concept of work is a vital part of any definition of mysticism. Without it, there can be no positive action justifying the unitive experience and mysticism can be equated with existentialism. It is the sharing sacrifice with Christ that gives objectivity to the mystic experience and literally raises it above itself and relates it to all mankind.

And thus simply defined

The whole of Christian mysticism lies  
 In love identifying mind and soul  
 With God, and sharing sacrifice with Christ.

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1. Act II, scene ii, ll. 626-631.

Appendix B: Ruysbroeck's Influence  
Upon Tauler as Evidenced in Tauler's Sermons

The first trace of Ruysbroeck's influence upon the thought of John Tauler is apparent in the conversion story. While this history is generally regarded as fiction, nevertheless the structure for the conversion is not inadequate. A certain Master of Theology was confronted by a layman and charged with being a Pharisee. Upon strict examination, the Master discovered truth in the layman's accusation and sought to achieve spirituality with the layman's guidance.

The eloquent preacher was then assigned a period of silence for two years during which time he trained himself in contemplation. Upon being released from his silence, a crowd gathered to hear him preach and he was tongue-tied. Ridiculed and mocked, he retired to his cell. Within the week another sermon was announced, although the monk added, "But what he will do this time, I know not; God only knoweth."

The second attempt after his illumination produced excellent results. The sermon is preserved in the tenth chapter of this history,<sup>1</sup> and the text is the same text that introduces Ruysbroeck's The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage. In this sermon, after setting forth the suffering of the Bride, the Master speaks "The torrent of divine love, and this love flows out unto the Bridegroom, insomuch that the Bride loseth herself, and is intoxicated with love so that she forgets herself, and all creatures, in

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1. The History and Life of the Reverend John Tauler, tr. by Susanna Winkworth (London: H. R. Allen, 1905), pp. 85-92.

time or eternity, together with herself."<sup>1</sup>

The torrent of divine love is a figure used frequently by Ruysbroeck sometimes in the form of "a vast ocean wherefrom all good things have flowed,"<sup>2</sup> sometimes as an "ebb and flow,"<sup>3</sup> sometimes as a fountainhead,<sup>4</sup> or as a brook.<sup>5</sup> The self-forgetfulness is the naughting of Ruysbroeck in which all activity fails as he "is vanquished by the working of God's abysmal love."<sup>6</sup>

As this sermon stands, according to the history, at the beginning of Tauler's effective career it is scarcely surprising to note in subsequent sermons strong traces of Ruysbroeck's influence. One cannot read the sermons of Tauler without being struck by a similarity of speech and thought, figure and concept. Susanna Winkworth notes that the edition of Tauler's sermon prepared by Surius in 1548 adds the names of Eckart, Suso, and Ruysbroeck to several of the sermons attributed to Tauler in the general title. She readily identifies the style of Eckart and Suso but admits that "that of Ruysbroeck seems to me less [recognizable]."<sup>7</sup>

Of greater import in tracing the development in the sermons is the general theme or idea, the proposition as stated by Tauler. The Sermon

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1. Ibid, p. 90.
  2. The Kingdom of the Lovers of God, p. 180.
  3. The Book of Supreme Truth, cap. xlii.
  4. The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, lib.ii, cap xxxvii.
  5. Ibid., lib. ii, cap. xxxv.
  6. Ibid., lib. ii, cap. lxv.
  7. Winkworth, op. cit., p. 19.

for the First Sunday after Easter is based upon John 20:19 and describes "how we are to ascend by three stages to true peace and purity of heart."<sup>1</sup> And his Second Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Easter speaks of "three hindrances which resist the coming of the Holy Ghost in three classes of men."<sup>2</sup>

Both of these themes are developed in detail in Ruysbroeck, the first in the Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage and the second in The Kingdom of the Lovers of God. The three stages correspond to the active, interior, and superessential life as conceived by Ruysbroeck. The hindrances of which Tauler speaks are "sinful persons or open sinners."<sup>3</sup> Ruysbroeck speaks of "men of the first kind who live in open mortal sin."<sup>4</sup> Tauler's second hindrance concerns misuse of the sacraments while Ruysbroeck cites those who pursue some error against the creed. The third hindrance which Tauler lists includes those who are too fond of contemplating the images of outward things, while Ruysbroeck speaks of those who do good works for temporal gains.

The image of Mount Tabor appears in Tauler's Sermon on a Martyr's Day in almost identical content to Ruysbroeck's use in The Sparkling Stone. The isolated instances could be multiplied greatly without adding to the weight of influence.

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1. Winkworth, op. cit., p. 315.

2. Ibid., p. 328.

3. Ibid., p. 328.

4. The Kingdom of the Lovers of God, cap. vii.

Of more significance is the book The Following of Christ by Tauler. While Tauler emphasizes a poverty in man to a greater extent than appears in Ruysbroeck, the development of the Spirit of God speaking without image or form corresponds to Ruysbroeck's Waylessness or Unwalled state. The parallel of light revealing the Presence of God and the Father of light is too exact to be coincident.

Wautier speaks of the tradition of the Tauler-Ruysbroeck relationship as being apparently without doubt but the influence of Ruysbroeck on Tauler as being undeniable especially in the sermons after 1350, the Book of the Four Temptations being reproduced in its entirety in Sermon I in prima Dominica quadr. And three chapters of The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage appear in Sermon II in eadem Dominica.<sup>1</sup>

In light of the above, the text "Probably true outweighs probably false" is undoubtedly justified.

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1. Wautier, op. cit., p. 245.

