

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

1.1. WILLIAM OF SAINT-THIERRY (1075-1148)

From: *Exposition on the Song of Songs*

Therefore the Bride immediately goes on to speak of fruition and says: “Our little bed is flowery.”¹ The little flowery bed is a conscience full of charm, and the joy of the Holy Spirit in it; it is the constant fruition of truth in its very fountainhead. It is the bed of which the same Bridegroom says: “Upon whom shall my Spirit rest unless upon him who is humble and calm and who trembles at my words?”² It is pleasant to pause before the beauty of the flowery bed and consider its joyful pleasures — the springtime beauty of chastity and charity, the wafted fragrance of spiritual feelings and thoughts, the breath of the perfume of divinity and the strength of eternity. Upon this bed takes place that wonderful union and mutual fruition — of sweetness, and of joy incomprehensible and inconceivable even to those in whom it takes place — between man and God, the created spirit and the Uncreated. They are named bride and Bridegroom, while word are sought that may somehow express in human language the charm and sweetness of this union, which is nothing else than the unity of the Father and the Son of God, their kiss, their embrace, their love, their goodness and whatever in that supreme simple unity is common to both. All this is the Holy Spirit — God, Charity, at once Giver and Gift. Upon this bed are exchanged that kiss and that embrace by which the Bride begins to know as she herself is known. And as happens in the kisses of lovers, who by a sweet, mutual exchange, impart their spirit each to the other, so the created spirit pours itself out wholly into the Spirit who creates it for this very effusion; and the Creator Spirit infuses himself into it as he wills, and man becomes one spirit with God.³

The Works of William of Saint-Thierry, vol. II: *Exposition on the Song of Songs*, transl. Columba Hart, Cistercian Publications 6 (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1970), p. 77-78.

1.2. IDA OF NIVELLES (1190?-1231):

Ida responded that she had been carried away in the pure Divinity. In this ecstasy, she had tasted and felt something of the Trinity, something which was beyond every experience that she had had before. Explaining it as well as she could, she said that the life⁴ of the Father in the Son was revealed to her, and that of the Son in the Father, and that of the Spirit in them both. And in order to clarify this, she said that the holy Trinity had associated with her as sweetly as a lover with his beloved, and that she as well had spoken with the holy Trinity lovably and sweetly.

Cf. Chrysostomos Henriquez (ed.), *Quinque prudentes virgines* (Antwerp: Cnobbaert, 1630), p. 271.

¹ Cf. Sg 1, 15.

² Cf. Is 66, 2.

³ 1 Cor 6, 17.

⁴ *Essentia*, as a translation of the Middledutch *wesen* = “being,” not static, but considered as “life,” cf. Jn 1, 3-4: *quod factum est, in ipso vita erat*.

1.3. IDA OF LOUVAIN (1211-?)

One day, the blessed virgin had a vision, when she was in rapture. She saw her own soul as a grand temple, which extended more and more so that its wide dimensions [...] resembled that of a splendid church. She could see it from within and while she was observing sharply and with amazement all the wondrous details of it, reflecting that she had never seen something as beautiful as this, she looked at the altar because it seemed to be the most beautiful of all. [...] She could see the priest coming to the altar, dressed in the solemn liturgical garments. [...] This priest was the only and highest Priest, after the order of Melchizedek, Jesus Christ, perfect God and man, born from the Virgin Mary.

Vita Idae de Lovanio, II 34 (*Acta Sanctorum aprilis* 2, 180C-D).

1.4. HADEWIJCH

From *Letter 18*

God, who is powerful and sovereign above all power and riches, gives enough to all men out of his omnipotence and pure benevolence. This he does not by his own exertion, or procurement, or gifts from his own hand, but through his rich omnipotence (*mogentheit, potestas*)⁵ and mighty messengers (*boden, nuntii*), that is, his perfect virtues. They serve him, govern his empire, and give to all men what they need, according to the glory and rights of him who is Lord over them. And each of his virtues gives according to the condition of its birth and function. Mercy gives God's gifts to all the indigent people who are utterly poor and ensnared in all sorts of vices, because of which they remain infamous and ragged. Charity guards the common people of the kingdom and gives each of them what he needs. Wisdom arrays all the noble knights who, in burning desire, labour with great combat and fierce assaults for noble Love. Perfection gives the peers (*ghenoten, pares*) of the empire the lordship over their land, like the sovereign dominion of the sovereign soul I am speaking of who, with a sovereign and perfect will and perfect works, has obtained her noble mode of living by all the will of love. Justice directs these four virtues, in order to condemn or commend what they do. In this way the emperor himself remains free and in peace, because he commands the officials to administer the law and invest the kings, dukes, counts, and chief peers with the high feudal tenure of his domain and the true legal rights of Love. This same love is the crown of the blessed soul, who can help all according to their needs while, at the same time, seeking after nothing except in the love of its beloved. (...)

Now understand the deepest interiority of your soul, what "soul" is. Soul is a "being" that can be beheld by God and wherein God beholds himself. Soul is a being that wishes to content God [...]. If it maintains its worthy state, the soul is a bottomless abyss in which God suffices to himself, and finds his enjoyment to the full in this soul — as the soul, for its part, ever has in Him. Soul is a way for the passage of God which He makes freely, as He is in his depths, and God is a way for the passage of the soul freely, that is, into God's inmost depths, that cannot be touched except by the soul's depth. And as long as God does not belong to the soul in his totality, He would not truly satisfy it.

Hadewijch, *The Collected Works*, transl. Columba Hart, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 85-86 (modified).

⁵ Can be: *princeps, supremus loci magistratus*, who governs a certain area in the name of the Emperor.

2. RUUSBROEC: THE HUMAN PERSON IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

We find a triple unity in all people naturally, and in good people also supernaturally. The first and the highest unity is in God; for all creatures hang in this unity with their being, life and subsistence; and if they should be cut off in this way from God, they would fall into nothingness and be annihilated. This unity is in us essentially by nature, whether we are good or evil, and it renders us neither holy nor blessed without our effort. We possess this unity in ourselves, and in fact, above ourselves, as a principle and support of our being and our life. A second union, or unity, is also in us by nature, that is, the unity of the higher faculties, where they take their natural origin as to their activity: in the unity of the spirit or of the mind. This is the same unity which is hanging in God, but in the latter instance we understand it as active, and in the former as essential. Nevertheless, the spirit is totally within each unity, according to the entirety of its substance. We possess this unity in ourselves, above sensory perception, and from it come memory and intellect and will and every faculty of spiritual activity. In this unity, we call the soul “spirit”. The third unity which is in us by nature is the domain of the bodily faculties in the unity of the heart, the beginning and origin of bodily life. The soul possesses this unity in the body and in the natural vigor of the heart; and from it flow all bodily activity and the five senses. Here the soul is therefore called “soul”, since it is the form of the body, and it animates the body, that is, it makes it a living thing and keeps it living. These three unions exist in us naturally as one life and as one kingdom. On the lowest level, we are sensitive and animal; on the middle level, we are rational and spiritual; on the highest level, we are upheld essentially. And this is natural in all mankind.⁶

Spiritual Espousals (Opera omnia 3, p. 286-289)

3. RUUSBROEC: THE UNION WITH GOD

3.1. When we have ascended with Jesus the mountain where our images cease, if we then follow him with onefold vision, with intimate pleasure and with joyful inclination, we feel the strong heat of the holy Spirit, that makes us burn and melt in God’s unity. For where, one with God’s Son (*een met den sone gods*), we are brought lovingly back to our beginning, we hear the voice of the Father that touches us, drawing us in. For he speaks to all he has chosen in his eternal Word: ‘This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.’ For you must know that the Father with the Son and the Son with the Father have taken eternal pleasure in that the

⁶ *Nu merket met ernste: drierhande eenicheit vintmen in allen menschen natuerlijcke, ende daer toe overnatuerlijcke in goeden menschen. Die eerste ende die hoochste eenicheit es in gode, want alle creatueren hanghen in deser eenicheit met wesene, met levende ende met onthoude; ende scieden si in deser wijs van gode, si vielen in niet ende worden te niete. Dese eenicheit es weselijc in ons van natueren, weder wij sijn goet ochte quaet, ende si en maect ons sonder ons toedoen noch heylich noch salich. Dese eenicheit besitten wi in ons selven ende doch boven ons, als een beghin ende een onthout ons wesens ende ons levens. Eene andere eninghe ochte eenicheit es oec in ons van natueren, dat es eenicheit der overster crachten, daer si haren natuerlijcken oerspronc nemen werkelijcker wijs: in eenicheit dies gheests ochte der ghedachten. Dit es die selve eenicheit die in gode hanghet, maer men neemse hier werkelijcke ende daer weselijcke; nochtans es die gheest in elcke eenicheit gheheel, na alheit sire substancien. Dese eenicheit besitten wij in ons selven boven senlijcheit; ende hier ute comt memorie ende verstannisse ende wille, ende alle die macht gheestelijcker werke. In deser eenicheit heetmen de ziele gheest. Die derde eenicheit die in ons is van natueren, dat is eyghendoem der lijflijcker crachte in eenicheit des herten, beghin ende oerspronc des lijflijs levens. Dese eenicheit besit die ziele inden live ende inde levendicheit dies herten; ende hier ute vloeyen alle lijflijcke werke ende die .v. zinnen. Ende hier afheetet die ziele ziele, want si des lijfs forme es ende den lichame animeert, dat es dat sine levende maect ende levende onthoudet. Dese drie eninghen staen inden mensche natuerlijcke alse een leven ende een rijcke. Inden nedersten esmen ghevoelijc ende beestelijc; inden middelsten es men redelijc ende gheestelijc; inden oversten wertmen onthouden weselijc. Ende dit es natuerlijcke in allen menschen.*

Son should assume our humanity and die and bring all the chosen back to their beginning. And therefore, when we are elevated into our origin by the Son, we hear the voice of the Father that draws us in and enlightens us with truth eternal.⁷

Sparkling Stone (Opera omnia 10, p. 177)

3.2. Furthermore, in our mere being, where we are one with God in his love, there begins a superessential contemplation and feeling, the highest one can put into words, that is: to live dying, and to die living, out of our essential being in our superessential blessedness. When we are in control of ourselves through the grace and the help of God so that we can rid ourselves of images whenever we wish, right down to our mere being, where we are one with God, in the fathomless abyss of his love, there we are indeed satisfied. For we have God in us, and are blessed in our essential being through the inworking of God, with whom we are one in love, not in essence, nor in nature; but we are blessed and blessedness in God's essential being, where he has joy of Himself and of us all, in his high nature: that is the kernel of love that is hidden from us in darkness, in fathomless unknowing. This unknowing is an inaccessible light that is God's essential being, and superessential to us, and essential to Him only. For He is his own blessedness, and has joy of Himself in his nature. And in his enjoyment we have died and sunken away from ourselves and we are lost according to the manner of our having joy, but not according to the manner of our essence. For our love and his love are always alike and one in having joy, where his Spirit has drunk up our love and swallowed it in Him in having joy and in one blessedness with Him.

And when I write that we are one with God, it is to be understood: in love, not in essence, nor in nature; for God's essence is uncreated, and our essence is created. And this is unlike without measure, God and creature. And therefore, even though it may unite, it cannot become one. If our essence came to naught, we would not know, love or be blessed. But our created essence is to be beheld as a wild, waste wilderness, wherein God lives who reigns over us. And in that wilderness we must wander modelessly and without manner. For we cannot come out of our essential being into our superessential being otherwise than with love. And therefore we are blessed in our essential being, if we live in love. And we are blessedness in God's essential being, if we, in love, have died to ourselves in his enjoyment. We are always living in our essential being through love. And we are always dying in God's essential being through having joy. And therefore this is called a dying life and a living dying, for we live with God and we die in God. Blessed are the dead who live and die thus, because they have been made heirs in God and in his realm.⁸ *Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* (Opera omnia 8, 404-407)

⁷ *Ende hier omme, alse wij gheclommen sijn met Jhesumme opden berch onser onghe beeltheit, eest dat wij hem dan na volghen met eenvoldighen ghesichte, met inneghen behagene, met ghebrukelijcker neyghinghen, soe ghevoelen wij de sterke hitte des heilichs gheests, die ons verberren ende ver smelten doet tot in die eenicheit gods. Want daer wij een met den sone gods minlijc wederboecht sijn in onse beghin, daer horen wij des vaders stemme, die ons intrekkende gherijnt. Want hi spreect alle sine vercorne in sinen ewighen woorde: "Dit es mijn lieve sone inden welcken ic my met behaghede." Want ghi zult weten dat die vader met den sone, ende die sone met den vader hebben gheoeffent een eewich behaghen van dien dat die sone onse menscheyt aen nemen soude, ende sterven soude, ende alle die vercorne wederbringen soude in haer beghin. Ende hier omme, eest dat wij overmids den sone verheven werden in onsen oerspronc, so horen wij die intrekkende stemme des vaders die ons verclaert met eewigher waerheit.*

⁸ *Vooertmeer, in onsen ledeghen sine, daer wi een sijn met gode in sijnre minnen, daer beghint .i. overweselec scouwen ende ghevoelen, dat hooeghste dat men ghewaerden mach, dat es stervende leven ende levende sterven ute onsen wesene in onse overwesende salecheit. Wanneer dat wi overmids gratie ende de hulpe gods ons selfs gheweldegh sijn, alsoe dat wi ons ontbeelden moghen altoes alse wi willen tote in onsen ledeghen sine, daer wi met gode een sijn in dat grondeloes abys sijnre minnen, daer ons wel ghenoecht. Want wi hebben gode in ons*

NOTE IN THE MARGIN: “What is written here exonerates and justifies the author of this book, which was proclaimed to be unsound by the Chancellor of [the University of] Paris concerning a certain other passage in his work. The Chancellor, however, was insufficiently informed of the good intentions of the very enlightened Father who wrote this book.”⁹

4. RUUSBROEC: ‘BEING’ (WESEN) AND ‘SUPRABEING’ (OVERWESEN)

4.1. When he who lives in this manner raises himself with the totality of himself and with all the powers and turns to God with lively active love, then he feels that the depth of his love, there where it begins and ends, is enjoyable and fathomless. If he then wishes further to penetrate this enjoyable love with his active love, there all the powers of his soul must give way and suffer and endure the piercing truth and goodness which is God himself. For in the same way as the air is bathed with the sun’s light and heat, and just as the iron is penetrated by the fire so that with the fire it does fire’s work — for it burns and gives light like fire; I say the same thing for the air: if the air itself could reason it would say “I give light and warmth to the world”; nevertheless each keeps his own nature, for the fire does not become iron nor the iron fire, but the union is without intermediary, because the iron is within the fire and the fire within the iron, and in the same way the air is in the light of the sun and the light of the sun is in the air — so God is always in like manner in the essence of the soul.¹⁰

Little Book of Enlightenment (Opera omnia 1, p. 129-131)

ende sijn salegh in onse wesen overmids dat inwerken gods, daer wi een mede sijn in minnen, niet in wesene noch in natueren. Maer wi sijn salegh ende saleghheit in gods wesen, daer hi sijns selfs ghebruuct ende onser alre in sine hooghe natuere, dat es der minnen kerne, die ons verborghen es in deemsterheit, in niet wetene sonder grond. Dit nietweten es .i. ontoegankelec licht dat gods wesen es ende ons overweselec ende heme alleene weselec. Want hi es sijns selfs saleghheit ende ghebruuct sijns selfs in sijnre natueren. Ende in sijn ghebruken sijn wi ghestorven ende ons selven ontsonken ende verloren na wise ons ghebrukens maer niet na wise ons wesens. Want onse minne ende sine minne sijn altoes ghelijc ende een int ghebruken, daer sijn gheest onse minne op ghesopen heeft ende in heme verswolghen in ghebrukene ende in eene salecheit met heme. Ende waer ic sette dat wi een met gode sijn, dat es te verstane in minnen, niet in wesene noch in natueren. Want gods wesen es onghescapen ende onse wesen es ghescapen. Ende dit es sonder mate onghelijc, god ende creatuere. Ende hier omme, al maecht vereeneghen, en mach niet een werden. Ghinghe oec onse wesen te niete, soe en souden wi niet kinnen noch minnen noch salegh sijn. Maer onse ghescapene wesen es ane te siene alse eene welde, wueste wustine, daer god in leeft, die ons regeert. Ende in dese wustine moeten wi dolen wiselooes ende sonder maniere. Want wi en connen ute onsen wesene niet comen in onse overwesen anders dan met minnen. Ende hier omme sijn wi salegh in onse wesen, eest dat wi leven in minnen. Ende wi sijn saleghheit in gods wesen, eest dat wi in minnen ons selfs ghestorven sijn in sijn ghebruken. Altoes leven wi in onse eighen wesen overmids minne. Ende altoes sterven wi in gods wesen overmids ghebruken. Ende hier omme es dit ghenoeemt een stervende leven ende .i. levende sterven. Want wi leven met gode ende wi sterven in gode. Salegh sijn de dooede die aldus leven ende sterven, want si sijn gheerft in gode ende in sijn rike.

⁹ *Quod hic subscribitur rectificat et excusat auctorem presentis libri in alio operis passu reprobato a cancellario parisiensi non satis informato de recta intentione illuminatissimi patris scriptoris huius voluminis. Cf. Opera omnia 8, p. 405.*

¹⁰ *Wanneer dat hem al selc levende mensche, met gheheelheiden sijns selves ende met allen sinen crachten, op recht ende te gode voeghet met levender werkeleker minnen, soe ghevoelt hi dat sine minne in haren gronde, daer si beghent ende indet, ghebrukeleec es ende sonder gront. Wilt hi dan voert in dringhen met sijnre werkeleker minnen in die ghebrukeleke minne, al daer moeten wiken alle die crachte siere zielen, ende moeten liden ende ghedoghen die doregaende waerheit ende goetheit die god selve es. Want gheliker wijs dat die locht doregaen wert met claerheiden ende met hitten der sonnen, ende alsoe dat yser doregaen wert met den viere, alsoe dat met den viere viers werc werket — want het berrent ende licht ghelijc viere; ende dat selve spreke ic van der locht; ware die locht verstendeck, si sprake: “Ic verclare ende ic verhitte al de werelt,” nochtan behout ieghewelc sine eighene nature, want dat vier enwert niet yser, noch dat yser vier, maer die eninghe es sonder middel, want dat yser es binnen int vier ende dat vier int yser, ende aldus es de loecht in den lichte der sonnen ende dat licht der sonnen in die locht —, alsoe gheliker wijs es god altoes in den wesene der zielen.*

4.2. Therefore we are poor in ourselves and rich in God (...) And so we live completely in God, where we possess our bliss, and completely in ourselves, were we practice our love towards God. And even if we live completely in God and completely in ourselves, yet it is only one life. But it is contrary and twofold according to experience, for poor and rich, hungry and replete, working and at rest, those are contraries indeed. Yet in them resides our highest nobility, now and forever. For we cannot become God at all and lose our createdness: that is impossible. And if we remained in ourselves completely, separated from God, we would be desolate and miserable.¹¹

Sparkling Stone (Opera omnia 10, p. 151)

4.3. These men then, remark, by their plain simplicity and natural inclination, have turned to the nakedness of their essence (...). You see, these men have strayed into the empty and blind simplicity of their own essence and wish to become blessed within their own nature. For they are so simple and inactively united to the naked essence of their soul and to the indwelling of God in themselves, that they have neither ardor nor devotion towards God, neither without nor within. For in the highest point in which they are turned, they feel nothing save the simplicity of their essence, hanging in the essence of God. This absolute simplicity which they possess they regard as being God because there they find a natural repose. This is why they consider themselves as being God in the ground of their simplicity, for they lack real faith, hope and love.¹²

Little Book of Enlightenment (Opera omnia 1, p. 115)

5. RUUSBROEC: THE BIRTH OF CHRIST IN THE SOUL

In the abyss of this darkness in which the loving spirit has died to itself, there begins the revelation of God and eternal life. For in this darkness there shines and is born an incomprehensible light which is the Son of God, in whom one contemplates eternal life. And in this light one becomes seeing. And this divine light is granted in the simple being of the spirit, where the spirit receives the brightness — which is God Himself — above all gifts and above all creaturely activity, in the empty void of the spirit in which it has lost itself through enjoyable love and receives the brightness of God without intermediary. And without cease, it becomes the very brightness which it receives. See, this hidden brightness in which one contemplates everything that one desires according to the mode of emptiness of spirit, this brightness is so great that the loving contemplative neither sees nor feels anything in his ground in which he rests except an incomprehensible light. And according to the simple

¹¹ *Ende hieromme sijn wij in ons selven arm ende in gode rike (...). Ende aldus leven wij gheheel in gode, daer wij onse salicheit besitten; ende wij leven gheheel in ons selven, daer wij ons in minnen te gode oefenen. Ende al eest dat wij gheheel in gode leven ende gheheel in ons selven, dit en es doch maer een leven. Maer het es contrarie ende tweevuldich van ghevoelne: want arm ende rijke, hongherich ende sat, werkende ende ledich, dese dinghe sijn te male contrarie. Nochtan gheleghet hier inne onse hoochste edelheit, nu ende ewelijc. Want wij en moghen te male niet god werden ende onse ghescapenheit verliesen; dat es ommoghelijc. Blevē wij oec te male in ons selven ghesondert van gode, soe moesten wij sijn elendich ende onsalich.*

¹² *Siet, dese menschen sijn overmidts eenvoldeghe sempelheit ende naturleke gheneicheit ghekeert in bloetheit haers wesens (...). Siet, dese menschen sijn verdoelt in ene ledege verblende sempelheit haers eighens wesens ende willen salech sijn in bloeter naturen. Want si sijn alsoe eenvoldech ende alsoe ledechleke gheenecht den bloten wesene haerre zielen, ende den inwesene gods in hen, dat si en hebben noch ernst, noch toevoeghen te gode, van buten noch van binnen. Want in dat hoechste daer si inne ghekeert sijn, en ghevoelen si niet dan sempelheit haers wesens, hanghende in gods wesen. Ende die eenvoldeghe sempelheit die si besitten, houden si vore god, om dat si daer naturleke raste in venden. Ende hieromme dunct hen dat si selve god sijn in den gronde haerre eenvoldecheit. Want hen ghebrecht ghewarech ghelove, hope ende minne.*

bareness which encompasses all things, he finds and feels himself to be that very light by which he sees, and nothing else.¹³ (...)

When we have become thus seeing, then we can contemplate, in joy, the eternal coming of our Bridegroom, which is the second point about which we are going to speak. Now what is the coming of our Bridegroom which is eternal? It is a new birth and a new enlightenment without cease. For the ground out of which the brightness shines, and which is the brightness itself, is living and fruitful. And therefore, the revelation of the eternal light is renewed without cease in the hiddenness of the spirit. See, all creaturely activity and all practice of virtues must fail here, for here (what) God works is nothing but Himself in the highest nobility of the spirit. And here there is nothing but an eternal contemplation and gazing at the light with the light and in the light. And the coming of the Bridegroom is so rapid that He is always having come and (is) indwelling with fathomless riches, and (that He) is coming anew personally, without cease, with such new brightness just as though He had never come before. But his coming consists in an eternal now, without time, which is always received with new lust and in new joy. Behold, the bliss and the joy which this Bridegroom brings in His coming are fathomless and incommensurable, for He Himself is that (bliss and joy).¹⁴

Spiritual Espousals (Opera omnia 3, p. 581-585)

¹³ [H]i moet hem selven verloren hebben in een onwise ende in een duysternisse daer alle scouwende menschen ghebrukelijcke in verdoelt sijn, ende hem selven nemmermeer creatuerlijcker wijs en connen vinden. Inden afgront deser duysternissen, daer de minnende gheest sijns selfs in ghestorven es, daer beghint die oppenbaringhe Gods ende dat eewige leven. Want in dier duysternissen schijnt ende werdet gheboren een ombegripelijc licht, dat es de sone gods, daermen in scouwet eewich leven. Ende in desen lichte wertmen siende. Ende dit godlicke licht wert ghegeven inden eenvuldighen sine des gheests, daer de gheest die claeurheit — die god selve es — ontfeet boven alle gaven ende boven creatuerlijc werk, in die ledighe idelheit des gheests daer hi overmids ghebrukelijcke minne hem selven in verloren hevet ende ontfeet die claeurheit gods sonder middel. Ende hi wert die claeurheit selve sonder onderlaet die hi ontfeet. Siet, dese verborghene claeurheit daermen al in scouwet diesmen beghert na wise des gheests ledicheit, dese claeurheit es alsoe groot dat de minnende scouwere in sinen gronde, daer hi in rast, niet en siet noch en ghevoelt dan een ombegripelijc licht. Ende nader eenvuldigher bloetheit die alle dinc beveet, soe vint hi hem ende ghevoelt dat selve licht daer hi met siet, ende niet anders. Ende hier met hebdi dat eerste poent hoemen siende wert in godlijcken lichte. Salich sijn die oghen die aldus siende sijn, want si besitten dat eewich leven.

¹⁴ Alsoe wij aldus siende sijn worden, soe moghen wij in vrouwen scouwen die eewighe toecomst ons brudegoms, dat dat ander poent es daer wij afspreken willen. Welc es nu die toecomst ons brudegoms die eewich es? Dats die nuwe ghehort ende een nuwe verclaren sonder onderlaet. Want die gront daer die claeurheit ute schijnt ende die de claeurheit selve es, hi es levende ende vruchtbaer. Ende hier omme wert die oppenbaringhe des eewichs lichts sonder onderlaet vernuwet in die verburghenheit des gheests. Siet, alle creatuerlijcke werke ende alle oefeninghe der duechde moet hier onder bliven, want hier werket god hem selven alleene indie hoochste edelheit des gheests. Ende hier en es anders niet dan een eewich scouwen ende staren dat licht metten lichte ende inden lichte. Ende die toecomst des brudegoms es also snel, dat hi altoes comen es ende in blivende met grondeloser rijcheit; ende persoonlijc, sonder onderlaet, nuwe met alsulcker nuwer claeurheit comende es, rechte ochte hi vore nie comen en ware. Want sijn comen besteet, sonder tijt, in eenen eewighen nu, dat altoes in nuwer ghelost ende in nuwer vrouwen wert ontfanen. Siet, de welde ende die vroude die dese brudegom brinct in sire toecomst die es grondeloos ende onghemeten, want hi eest selve. Ende hier omme sijn die oghen des gheests, daer hi met scouwet ende anestaert sinen brudegom, soe wide ontploken datse nummermeer en werden gheloken. Want staren ende scouwen des gheests blivet eewich in die verborghene oppenbaringhe gods, ende dat begrijp des gheests es soe wide ontploken jeghen die toecomst des brudegoms, dat die gheest selve die wijtheit worden es die hi begriipt. Ende aldus wert god met gode begrepen ende ghesien, daer alle onse zalicheit in gheleghet. Dit es dat ander poent, hoe wij die eewighe toecomst ons brudegoms in onsen gheeste sonder onderlaet ontfanen.

6. RUUSBROEC: THE 'COMMON PERSON'

6.1. The man who is sent by God down from these heights, into the world, is full of truth and rich in all virtues. And he seeks nothing for himself but only the honor of the one who sent him, and therefore he is just and true in his actions. And he has a rich, mild foundation which is grounded in the wealth of God, and therefore he always flows into all those who need him, for the living fountain of the Holy Spirit is his wealth and cannot be exhausted. And he is a willing, living instrument of God with which God does what he wants, the way he wants; and he does not claim this for himself, but gives the honor to God. And therefore he remains willing and ready to do all that God commands, strong and courageous to suffer and bear all that God allows to befall him. And therefore he has a common life, for contemplation and action come just as readily to him and he is perfect in both.¹⁵

Sparkling Stone (Opera omnia 10, p. 181-183)

6.2. And you will see that God's unity, which draws all things into itself, is nothing other than the unfathomable love which lovingly draws in the Father and the Son, and all that lives in them in eternal enjoyment. And in that love we shall burn and be burnt up without end for all eternity, for in it lies the bliss of all spirits. And for this reason we must lay the foundations of our life in an unfathomable abyss and so we shall be able to sink into love forever and sink away from ourselves in those unfathomable depths, and with the same love we shall raise and transcend ourselves on to those incomprehensible heights and in that love we shall wander without manner and it shall lead us and lose us in the measureless width of God's love. In it we shall flow, and flow beyond ourselves in that unknown luxury that is the wealth and goodness of God and in it we shall melt and be melted down, we shall whirl and be whirled away in the glory of God forever. Look, in each one of all these likenesses I show his own being and his own practice to a contemplative man. But no one else will be able to understand this, since no one can teach others the contemplative life.¹⁶

Sparkling Stone (Opera omnia 10, p. 112-113)

¹⁵ *Die mensche die ute deser hoocheit van gode neder ghesent wert inde werelt, hi es vol der waerheit ende rijcke van allen doechden. Ende hi en soeket sijns niet, maer des gheens eere diene ghesonden heeft; ende daeromme es hi gherecht ende warechtich in allen sinen dinghen. Ende hi heeft eenen rijcken melden gront die ghefondeert es inde rijcheit gods; ende daer omme moet hi moet hi altoes vloeyen in alle die ghene die sijns behoeven, want die levende fonteyne des heilichs gheests, die es sine rijcheit diemen niet versceppen en mach. Ende hi es een levende willich instrument gods, daer god mede werct wat hi wilt ende hoe hi wilt; ende des en dreecht hi hem niet ane, maer hi gheeft gode die eere. Ende daer omme blijft hi willich ende ghereet al te doene dat god ghebedt, ende sterc ende ghenendich al te dogene ende te verdraghene dat god op hem ghestaedt. Ende hieromme heeft hi een ghemeyn leven, want hem es scouwen ende werken even ghereet, ende in beyden es hi volcomen.*

¹⁶ *Ende aldus mochdi merken dat die intreckende eenicheit gods anders niet en es dan grondelose minne die den vader ende den sone, ende al dat leeft in hem, met minnen intreckende es in een eewich ghebruken. Ende in deser minnen wille wij berren ende verberen sonder inde in eewicheit, want hier inne es gheleghen alre gheeste salicheit. Ende hier omme soe moeten wij al onse leven fondeeren op een grondeloes abis, soe moghe wij eewelijc in minnen sincken ende ontsincken ons selven in die grondelose diepheit; ende metter selver minnen sele wij hoghen ende onthoghen ons selven in die ombegripelijcke hoocheit, ende in die minne sonder wise sele wij dolen. Ende si sal ons verleiden in die onghemetene wijtheit der minnen gods. Ende daer inne sele wij vlieten ende ons selven ontvlieten in die ombekinde welde der rijcheit ende der goetheit gods; ende daer inne selen wij smelten ende versmelten, wielen ende verwielen eewelijc in die glorie gods. Siet, in yeghewelc ghelijckenisse van allen desen, soe toene ic eenen scouwenden mensche sijn wesen ende sine oefeninghe. Maer niemen anders en maecht verstaen, want scouwende leven en mach niemen anderen.*

6.3. Fifthly, the realm of God is shown to the loving person above all created light, in an infinite divine light, and that has to be beyond reason, in the mind turned inward in to the superessence of God. There a person receives three kinds of fruits: an infinite resplendence, an incomprehensible love, and a divine enjoyment.

The first fruit is an infinite resplendence. It is a cause of all the resplendence that exists in contemplation and action. This resplendence is so savory to the understanding that it (the understanding) sinks away from itself, essentially, into the resplendence, and becomes infinite resplendence. The second fruit is incomprehensible love. It flows through the whole realm of the soul according to the receptivity of every faculty; and it makes the soul melt in a simple, essential love. By means of the infinite resplendence and the incomprehensible love, the soul is perfused and penetrated and comes into enjoyment. This is the third fruit. This enjoyment is so great that in it, God and all the saints and these exalted people are swallowed up and are sunken away into modelessness, that is, in an unknowing and into an eternal lostness. But the greatest savor lies in the in-sinking into this lostness.

Now this person is to be common (to all) and is to possess his mind as a king possesses his realm, so that the mind may always be turning downward to all virtues, in order to bear a perfect likeness to the fruitful unity of God, which, without cease, is flowing out according to personhood, with all gifts for the needs of every creature; and this person, without cease, will be hanging essentially in God with the same mind, in order to be transformed and transfigured into the abyssal resplendence like the divine Persons, who at every moment are whirling away into the abyssal essence/being and are overflowing in enjoyment – nevertheless, with respect to the distinction (of Persons) in the fruitful nature, they are eternally out-flowing and active.

Thus the common person is to stand in the apex of his mind between essence and faculties, that is, between enjoyment and action, always hanging essentially in (God), transported in enjoyment, and sinking away into his nothingness, that is, into the darkness of the Godhead. This is the supreme blessedness of God and of all spirits. Thus he is transformed from splendor to splendor, that is, from created splendor to uncreated splendor (cf. 2 Cor 3, 18), by means of his eternal image, that is, the Wisdom of the Father. This is an image and an example for all creatures, for in this image are living all things corporeal and spiritual (cf. Jo 1, 3-4). By means of the same image, all creatures are flowing out into (their) created being and receive a likeness of God.

But the noble person common (to all) is the most like (God), for he is flowing out with all virtues, and he is like God who is flowing out with all gifts; but he remains in eternal enjoyment and is one with God above all gifts. This is a person enlightened and common (to all) in all nobility.¹⁷ *Realm of Lovers* (Opera omnia 4, p. 412-419)

¹⁷ *Ten vijften male wert dat rike gods den minnende ghetoent boven al ghescapen licht in enen onghemetenen godliken lichte, ende dat moet sijn boven redene in die in ghekeerde ghedachte in dat overwesen gods. Daer ontfeet hi drierande vrocht: een onghemetene verclaertheit ende eene onbegripelike minne ende een godlike ghebruken. De ierste vrocht es ene onghemetene claerheit. Die es ene sake alle der claerheit die in scouwene ende in werkene es. Die claerheit es so smakeleec den verstane dadt hem selven ontsinket weseleec in die claerheit, ende wert een met diere onghemetene claerheit. De ander vrocht dat es onbegripelike minne. Die doervloet al dat rike der sielen na dats elke cracht ontfankelijc es, ende si doet de siele smelten in eene eenvuldighe, weseleke minne. Overmids die onghemetene claerheit ende die onbegripelike minne so wert die siele doervloet ende doergaen, ende comt in een ghebruken. Dat es de derde vrocht. Dat ghebruken es so groet dat god ende alle heilighen ende dese hoeghe menschen hier in verswolghen ende versonken sijn in onwisen, dat es in een niet weten ende in eene ewighe verlorenheit. Maer in dit in sinken in deser verlorenheit leghet de hoechste smaেকেleecheit. Nu sal dese mensche sijn een ghemein mensche, ende sal sijne ghedachte besitten*

6.4. As long a man is divided in his heart he will look outward and remain fickle in his mind and he is easily moved by the joys and sorrows of things temporary, for they are still alive in him. Even if he lives according to God's commandments, he always remains unenlightened and uninstructed inside, not knowing what inner practice is or how he should deal with it. But since he knows and feels that his mind is directed towards God and since he desires to accomplish his dearest will in all his works, he lets himself be satisfied with this for he finds himself honest in his intention and faithful in his service. Because of these two points he is pleased with himself and he thinks that outward good works done with an upright intention are holier than any inner practice and more useful for with God's help he has chosen an outward way of life. And so he is more occupied with outward works in diversity than with the one he works for with inner affection. That is why he is more filled with the images of the works he does than with God he works for. And because of this encumbrance with images in his works he remains directed outward always and he is not able to keep God's counsel. For his practice is more outward than inward, more of the senses than of the spirit. And even though he is a faithful servant of our Lord in outward service, whatever the secret friends of God experience remains hidden and unknown to himself. And that is why some unrefined outward men always sit in judgment over the inward men and criticize them because they think those who turn inward are idle. And for the same reason Martha complained to our Lord about her sister Mary because she did not help her serve, for she thought she was performing a big and very useful service and her sister was just sitting there, idle. But our Lord passed sentence and pronounced judgment on them both. He did not criticize Martha because of the service she performed, for that service was good and useful. But he did criticize her because she was so preoccupied and because she was depressed and sad about a number of outer things. And he praised Mary for her inner practice and said that only one thing was needful and that she had chosen the best part that would never be taken away from her; The one thing needful for all men is divine love. The best part is the inner life that clings to God in love. That is what Mary [Magdalen] chose, as do the secret friends of the Lord to this day. But Martha chose an honest outward active life, and that is the other part man serves God in and it is neither as perfect nor as good. And this is the part the faithful servants are still choosing for love of our Lord. But nowadays you can find stupid men who want to be so inward and so given to doing nothing that they do not want to work for their fellow Christians in need, or serve them. And you see, these people are neither secret friends nor faithful servants of our Lord, but they are totally false and deceitful, for nobody can live by God's counsel and not take his commandments to heart. Therefore all secret friends of our Lord are always faithful

alsoe een coninc sijn rike besidt: dat de ghedachte altoes nederkeerende si tote allen doecheden, op dat hi draghe een volcomen ghelijc der vrochtbarigher enicheit gods, die sonder onderlaet uutfloeiende es, na persoanleecheden, met allen gaven tot allen creatueren noet; ende hi sal sonder onderlaet weseleec in hanghende sijn met diere selver ghedachten, op dat hi overformt ende overbeeldt werde in die afgrondighe claeerheit, ghelijc den godliken personen die in elken oeghenblicke verwielen in dat afgrondighe wesen ende overvloeien in ghebrukene - nochtan sijn si eweleke uutflietende ende werkende na den ondersceede in der vrochtbarigher natueren. Also sal de ghemeine mensche staen in dat overste sire ghedachten tusschen wesen ende crachte, dat es tusschen ghebraken ende werken, altoes weseleec in hanghende met ontvlotenheiden in ghebrukene, ende ontsinken in sinen niete, dat es in de deemsterheit der godheit. Dat es gods ende alre gheeste overste salicheit. Also werdet hi ghetransformeert van claeerheiden in claeerheiden, dat es van ghescapenre claeerheit in onghescapenre claeerheit, overmids sijn ewighe beelde, dat es dies vader wijsheit. Dat es een beelde ende een exemplaar alre creatueren, want in dien beelde leven alle lijfelike ende alle gheesteleke dinghe. Overmids dit selve beelde vlieten alle creatueren uut in ghescapenen wesene ende ontfaen een ghelijc gods. Maer die edele ghemeine mensche dat es de ghelijcste. Want hi vliedt uut met allen doecheden ende hi es ghelijc gode, die uut vloeit met allen gaven, ende hi blivet in een ewich ghebraken ende es een met gode boven alle gaven. Dit es een verclaert ghemeyn mensche in alre edelheit.

servants where the need arises. But the faithful servants are not all secret friends, for they do not know the requisite practice.¹⁸

Sparkling Stone (Opera omnia, p. 132-134)

7. RUUSBROEC: ECCLESIAL DIMENSION

7.1. But after they [= the apostles] received his spirit, no one could restrain them. They had overcome all their distress; they were ready to die, if God wanted to permit it and commanded them. Christ lived in them and they in Him; and each one wanted to keep his dwelling in the other; thus they were to remain united with God. This is the mode of all holy people who are dead to themselves in God with love. They could not leave God; for they had found perfect charity in Him, who is God and they were afraid of no one. They live in the Spirit without anxiety, fear, encumbrance, or any sorrow. They have in their spirit from the Spirit of God [the testimony] that they are chosen sons of God. That witness, no one can take from them, for they feel eternal life in their spirit. This word I have often written, but I renounce myself and subject myself to the eternal truth, and to the faith of holy Christendom, and to the teachers who, by the Holy Spirit, have explained the Holy Scripture. But what I feel has to remain mine: I cannot drive it out of my spirit. Even though I should gain the whole world, I cannot hesitate nor distrust Jesus; He would condemn me. If I hear anything opposed to this, then I will keep silent.¹⁹ *Twelve Beguines* (Opera omnia 7a, p. 523)

¹⁸ *Want alsoe langhe alse die mensche van herten ghedeilt es, soe es hi uutsiende ende onghestadich in sinen ghemoede, ende wert licht beweecht van lieve ende van leede tidelijcker dinghen, want si leven noch in hem. Ende al leeft hi die ghebode gods, hi blijft altoes van binnen onverlicht ende onghelert wat innighe oefeninghe es ende hoemen haers pleghen sal. Maer in dien dat hi weet ende ghevoelt dat hi gode meint ende sinen liefsten wille begheert te volbringhene in alle sinen werken, hier mede laet hi hem ghenoeghen. Want hi vint hem selven ongheweist in sijnre meyninghen ende ghetrouwe in sinen dienste. Ende overmids dese twee poente behaecht hi hem selven, ende dunct hem dat uutwendighe goede werke met rechter meyninghen heiligher ende orborlijcker sijn dan enighe inwindighe oefeninghe. Want hi heeft overmids die hulpe gods eene uitgaende wise vercoren. Ende hier omme oefent hi meer uutwendighe werke met ondersceede, dan den ghenen daer hi om werct met innigher liefden. Ende dit es de sake dat hi meer verbeelt es met den werken die hi werct, dan met gode daer hi omme werct. Ende overmids dese verbeeltheit in sinen werkene, soe blijft hi een uutwendich mensche ende en es niet hebbelijc den rade gods ghenoech te sine. Want sine oefeninghe es meer uutwindich dan inwindich, meer senlijc dan gheestelijc. Ende al es hi een ghetrouwe knecht ons heeren in uutwindighen dienste, dat die heimelijcke vriende gods ghevoelen, dat blijft hem verborghen ende onbekint. Ende hier omme eest dat selke grove uutgekeerde menschen altoes ordeelen ende berespen die inghekeerde menschen, omme dat hem dunct dat die inghekeerde ledich sijn. Ende dit was oec die sake dat Martha claghede onsen heere over haer suster Marien, omme dat si hare niet en halpt dienen; want haer dochte dat si groten dienst ende groten orbor dede, ende dat haer suster ledich sat te vergheefs. Maer onze heere die gaf sentencie ende oordeel van hem beiden. Ende hi berespte Marthen niet van haren dienste, want die dienst was goet ende orborlijc. Maer hi berespte se van haerre sorchvoldicheit, ende omme dat si bedruct ende bedrueft was overmids menichfuldicheit uutwendigher dinghe. Ende hi prijsde Marien van harer inwindigher oefeninghen, ende sprac dat eens dinc noet ware, ende dat si dat beste deel vercoren hadde, dat haer niet ghenomen en soude werden. Dat een dinc dies noot es alle menschen dat es godlijcke minne. Dat beste deel dat es een inwindich leven met minlijcken aenclvene ane gode. Dat hadde Maria Maegdelena vercoren, ende dat verkiesen noch die heimelijcke vriende ons heeren. Maer Martha die vercoes een ongheweynst uutwendich werkende leven. Ende dat es dat ander deel daer men gode inne dient, dat soe volcomen noch soe goet niet en es. Ende dit deel verkiesen noch die ghetrouwe knechte omme die minne ons heeren. Maer nu ventmen selcke dorre menschen die alsoe innich ende alsoe ledich willen sijn, dat si noch werken noch dienen en willen in node haers evenkerstens. Siet, dese menschen en sijn noch heimelijcke vriende noch ghetrouwe knechte ons heeren, maer si sijn te male valschs ende bedroghen. Want niemen en mach den rade gods ghenoech sijn die sine ghebode niet houden en wilt. Ende hier omme sijn alle die heimelijcke vriende ons heeren altoes ghetrouwe knechte daers noot es. Maer die ghetrouwe knechte en sijn alle niet heimelijcke vriende, want die oefeninghe die daer toe behort die es hem ombekint.*

¹⁹ *Maer doe si sinen gheest ontfinghen, daer na en mochtse nieman dwinghen. Si hadden verwonnen al haren noot, si waren bereet te stervene, alsoe alst god ghestaden woude ende hem gheboot. Cristus levede in hem ende*

7.2. For all saints and all believers are one in our Lord Jesus Christ. And they are all each other's limbs. And Christ is holy Church's most important limb, for he is the head of us all and we are his limbs. And for this reason the apostles further teach us that we should believe in the communion of saints. For as I just said, our Lord Jesus Christ nourishes and feeds the saints in heaven, the souls in purgatory and all good people on earth with his spirit and his life, each according to his state. For they are all one holy Church and one communion of saints and also one communion of all goods.²⁰

Christian Faith (Opera omnia 10, p. 397-399)

7.3. See, I have thus said that the contemplative lover of God is united with God by intermediary, and again without intermediary, and thirdly without difference or distinction. And this I find in nature and in grace and also in glory. I have further stated that no creature can become or be so holy that it loses its own condition of creature and becomes God, not even the soul of our Lord Jesus Christ: it will remain eternally creature and other than God. Nevertheless we must all be lifted up above ourselves in God and become one spirit with God in love if we would be blessed.²¹

Little Book of Enlightenment (Opera omnia 1, p. 110-111)

si in hem, ende yeghewelc woude sijn woeninghe in den anderen behouden; alsoe moesten sy gheenicht met gode bliven. Dit es die wise van allen heilighen menschen die haer selves ghestorven sijn in gode met minnen. Si en mochten gode niet laten, want sy hadden vonden in hem volmaecte karitate, die god es ende niemen en ontsiet. Si leven inden gheeste sonder anxt, vreese, commer ende eenich verdriet. Si hebben in haren gheeste vanden gheest gods dat si uutvercoren sonen gods sijn. Dat ghetughe en mach hem niemen nemen, want si ghevoelen in haren gheeste ewich leven. Dit woordt hebbic dicwile ghescreven. Maer ic vertye mijns ende late my onder de eewighe waerheit ende onder dat ghelove der heiligher kerstenheit ende onder die leeraren die de heilighe scriftuere overmids den heilighen gheest hebben ontbonden. Maer dat ic ghevoele, dat moet my bliven: ic en macht uut mijnen gheeste niet verdriven. Al soudt my alle die werelt vromen, ic en mocht niet twifelen noch Jhesum mestrouwen, dat hy mi soude verdoemen. Alsic contrarie hore, dan willic swighen.

²⁰ *Ende hieromme, al sijn iegewelken heiligen ende iegewelken goeden mensche sine werke proper ende eigen in ere ende in love, si sijn oec doregaende alle die lede der heileger kerken. Want alle heiligen ende alle geloeveghe menschen sijn een in onsen here Jhesum Cristum ende elc es des anders let. Ende Cristus es dat principaelste let der heileger kerken, want hi es onser alder hoeft ende wij sijn sine leden. Ende dat hoeft geeft leven alle sinen leden. Ende die Cristus gheest ende Cristus leven in hen niet en hebben, die en sijn sine lede niet, maer si sijn avegedeilt ende dode lede. Ende hieromme leren ons die apostelen vorwert dat wi geloeven selen gemeininghe der heiligen. Want alsoe alse ic te hans seide, so spijst ende voedt ons here Jhesus Cristus met sinen geeste ende met sinen levne die heiligen inden hemel ende die zielen int vagevier ende die goeden menschen in erterike, ende iegewelke na sine staet. Want dit es al ene heilege kerke ende ene gemeininghe der heileghen ende oec ene gemeininghe alles goets.*

²¹ *Siet, ic hebbe aldus gheseghet: dat de scouwende minnere gods met gode verenecht es overmids middel, ende oec sonder middel, ende ten derden male sonder differentie ochte onderscheet. Ende dit vende ic in naturen ende in der gratien ende oec in der glorien. Ic hebbe voert gheseghet, dat en ghene creature en mach soe heilech werden noch sijn, dat si hare gheschapenheit verliese ende god werde, noch oec die ziele ons heren Jhesu Cristi: die sal eweleke creature bliven ende een ander van gode. Nochtan moete wi alle boven ons selven in gode verhaven sijn ende een geest met gode in minnen, sele wi salech sijn.*