

Denys of Ryckel and Traditions of Meditation:

Contra detestabilem cordis inordinationem

by

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Among currents of religious thought in the late Middle Ages, modern historians are accustomed to distinguish "monastic theology",¹ scholasticism, speculative mysticism, and the modern devotion. Often, individual writers are classified according to these categories. The writings of Denys of Ryckel (Dionysius Cartusienensis, 1402-1471), however, reflect and partake of all of these currents. Denys has been praised generally for his monastic union of piety and learning, and particularly for the monastic character of his scriptural exegesis.² At the same time he has been called the "last scholastic".³ Denys' contacts with the modern devotion are well known. He attended for a while the school at Zwolle.⁴ Several of his treatises were influenced directly by devotionalist writers,⁵ and his works in turn were read by devotionalists. Indeed a large number of the surviving manuscripts of Denys' writings were copied in houses of the Augustinian Canons of Windesheim and other groups associated with the modern devotion.⁶ In a list of recommended readings, Jan Mombaer (ca. 1460-1502), besides naming several specific titles of Denys' works, recommends "omnia opuscula ... Dionysii Cartusienensis".⁷ Denys read Jan van Ruusbroec's (1293-1381) *De or-*

¹Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, trans. Catherine Misrahi (New York, 1961).

²See François Vandenbroucke, "Écriture sainte et vie spirituelle", *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, IV, 1 (Paris, 1960), 201-203.

³K. Krogh-Tønning, *Der Letzte Scholastiker. Eine Apologie* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1904).

⁴See K. Swenden, "Dionysius van Rijkel, Biographische nota", *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, XXIV (1950), 170-81. See Denys *In librum II Sententiarum*, in *Doctoris Ecstatici D. Dionysii Cartusiani Opera omnia*, cura et labore monachorum sacri ordinis Cartusienensis, 42 vols. in 44 (Montreuil, Tournai, Parkminster, 1896-1913, 1935), vol. XXI, p. 493: "Proinde recolo me ante annos quardraginta, dum in pueritia Suollis studerem, vidisse ac legisse tractatum a S. Bernardo compositum...". Henceforward the edition cited here will be referred to as *Opera omnia*.

⁵See Albert Grijs, *Jean de Schoonhoven (1356-1432). Son interpretation de 1 Jean 2, 15 "N'aimez pas ce monde, ni a qui est dans ce monde"*. *De contemptu huius mundi. Textes et études*, III (Nijmegen, 1967), pp. 36-40.

⁶Kent Emery Jr., "Dionysii Cartusienensis Bibliotheca et Manuscripta: Prologue and Queries", in *Kartäusermystik und-Mystiker Band IV, Analecta Cartusiana*, LV (Salzburg, 1982), pp. 147-48.

⁷Printed in Pierre Debongnie, *Jean Mombaer de Bruxelles, Abbé de Livry. Ses écrits et ses reformes* (Louvain-Toulouse, 1927), pp. 320-21, 324-27.

natu spiritualis dispensationis in the Latin translation made by Geert Groote.⁸ A great admirer of Ruusbroec, whom he called *doctor divinus*, Denys defended Ruusbroec's most daring mystical speculations against the charges of heresy made by Gerson.⁹ Like his friend and correspondent Nicholas of Cusa, Denys argued the use of the intellect in contemplation against those who preferred simple to learned ignorance.¹⁰

Denys' encyclopaedic - or if one must - eclectic use of spiritual traditions is evident in his *Contra detestabilem cordis inordinationem*, by his own testimony his "primum opusculum".¹¹ This work, concerning liturgical meditation, was written about 1430,¹² and is the object of this study. In a sequel, I shall discuss Denys' *De meditatione (meditaciones)*, written, as Denys himself tells us, in 1469 when he was 67 years old.¹³ This was Denys' last writing. It seems significant that Denys' first and last works concern meditation, in one sense the pivotal point of the spiritual life.

In medieval monastic life, the practice of meditation was bound closely to the recitation of the liturgy. Denys' Carthusian predecessor, Guigo II (+1188?), neatly formulated the traditional place of meditation within monastic life. Guigo placed meditation within a fourfold activity of reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. In his *Epistola de vita contemplativa (Scala claustralium)* Guigo defined the respective duties of these acts: "lectio inquirat, meditatio inveniat, oratio postulat, contemplatio degustat".¹⁴ Following longstanding tradition, Guigo relates meditation to the beatitude,

⁸Georgette Epiney-Burgard, *Gerard Groote (1340-1384) et les debuts de la devotion moderne* (Wiesbaden, 1970), pp. 125-27.

⁹See Kent Emery Jr., "The Carthusians, Intermediaries for the Teaching of John Ruusbroeck during the Period of Early Reform and in the Counter-Reformation", *Analecta Cartusiana*, XLIII (1979), 100-116.

¹⁰For a study of these issues, see E. Vansteenberghe, *Autour de la Docte Ignorance. Une controverse sur la théologie mystique au XVe siècle. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Bd. XIV (1915).

¹¹*Contra detestabilem cordis inordinationem in Dei laudibus horisque canonicis vel laus Cartusiana*, *Opera omnia* XL, pp. 191-259. See *Prooemium*, p. 194.

¹²A. Stoelen, "Denys le Chartreux", *Dict. de spir.*, III (Paris, 1957), 434.

¹³*De Meditatione*, *Opera omnia* XLI, pp. 69-90; see a.14, p. 90, and Stoelen, 434. In a list of his works which he made, found in Trier, Stadtbibliothek, 631/1562⁴⁰, 227r-229v, Denys gives this work the title *Meditaciones*; see 229r: "Meditaciones eiusdem. Incipiunt Cogitaciones mee vane". The same manuscript contains the only manuscript copy of the work that I know; see 48r^b-56r^a: "Incipiunt meditationes fratris Dyonisii Carthusiensis Cogitaciones mee varie succedunt sibi et mens in diuersa rapitur *Job 20* Intellectus et voluntas sibi inuicem sunt connexe".

¹⁴Guigo's *Epistola* is edited by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, with a French translation by a Carthusian, in *Lettre sur la vie contemplative (L'Echelle des moines)*. *Douze meditations* (Paris, 1970). See III, p. 84.

"Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt" (Matthew 5, 8). Meditation is thus associated with moral purification and the elimination of impure, carnal thoughts.¹⁵ Denys preserved meditation's place within the context of reading, prayer, and contemplation. Like Guigo, he bases meditation squarely on reading, although, as we shall suggest, habits of reading changed considerably from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, and this was not without effect upon the tradition of meditation. Moreover, like Guigo Denys emphasizes that meditation, in order to be fruitful and not empty, must issue in prayer and affection. Finally, Denys treats meditation as an intermediate step in the spiritual life, preparatory to a pure and naked union with God in contemplation.¹⁶

Before turning directly to Denys of Ryckel's first treatise, one may usefully consider works by Anselm of Canterbury (1033?-1109) and Geert Groote (1340-1384) which illustrate lineaments of the tradition of meditation which Denys received. Anselm's *Orationes sive meditationes* were a decisive influence upon the course of later medieval piety;¹⁷ Groote's *De quattuor generibus meditabilium*¹⁸ is significant for later devotionalist developments of the practice of meditation, which in turn influenced modern ones.¹⁹ We shall not argue here that either of these works was a direct source for Denys' *Contra detestabilem cordis inordinationem*: there are enough of these. However, Denys knew Anselm's meditations, and in his treatises on meditation there are at least traces of Groote's teaching.

As the title of his collection indicates, Anselm's prayers are meditations and his meditations are prayers. Both, like his speculative writings, to which they are closely related,²⁰ are governed by the general rubric, "fides quaerens intellectum". In his prayers and meditations, Anselm associ-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, V, pp. 88-92.

¹⁶ See *De meditatione*, a.4, p. 75; *Contra detestabilem*, a.27, p. 252.

¹⁷ A. Wilmart, *Auteurs spirituels et textes dévots du Moyen Age Latin* (Paris, 1932), pp. 147-216, edited and discussed the authenticity and influence of the meditations. For the *Orationes sive meditationes*, we shall cite the edition of F. S. Schmitt in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Opera omnia*, III (Edinburgh, 1946).

¹⁸ Gerardo Groote, *Il Trattato "De quattuor generibus meditabilium"*, ed. with intro. and Italian trans. by Ilario Tolomio (Padua, 1975).

¹⁹ We should note that R. R. Post, *The Modern Devotion. Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism* (Leiden, 1968), pp. 164-65, believes that in Groote's treatise one finds little of the "methodical meditation" developed by later devotionalists.

²⁰ Anselm's *Meditatio redemptionis humanae* (*Opera omnia* III, pp. 84-91) is obviously related to his speculative treatise, *Cur Deus Homo*, (ed. Schmitt, 1946, in *Opera omnia* II, pp. 36-133). Other speculative treatises, such as *De veritate* and *De casu diaboli* (ed. Schmitt, *Opera omnia* IV, pp. 167-99, 227-76), illumine difficult passages in several prayers and meditations by Anselm.

ates faith with the soul's faculty of memory, with the recollection of God's creative and redemptive works recorded in Scripture. Faith is only a beginning, not an end to the knowledge of God. Understanding, which penetrates to the spirit or *ratio* of the letter recalled in the memory, lies between faith and vision,²¹ and is the ground of man's hope. This hope engenders desire for the good seen more clearly by the mind. Nearly all of Anselm's meditations mark a clear - if rhetorically complex - progress from initial despair, to faith, hope and love. This progress corresponds to an Augustinian movement in the soul from memory to understanding to affection. Within this movement, meditation corresponds with understanding:

Converte, misericordissime, meum teporem in ferventissimum tui amorem. Ad hoc, clementissime, tendit haec oratio mea, haec memoria et meditatio beneficiorum tuorum, ut accendam in me tuum amorem.²²

Anselm's meditations are artful in a strict sense. Faith and memory are based on reading. Understanding comes through a dialectic, or rather "speculative grammar",²³ which distinguishes the proper sense of Scripture's human terms applied to God. Finally, as the text quoted suggests, rhetorical figures are the instrument for expressing one's affection for God. The correspondence of meditation with understanding points to the relation between Anselm's medita-

²¹See the commendation "ad Urbanum Papam II" of the *Cur Deus Homo*, p. 40: "Denique quoniam inter fidem et speciem intellectum quem in hac vita capimus esse medium intelligo: quanto aliquis ad illum proficit, tanto eum propinquare speciei, ad quam omnes anhelamus, existimo".

²²"Oratio ad Christum cum mens vult eius amore fervore" (*Oratio II*), *Opera omnia III*, p. 7, which continues: "sic et ego non quantum debeo, sed quantum queo, memor passionis tuae, memor alaparum tuarum, memor flagellorum, memor crucis, memor vulnerum tuorum, memor qualiter pro me occisus es, qualiter conditus, qualiter sepultus, simul memor gloriosae tuae resurrectionis et admirabilis ascensionis *haec indubitata fide teneo*, exilii mei aerumnas defleo, spero tui adventus solam consolationem, *ardeo tui vultus gloriosam contemplationem*" (italics mine). Here understanding lies between faith, or the memory of its articles, and the vision of God face to face, which one aspires to by love. Truth and understanding yield hope, which engenders prayer and desire. See *Oratio X* "ad sanctum Paulum", p. 34: "Sic enim esse veritas ostendit, et tamen affectus non sentit. Sic ratio docet, et cor non dolat ... Si hoc possem, forsitan sperarem, sperando orarem, orando impetrarem". See also *Meditatio III* "redemptionis humanae", p. 91: "Certe, domine, quia me fecisti, debeo amori tuo me ipsum totum; quia me redimisti, debeo me ipsum totum; quia tanta promittis, debeo me ipsum totum... Fac precor, domine, me gustare per amorem quod gusto per cognitionem. Sentiam per affectum quod sentio per intellectum". Anselm's *Epistola de incarnatione verbi* (ed. Schmitt, *Opera omnia II*) pp. 7-9, recapitulates the monastic order: faith and meditation on God's laws yield a clean heart and illumined eyes; thus, "qui non crediderit, non intelliget. Nam qui non crediderit, non experietur; et qui non expertus non fuerit, non cognoscet."

²³See Marcia L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (New Haven, 1968), pp. 92-160.

tions and his speculative treatises. These latter, as Anselm says, provide the abstract "necessary reasons" that underlie Scripture's "beautiful pictures", that is, the concordances between Old and New Testaments.²⁴

We have drawn attention here to the psychological and artful scheme of Anselm's meditations. But these are not individualistic. All of them, including the prayers to saints, are firmly attached to liturgical prayer. All focus upon the central point of liturgical celebration, the redemption of the old creation in Christ, the new creation. In the liturgical manner, Anselm weaves texts of the Old and New Testaments around this event. One should remark especially the aural quality of Anselm's recollection of scriptural texts. Nearly each sentence, explicitly or implicitly, refers to a scriptural text; the words of one recall another. Such a memory is the product of repeated recitation.

In light of subsequent tradition, the most significant feature of Anselm's meditations is the regular movement, issuing finally in affection, from reading and memory to abstraction and understanding. This movement in the late Middle Ages precisely defines meditation, the proximate end of which is understanding (affection transforms meditation into prayer, the longing for vision and contemplation). Further, later writers will follow Anselm's example in borrowing instruments from the established verbal arts to develop an art of meditation. In Anselm's treatment of meditation according to an order of faculties in the soul one recognizes the seed of a tradition, passing through the modern devotion, which crystallizes in Ignatius' *Exercises*.²⁵

As we have stated, the founder of the modern devotion, Geert Groote, wrote an intriguing treatise on meditation entitled *De quattuor generibus meditabilium*. This work dispels any lingering notion that the modern devotion is best characterized as anti-intellectual. In the happy phrase of Georgette Epiney-Burgard, Groote's treatise is "post-scholastique", in the sense that it presupposes the full development of scholastic culture.²⁶

As his title declares, Groote distinguishes four classes of things upon which one may meditate: the words and images of sacred Scripture, especially the life and death of Christ; revelations delivered to favored saints; the assertions of doctors; and the phantasms of sensible things apprehended by

²⁴See *Cur Deus Homo*, IV, pp. 51-52.

²⁵M. van Woerkum, "Florent Radewijns", *Dict. de spir.*, V (Paris, 1964), 433-34, traces a line from Radewijns through Gerard de Zutphen (+1398) and Jan Nombaer to Ignatius of Loyola. For the influence of Carthusian writers upon Ignatius, including possibly Denys, see P. B. Spaapen, "Karthuizervroomheid en Ignatiaanse spiritualiteit", *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, XXX (1956), 337-66; XXXI (1957), 129-49.

²⁶For Epiney-Burgard's treatment of the treatise, see the work cited, n. 8, pp. 258-65.

the imagination.²⁷ In fact, all of the classes of meditational objects may be reduced to this last one. Even the "verisimilitudes, conjectures, and probable arguments" of the doctors, however abstract they may seem, are but images of the truth, and, as we shall see, are rooted in the imagination.²⁸ In the beginning, Groote's treatise purports to be a sermon on Christ's nativity, on the text "Parvulus natus est nobis" (Isaias 9, 6). Epiney-Burgard finds this device clumsy, and R. R. Post, characteristically, finds it extraneous.²⁹ On the contrary, the appropriateness of this text to the theme of meditation is clear. Christ, in his Incarnation, accommodates himself to the weakness of sensible human nature, which, Groote says, draws nourishment from "fictions" and "imagined things". Befitting the weakness of our nature, if we wish to enter the kingdom of heaven we must become like little children (Matthew 18, 2-4), drinking the milk of babes, the food of the imagination, before presuming to eat the solid food of abstraction.³⁰

Lest "the cloud of our eyes" and our "carnal and animal nature" be overwhelmed by exceeding light, God and the angels have revealed spiritual things to us in corporeal forms, images, figures, and figments (*figmentis*).³¹ As Dionysius the Areopagite says, it is impossible for us to perceive the ray of divine light except through a variety of sacred veils prepared for us by the fatherly providence.³² Further alluding to Horace, Groote adds that the holy fictions of sacred Scripture no more deceive than the fictions of moral poets. Certainly, one must never accept the writings of poets literally, according to the "naked sound" of their words, but rather one must realize that

²⁷ *De quattuor generibus*, p. 48.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Curiously, Groote has often been labeled a nominalist. On his "nominalism" (he is not in any precise sense) see Epiney-Burgard, pp. 33-34. Groote's terms - "conjecture, verisimilitude, probable argument" - are in fact drawn from Latin rhetorical discourse. See Cicero, *De oratore*, II, 74, 299 (ed. A. S. Wilkins, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Rhetorica*, Oxford, 1902, repr. 1969, *Tomus 1*); *Orator*, 36, 126-27 (ed. Wilkins, *Rhetorica*, Oxford, 1903, repr. 1970, *Tomus II*); *De inventione* (with trans. H. M. Hubbell, Loeb: Cambridge, Mass., 1968), II, v, 16, p. 180; II, xxxii, 99, p. 264; and most usefully, since it brings together the terms *coniectura*, *verisimilia*, *similitudo*, and *argumentum*, *Partitiones oratoriae*, 9,33 - 11,40 (ed. Wilkins, *Rhetorica II*). For *coniectura*, see also Quintilian, *Institutionis oratoriae libri duodecim* (ed. M. Winterbottom, *Tomus II*, Oxford, 1970), I, 2, 25, p. 18; III, 6, 15, p. 145; VII, 2, 6, p. 379; VII, 3, 25, p. 394; VII, 4, 23, p. 401; VIII, 4, 26, p. 454. *Inst.* III, 6, 30, p. 148 gives a precise definition: "Coniectura dicta est a coniectu, id est derectione quadam ratinnis ad ueritatem, unde etiam somniorum atque omnium interpretes coniectores uocantur."

²⁹ Post, pp. 164-65.

³⁰ *De quattuor generibus*, pp. 42, 48.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-50, 52-54.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 102. See Ps.-Dionysius, *De caelesti hierarchia*, 1, in *Dionysiaca: Recueil donnant l'ensemble des traductions latines des ouvrages attribués au Denys l'Aréopage*, ed. P. Chevallier, II (Brussels, 1937), p. 733.

in poetic speech, the literal is figurative.³³ This example reveals Groote's bookishness, evident throughout his treatise.³⁴ As Post observes, Groote's treatise does not, as one might expect, show four methods of meditation.³⁵ Rather, Groote's kinds of meditation are distinguished by kinds of books from which one may draw matter for meditation: Scripture, saints' lives and revelations, scholastic texts, and even poets.

Whatever images one meditates upon must be governed by and referred to the images of sacred Scripture. Alluding to Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*, Groote says that the images of Scripture have a special property: the things to which they refer themselves signify other things too difficult for us to apprehend because they cannot be impressed on our senses.³⁶ Furthermore, there is an hierarchy even among scriptural images. The images and figures of the Old Testament books and of the Apocalypse, since they are prophetic shadows, must (like the writings of the poets) be read figuratively. Like the assertions of the doctors, their interpretation yields only conjectures, opinions, and probable arguments, not necessary ones. On the other hand, the images of the Gospels, Christ's words and deeds, must always be received "purely and simply, according to the letter".³⁷ In this ordering of scriptural images, Groote provides not only a doctrinal, but, as it were, an hermeneutical rationale for the priority of meditation upon Christ's life and death. Groote's teaching on this point draws together several medieval notions: first, the ancient exegetical principle that the New Testament fulfills and completes the Old; secondly, the scholastic principle that only the literal sense of Scripture yields demonstrable conclusions; and thirdly, perhaps, Anselm's distinction between Scripture's "pictures" and "necessary reasons".

Although meditation begins in imagination, and necessarily remains rooted there, it must rise to abstraction. Unlike Anselm, who associates faith with memory, Groote, reflecting scholastic teaching, appropriates faith to the intellect. Faith, Groote says, does not operate in the imagination, which is formed by sensible sight, but in the intellectual power, which is

³³Horace, *Ars poetica*, with trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough (Loeb, 1961), p. 476, ll. 333-44; p. 480, ll. 361-65.

³⁴Groote was a zealous collector of books, and an advocate of *originalia*. See Epiney-Burgard, pp. 57-59; Post, pp. 98-99.

³⁵Post, p. 165.

³⁶*De quattuor generibus*, pp. 52-54. See Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, ed. J. Martin, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, XXXII (Turnhout, 1962), I, 2, 2, pp. 7-8; II, 1, 1, -6, 8, pp. 32-36, *et passim*.

³⁷*De quattuor generibus*, pp. 66-72, *passim*.

remote from the phantasms of sensible forms, and which comprehends the common reasons and eternal causes of things.³⁸ We are able to believe that the lord was born of a virgin named Mary because we know the "universal species and quiddities" of the terms: we know what a virgin is, what it means to be born, and what a proper noun is.³⁹ Since faith is received in the intellect and not the imagination, one must detach himself from images and signs, which eventually should be "emptied out" (*evacuandum*), and instead be led through them to the universal things they signify.⁴⁰ Thus, although it is useful to imagine one's self as present to the words and deeds of Christ, one must be careful not to be deceived.⁴¹ Meditating upon Christ's Incarnation, one must pass through its corporeal images to the idea of God's love and humility, and meditating upon Christ's miracles, one must be led to God's omnipotence.⁴² In general, Groote criticizes books such as the *Meditationes de vita Christi* which imagine details of Christ's life unrecorded in Scripture.⁴³ In sum, in "sincere meditations and devotions", founded on faith, "it is fitting that the lineaments and forms of corporeal things be purged, and that the rational soul (*animus*) turn to their species and quiddities".⁴⁴

Because he accepts a specifically Thomist epistemology,⁴⁵ Groote can find no direct means for the emptying out of images which true meditation requires. On the one hand, abstraction is necessary for the understanding of Scripture. Even though the signs and names in Scripture refer to individual things, one cannot grasp these things immediately as individuals, since one cannot apprehend singulars except through universals.⁴⁶ On the

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-82.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78. See Augustine, *De Trinitate libri XV*, ed. W. J. Mountain with Fr. Glorie, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, L (Turnhout, 1978), VIII, 5, p. 277.

⁴⁰ *De quattuor generibus*, pp. 58-60.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁴⁵ See Epiney-Burgard, p. 34.

⁴⁶ *De quattuor generibus*, pp. 80-82. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (cum textu ex recensione Leonina, Marietti: Turin, Rome, 1952), I, q. 85, a.3 (pp. 419-21), where Thomas distinguishes a psychological order from the order of intellectual act: "Est ergo dicendum quod cognitio singularium est prior quoad nos quam cognitio universalium, sicut cognitio sensitiva quam cognitio intellectiva. Sed tam secundum sensum quam secundum intellectum, cognitio magis communis est prior quam cognitio minus communis" (*in corpore*). More specifically, see *ST*, I, q.86, a.1, *in corpore* (p. 425): "Respondeo dicendum quod singulare in rebus materialibus intellectus noster directe et primo cognoscere non potest. Cuius ratio est, quia principium singularitatis in rebus materialibus est materia individualis; intellectus autem noster, sicut supra dictum est, intelligit abstrahendo speciem intelligibilem ab huiusmodi materia. Quod autem a materia individuali abstrahitur est universale."

other hand, a total detachment from singular images is not possible. Seemingly referring to Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of reversion to the phantasm, Groote says that phantasms impress themselves so strongly on the mind that the mind habitually "runs back" (*recurrere*) to their origin in the exterior senses.⁴⁷ Following Aristotle and Cicero, Groote attributes this habit to man's reliance upon the dominant sense of sight. At a distance, in a seemingly more spiritual way, sight embraces more properties of things than the other senses, and is therefore the closest to the common sense.⁴⁸ Sight, we should point out, is in biblical terms the opposite of faith, upon which true meditation must be grounded.

Groote's teaching here leads him to some singular and revealing remarks. Illustrating his point by means of the more difficult example, Groote says that whenever learned men read or hear something, especially if it is abstract, they remember and visualize the books, the very places in books, the very letters and syllables wherein they read it the first time. Thus, although they think their meditations abstract, they are no less imaginative than the meditations of unlettered folk, who visualize what they hear by recalling more pictorial images. In this matter philosophers are particularly deceived. When speaking of essences, natures, quiddities, matter, form, genera and species, they believe that they philosophize through the intellect, but in fact they are turned to the sensible phantasms of letters.⁴⁹ Groote's observation probably reflects his own experience of reading as a university student. It also reflects a change in the experience of reading since the time of Anselm or Guigo. In the above cited text, Groote distinguishes two forms of visual, local memory. One, which Groote ascribes to simple folk, employs pictorial images as an aid to memory. Classical writers had made an

46 (cont'd) "Unde intellectus noster directe non est cognoscitivus nisi universalium".

⁴⁷ *De quattuor generibus*, p. 60. See Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 84, a.7, *in corpore* (p. 414): "dicendum quod impossibile est intellectum nostrum, secundum praesentis vitae statum, quo passibili corpori coniungitur, aliquid intelligere in actu, nisi convertendo se ad phantasmata".

⁴⁸ *De quattuor generibus*, pp. 82-84. See Aristotle, *De sensu et sensibili*, I, 437^a; Cicero, *De oratore*, II, 87, 357: "Vidit enim hoc prudenter sive Simonides sive alius quis invenit, ea maxime animis effingi nostris, quae essent a sensu tradita atque impressa; acerrimum autem ex omnibus nostris sensibus esse sensum videndi; qua re facillime animo teneri posse ea, quae perciperentur auribus aut cogitatione, si etiam commendatione oculorum animis traderentur; ut res caecas et ab aspectus iudicio remotas conformatio quaedam et imago et figura ita notaret, ut ea, quae cogitando complecti vix possemus, intuendo quasi teneremus".

⁴⁹ *De quattuor generibus*, pp. 86-90.

art of this practice, and its use continued through the Middle Ages.⁵⁰ The other form of memory aid, which fastens ideas visually to their place in a book, and which Groote ascribes to the learned, seems to be a creation of university culture. From the thirteenth century, scholastic books in particular with their tables, headings, articles, indices, intricate means of alphabetical localizing and cross-reference were designed to serve this latter kind of visual memory.⁵¹ Groote's treatise on meditation, apparently, is addressed to readers accustomed to books of this kind. Looking forward, we might note that the apparatus to reading is an integral feature of all of Denys of Ryckel's compositions, indeed a means for identifying them. The intricate textual organization of Jan Mombaer's *Rosetum* likewise is integral to his methods of meditation.⁵² Men like Geert Groote and Denys of Ryckel may leave the university seeking solitude, but they read in the manner of university men and this shapes their practice of meditation.

Groote teaches that the effects of sight's obvious or subtle dominance can be overcome by relying more upon the other senses. Sight, which is the origin of science,⁵³ is the instrument of reason. Faith, however, comes through hearing (Romans 10, 7). By itself hearing cannot supply phantasms of singular visible things.⁵⁴ Hearing yields knowledge only *in genere*; thus, when one hears that Christ's Passion was bitter, he understands its bitterness only generally, no matter what particular phantasms he may form in the imagination. Pure faith, consequently, comes from hearing, since things heard and not seen must adhere to the first truth (or nothing).⁵⁵

⁵⁰See Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Peregrine edition: Harmondsworth, England, 1969), especially pp. 17-113.

⁵¹See the fascinating study by Richard H. and Mary H. Rouse, *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons: Studies on the "Manipulus florum" of Thomas of Ireland* (Toronto, 1979) - bibliography of all the pertinent periodical studies. On pp. 212-13, the Rouses note that Jan van Schoonhoven used this highly cross-indexed source for the treatise mentioned in n. 5 above, and opine that further study will reveal that devotionalist writers frequently used such books.

⁵²See Joannes Mauburnus, *Rosetum exercitiorum spiritualium et sacrarum meditationum: in quo etiam habetur materia predicabilis per totius anni circulum* (J. Badius Ascensius, I. Petit: Paris, 1510). The book is divided into two major parts, and each of these into *distinctiones*. The volume collects several titles. These are designated by roman numerals on the head of col. a of each recto, and are divided sequentially by an *alphabetum* on the head of col. b of each recto. Each division of the *alphabetum* is marked marginally by letters A-Z. There are further chapter and article divisions, and in his prefaces, Mombaer offers several thematic schemes of division. The book has various tables and word-subject indices. It also contains several "memory" diagrams.

⁵³*De quattuor generibus*, p. 84.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 96-98.

Precisely because of its inadequate imaginative resources, hearing is more reliable than sight in matters of faith. So too the crudest senses serve faith more reliably than sight. Scripture, notably the Canticle, warrants the use of these senses - odor, taste, touch - for speaking about the highest things. Citing Bernard of Clairvaux, Groote conjectures that spiritual savour originates in and arises from the sense of taste.⁵⁶ In referring to the Canticle and spiritual savour, Groote alludes to the *sapientia* that transcends the *scientia* rooted in sight. Finally, Groote notes, the sacraments (chiefly the sacrament of the altar), in which there is a special proportion between sensible sign and invisible grace, are received primarily by the senses of touch and taste.⁵⁷

The necessary use of the senses in meditation is governed by a general principle. The less refined the sensible sign, the greater its efficacy for meditation, since unlike the philosopher, one will not be deceived by its apparent spirituality. This principle applies to images derived from reading: the further the sound of the words recedes from the truth, the less the mind is allowed to linger in the letter.⁵⁸ On this crucial point, Groote turns to the *De caelesti hierarchia* of pseudo-Dionysius:

Sed hoc etiam sciendum quod sicut negationes de Deo sunt affirmationibus veriores, sic dissimiliores similitudines et difformiores de Deo et spiritualibus rebus utiliores sunt, eo quod, nihil dignum Deo vel spiritualibus in se continentes, cogunt mentem hominis ab eis declinare et altius aspirare.⁵⁹

By virtue of this principle, man's meditations, necessarily bound to sensible signs, may none the less rise above them.

Denys of Ryckel's *Contra detestabilem cordis inordinationem* shares the general features of the tradition of meditation we have outlined in Anselm and Geert Groote. For Denys, too, meditation comprises precisely the movement from memory and imagination to understanding and abstraction. As for Groote, Thomas Aquinas (whom Denys calls "meum patronum")⁶⁰ and pseudo-Dionysius are Denys' chief authorities for the theory that underlies meditative practice. It is noteworthy that in their treatises on meditation, Groote and Denys seldom refer to pseudo-Dionysius' *De mystica theologia*,

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-106.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-104.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* See Ps.-Dionysius, *De Caelesti hierarchia*, 2, in *Dionysiaca* II, pp. 759-63. See Hugh of St. Victor, *Expositio in Hierarchiam coelestem s. Dionysii Areopagitae*, PL 175.961, 988-89; Richard of St. Victor, *In Apocalypsim Joannis*, PL 196.686-90; Dionysius Cartusianus, *Commentaria in librum de Caelesti seu angelica hierarchia*, *Opera omnia* XV, pp. 32-34.

⁶⁰ *Contra detestabilem*, a.8, p. 202.

relying instead upon the *De caelesti hierarchia*. Meditation is not a practice of mystical theology, wherein by definition one must rise by means of the affections above all sensible and intelligible things.⁶¹ Meditation belongs properly to symbolic theology, wherein one rises by means of created visible things to a knowledge of the invisible things of God (Romans, 1, 20).⁶² Although in the *Contra detestabilem* Denys uses the terms contemplation and meditation interchangeably, later in his writings he will distinguish them sharply in terms of the difference between mystical and symbolic theology.

The full title of Denys' work, *Contra detestabilem cordis inordinationem in Dei laudibus horisque canonicis vel laus Cartusiana*, reveals its monastic and liturgical context. The first work of the monk, Denys says, is "to assist in the divine praises of God with all vigilance, purity of heart, and an illumined intellect". The enemies of this work are "cogitationes super-vacuae, otiosae, volatiles ac inanes".⁶³ Because of the weakness of human nature, man's mind cannot easily remain elevated; the *pondus* of the soul in this life is towards bodily things, and the mind wanders constantly among their images.⁶⁴ Denys' treatise offers means to keep the mind elevated, and to discipline the imagination.

In defining purity of heart as the aim of the monk, a purity vitiated by wandering thoughts, Denys follows the teaching of John Cassian, whose works he later translated "ad stilum facillimum".⁶⁵ In his first *Collatio*, Cassian distinguishes between the monk's ultimate end, the kingdom of heaven, and his proximate end, or *scopos*, which is purity of heart. At this *scopos*, or fixed target, the monk should aim all the arrows of his prayer and thought.⁶⁶ Further on in the text, summarizing his teaching on this point, Cassian says that in divine praises it is common for the memory to slip from one verse to another, never retaining any of them. Thus the soul is drawn and turned from one psalm to another, from the Gospel to the Epistles of saint Paul, from these to the speech of the prophets and thence to the spiritual histories. Unstable, vague, and always moving, the mind never examines or judges fully any text, nor does it touch, taste, give birth to or possess the spiritual

⁶¹ See Ps.-Dionysius, *De mystica theologia*, 1, in *Dionysiaca* I, pp. 567-68.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 3, pp. 587-88.

⁶³ *Contra detestabilem*, *Prooemium*, pp. 193-94.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, a. 23, p. 244.

⁶⁵ *Translatio librorum Joannis Cassiani presbyteri ad stilum facillimum*, *Opera omnia* XXVII.

⁶⁶ *Iohannis Cassiani Conlationes XXIII*, ed. Michael Petschenig, *CSEL* XIII (Vienna, 1886), I, 5, pp. 10-11. See Denys, *Collationum ... translatio*, *Coll.* I, 2-5, pp. 136-37.

senses. Three things stabilize the mind: vigils, meditations, and prayers. In order for the mind to be stable in the time of prayer, it must already be formed "by thoughts which it has dwelt on before prayer".⁶⁷ This teaching explains the relation between Denys' elaborate meditations and the praise of God "in ... laudibus horisque canonicis".

Denys was not the only late medieval writer on meditation to be influenced directly by Cassian. Geert Groote developed Cassian's themes throughout his writings.⁶⁸ Groote's successor, Florens Radewijns (1350-1400), begins his *rapiarium*, "Omnes, inquit, artes", by excerpting Cassian's text concerning the *scopos*.⁶⁹ Mombaer's various arts are designed precisely to prevent wandering thoughts and thereby achieve purity of heart.⁷⁰ Intriguingly, Erasmus in his *Ratio seu methodus compendio perveniendi ad veram theologiam* uses the term *scopos* to designate the all-embracing "commonplace" - Christ in head and members - wherein one should locate all scriptural passages.⁷¹ All human arts, Cassian says, have an end which orders their exercise; no less than these should the monk's reading and meditation be ordered by such an end. In Cassian's analogy, late medieval writers found ancient authority for the "methodic" use in meditation of techniques borrowed from the verbal arts. These were most amply developed by Wessel Gansfort and Jan Mombaer. And it would seem that the Carthusians, for whom Cassian was a special authority, and who generally promoted schematized devotions,⁷² played some rôle in these later developments.

In the traditional manner, then, Denys of Ryckel teaches that an illumined intellect requires a pure heart, which in turn is the effect of a disciplined imagination. The discipline for man's imagination should befit

⁶⁷ See Denys, *Collationum ... translatio*, Coll. X, 13-14, pp. 265-66.

⁶⁸ Epiney-Burgard, pp. 64-65.

⁶⁹ M. Th. P. van Woerkum, *Het Libellus "Omnes, inquit, artes"*. *Een Rapiarium van Florentius Radewijns*, 3 dl. (Nijmegen, 1950), II, 1, p. 1.

⁷⁰ *Rosetum* (1510), *Titulus XX, Alphabetum XLVI, Prologus*, C-M.

⁷¹ See *Ratio seu Methodus compendio perveniendi ad veram theologiam*, ed. J. Clericus in *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami Opera omnia*, V (Leiden, 1704; repr. Hildesheim, 1962), col. 77, 83-88. See 77: "Inter humanas disciplinas, aliae alium habent scopum. Apud Rhetorem, hoc spectas, ut copiose, splendide dicas: apud Dialecticum, ut argute colligas, & adversarium illaquees. Hic primus & unicus tibi sit scopus, hoc votum, hoc unum age, ut muteris, ut rapiaris, ut affleris, ut transformeris in ea quae discis." See Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 72-81.

⁷² For the Carthusian contribution to the development of the meditation of the rosary, see Karl Joseph Klinkhammer, *Adolf von Essen und seine Werke. Der Rosenkranz in der geschichtlichen Situation seiner Entstehung und in seinem bleibendem Anliegen Quellenforschung* (Frankfurt, 1972). Ludolph of Saxony, of course, was instrumental in the development of systematic meditation on the Passion.

his created nature. Alluding to pseudo-Dionysius' theory of hierarchical illumination, as interpreted by Thomas Aquinas,⁷³ Denys states that since the human intellect is situated between intelligible substances (the angels) and corporeal things, and in this life inclines more to the body for which it is the act of existence, man can understand intelligible things only through bodily ones. Hence, the human mind does not receive the illumination of superior substances directly, but knows through sensible species; or, in the words of Dionysius the Areopagite, man cannot turn to the divine ray except through a variety of sensible forms. Even the inspirations of the prophets were communicated by God through imaginative forms and figures.⁷⁴

Like Groote, Denys distinguishes between the wholly abstract conceptions formed by faith, and those formed in our intellect through a variety of sensible forms. For example, by nature the intellect requires a local object. Nevertheless, by faith we piously believe that the human soul has no dimension or extension. Indeed, we cannot properly conceive the human soul except in relation to God, its exemplary cause. By faith we believe that God is an uncircumscribed spirit present everywhere through his power and essence, possessing within himself, as in a point, all life, all wisdom, all eternity, and all creatures.⁷⁵ Aptly is he called a sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere.⁷⁶ Now the soul is a *scintilla* of its divine cause. In its own way it contains virtually within itself the whole circuit of the world. Having no spatial dimension, it is able, by means of

⁷³Ps.-Dionysius, *De Caelesti hierarchia*, 15, in *Dionysiaca* II, pp. 986-90. Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 50, a. 1; q. 50, a. 3; q. 55, a. 3; q. 75, a. 1; q. 75, a. 5; q. 75, a. 7; q. 76, a. 1. See also Thomas' *Opusculum de humanitate Jesu Christi*, a. 1, *prooemium*, in *Opera omnia*, XVII (Parma, 1864; repr. New York, 1950), p. 189. For a lucid summary of Thomas' teaching on this point, see Étienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1955), pp. 375-76.

⁷⁴*Contra detestabilem*, a. 1, pp. 195-96. See Ps.-Dionysius, *De caelesti hierarchia*, 1, in *Dionysiaca* II, p. 733. For the argument that the prophets (namely Jacob) did not see the essence of God, Denys quotes Thomas Aquinas directly; see Thomas in *IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 7, ad 2 ("Utrum Deus in statu viae possit per essentiam videri"), in *Opera omnia*, VII, 2 (Parma), p. 1211: "Ad secundum dicendum, quod visio illa Jacob fuit imaginaria, vel corporalis. Dicitur tamem vidisse facie ad faciem, quia illa figura in qua ei apparuit Deus, facie ad faciem est ab eo visa".

⁷⁵*Contra detestabilem*, a. 1, p. 196. Denys cites "Augustine" (actually Honorius of Autun), *De cognitione verae vitae*. See ch. 7, *PL* 40.1010: "Deus spiritus est essentia invisibilis, omni creaturae incomprehensibilis, totam vitam, totam sapientiam, totam aeternitatem simul essentialiter possidens: vel ipsa vita, ipsa sapientia, ipsa veritas, ipsa justitia, ipsa aeternitas existens, omnem creaturam instar puncti in se continens." The thought of both Honorius and Denys here derives from Augustine, *De quantitate animae*. See, e.g., ch. 3, *PL* 32.1037: "Quamobrem quanta sit anima secundum inquisitionem hanc tibi respondere non possum; sed possum affirmare, neque illam longam esse, nec latam, nec robustum, neque aliquid horum quae in mensuris corporum quaeri solent."

⁷⁶*Contra detestabilem*, a. 17, p. 219. Denys cites Alan of Lille. See *Regulae de sacra theologia*, 7, *PL* 210.627.

the intellect, to reduce the corporeal dimensions of the outer world to its own "smallness", or point.⁷⁷

Such paradoxical conceptions (similar to Nicholas of Cusa's),⁷⁸ however, tease rather than establish comprehension; our intellect is scarcely capable of them. Lest our weak intellect be broken by and err in the difficulty of such conceptions, it is better that we contemplate God under certain similitudes and aenigmas used in sacred Scripture.⁷⁹ These temper and proportion the most noble spiritual objects to our capacity.⁸⁰ On the other hand, lest our intellect be seduced by various phantasms and discourse over diverse things, we should bind together the images of our contemplation and fix our thoughts to certain set objects.⁸¹

For such an object Denys uses the term *palus*, a set stake used as a mark or standard. Denys surely takes this term from a text in Ecclesiasticus:

Blessed is the man who will continue in wisdom, and who will meditate on her justice, and will think in his mind on God's all-encompassing sight; who considers wisdom's ways in his heart, and understanding her secrets, follows her path and stays in her ways; who looks through the windows, hears through the doors, and lodges near her house; and fixing a stake (*palum*) in her walls, sets up his house nearby her (14, 22-25).

Denys' later commentary on this text reveals the appropriateness of his term. The secrets of wisdom are the incomprehensible attributes of God, which one understands through the illumination of the mystical senses of sacred Scripture. Through the windows of sacred Scripture and the writings of holy authors, one comes to the clarity of divine illumination; through the doors of ecclesiastical sacraments one enters the kingdom. One fixes a stake (*palum*) in wisdom's walls when he stabilizes his intellect in the figures and tropes of Scripture, and in created things through which God is known. These stand as walls, Denys says, between the seer and the one seen, and he adds, "nunc enim videmus per speculum in aenigmate" (1 Corinthians 13, 12).⁸²

In the first part of *Contra detestabilem cordis inordinationem*, Denys sets forth an ordered sequence of *pali* for meditation. These are anagogic in the exegetical sense: all of them pertain to heavenly mysteries and the mysteries of man's final beatitude. As Denys says at the beginning of his

⁷⁷ *Contra detestabilem*, a. 2, pp. 196-97. See Honorius of Autun, *De cognitione verae vitae*, 8, PL 40.1011-12.

⁷⁸ Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, ed. E. Hoffmann and R. Klibansky, *Opera omnia*, I (Leipzig, 1932), I, 12-13, pp. 25-26; I, 23, pp. 46-47; II, 3, p. 69.

⁷⁹ *Contra detestabilem*, a. 4, p. 197.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, aa. 3-4, p. 197.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, aa. 2-3, p. 197.

⁸² *Ennaratio in librum Ecclesiastici*, a. 14, *Opera omnia* VIII, p. 85.

treatise, the roots of the psalms are in heaven, and when reciting them our conversation should be there.⁸³ Anagogic signs are scattered throughout the Scriptures. These Denys arranges topically, gathering texts around *loci* for meditation, which he then disposes in an hierarchical order. Denys' *pali* descend, in order, from God next to the virgin Mary (as piety and doctrine requires), thence through the nine angelic orders, and finally through various conditions, joys, and privileges to be experienced by human souls in beatitude. These last topics concerning human beatitude Denys classifies according to set questions in *Summae* and commentaries on the *Sentences*.⁸⁴ Denys generically divides all of the anagogic mysteries according to a formula used by Richard of St. Victor, Bonaventure, and others to mark degrees of being and corresponding spiritual perfection.⁸⁵ In relation to the beatified human soul, the joyful vision of heaven is threefold, *supra se*, *intra se*, and *sub se*.⁸⁶ The vision of God, the virgin Mary, and the angels is above the soul, the experience of the glorified faculties within it, and the experience of the glorified body beneath it. Moreover, the beatified soul delights in things *extra se*, in the manifold joys of the heavenly city, of the earth seen from a heavenly perspective, and in the just punishment of the damned in hell. Denys' conventional, hierarchical orders serve the memory as ladders upon which to situate objects for meditation.

⁸³ *Contra detestabilem*, a. 1, p. 195.

⁸⁴ In *Propositio* 159, the last of his *Elementatio theologica* (*Opera omnia* XXXIII, p. 231), Denys speaks first of the essential beatitude of the soul in the vision of God, and then summarizes: "Denique tres erunt dotes animarum felicitum, visio, tentio, fruitio: quae quanto fuerint eminentiores in illis, tanto praeclariores erunt. Insuper et quatuor dotes in earum corporibus erunt, nempe impassibilitas, claritas, agilitas atque subtilitas: quae utique corpora etiam suavissimi erunt odoris. In tanta demum beatitudine erit secunda aeternitas et aeterna securitas". The *Elementatio* abbreviates Denys' commentary on the *Sentences*. See Denys' *in librum IV Sent.* (*Opera omnia* XXV, 1) d. 44, qq. 3-7, pp. 266-303; d. 49, qq. 1-10, pp. 392-450. See Thomas Aquinas, *ST, Supplementum*, qq. 92-96 (pp. 360-95). The articles (12-22, pp. 208-242) in the *Contra detestabilem* have the following titles: 12, "De formali animae beatitudine, quae in tribus nobilissimis consistit actibus"; 13, "De quatuor dotibus glorificati corporis"; 14, "De quatuor Sanctorum gaudiosis excellentiis..."; 15, "De glorificatis Sanctorum sensibus..."; 16, "De triplici Sanctorum gaudio intuitu, supra se, intra se, et sub se"; 17, "De trifario objecto gaudio intuitus Sanctorum in coelo extra se... objecto primo"; 18; ... objecto secundo"; 19, "De exultatione Sanctorum in coelo felicissima ac multifaria"; 20, "De duplici gaudio Sanctis extra coelum, puta de mundo deque inferno, multifariam adveniente"; 21, "De gaudio quod Sancti de inferno reprobosque poenis in coelis habebunt"; 22, "De choreali circuitu perpetuitatis gaudiorum cum Deo regnantium".

⁸⁵ Richard of St. Victor, *Benjamin minor*, 74, *PL* 196.53; Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, *Opera omnia*, V (Quaracchi, 1891), I, 2 and 4, p. 297.

⁸⁶ *Contra detestabilem*, a. 16, p. 218.

Like Groote, Denys finds "dissimilar similitudes" and contradictory images, since they compel greater abstraction, most suitable for meditation upon heavenly things. Thus, for example, creatures of the lowest order may signify creatures of the highest. The differing properties of the nine stones enumerated in Ezechiel (28, 12-13), discovered in lapidaries, signify well the differing virtues of the nine angelic orders.⁸⁷ Other images dissolve in a famous paradox. Many texts in Scripture suggest that the heavenly city is built on a square foundation. At the same time, this city may rightly be imagined as circular, like the highest, empyrean heaven which by its power encloses the lower spheres. According to these conflicting images, it would seem that the heavenly city is something which does not exist, a squared circle. But although these images fail their object, they indicate different qualities of the heavenly city: its stability, perfection, and influence.⁸⁸ Another heavenly mystery seems to contradict a fundamental law of nature. The glorified body is able simultaneously to occupy the place of another body, and thus pass through the spheres without suffering division. This mystery is analogous to that of the sacrament of the altar, wherein Christ's body shares the same place with the accidents of bread and wine. Both are accounted for by an abstract principle which Denys draws from the *Liber de causis*. God, the first cause of all things, can preserve effects without secondary, intermediate causes. Because they partake the virtue of divine omnipresence, the glorified body and Christ's body in the sacrament can remain distinct from other bodies while occupying the same place.⁸⁹ What at first appears contradictory to sense and reason is an effect of the first principle of nature, the divine creative power.

The manner in which humble images engender elevated conceptions is well-illustrated by one *palus* of meditation, around which Denys collects images of streams and rivers scattered throughout Scripture. Through these images one may glimpse the mysteries of the Trinity *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Considering God under the image of an unfathomable, inexhaustible river (Ezechiel 47, 5), Denys says:

Quod aliter intelligi datur per fluvium hunc, seu potius fluminis fontem, nisi fontale principium omnium entium Deum? Cui in se ante omnem creaturam primo competit fluere et scaturire: quod intelligitur immanens fontis actus et communicatio in eodem substantialis, propter suam bonitatem sibi innatam nec ad extra diffusam. Quum enim extra diffunditur, creare seu causare vel conservare dicitur: exemplo aquae

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, a. 6, p. 199.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, a. 17, p. 219.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, a. 13, p. 212.

materialis fontis, qui primo fluxum indeficientem in se manentem exuberare videtur, per cuius redundantiam postea procedunt rivuli, propter copiam inundantis aquae in thesauro ejus collectae.⁹⁰

Here, in his first treatise, Denys echoes the theme of the *fluxum entis*, at once dear to Albertist philosophers and Jan van Ruusbroec.⁹¹ Denys' metaphors are not only philosophic and mystical, but rhetorical as well. Through his creating Word, God's goodness pours forth upon creatures in the same way that streams of eloquence pour forth from the wise orator's abundant treasure-chest of invented matter.⁹² God's "transient" goodness towards creation scarcely reflects his innate goodness. "If all the stars and single drops of water were tongues", Denys says, "so ineffable is God's goodness and plenitude of joys, that all of these tongues would become mute before they could tell his abundant fullness".⁹³ We should note that the analogy between God's abundance and the abundance of the orator is the foundation of Wessel Gansfort's theory of meditation.⁹⁴

Denys' sequence of anagogic meditations occupies the greater part of his treatise. They may seem remote from liturgical prayer, unless we recall Cassian's saying that in the time of prayer, the mind must be formed by thoughts previously dwelt on. Denys intends his meditations as examples of an art whereby one latches onto images of liturgical texts and remembers their significance. Moreover, his sequence is an abundant treasure-chest of topically arranged *meditabilia*. Finally, the *oratio mentalis* is much quicker than the voice. Denys says that one should not despair if the "exercise of meditation and recollection" seems difficult at first; the acquisition of any art is difficult in its beginning. Cicero, when he handed over the precepts of eloquence, said that no art prospers without exercise; this is

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, a. 19, p. 230.

⁹¹ See Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, p. 431; Ruusbroec, *De ornatu spiritualium nuptiarum*, III, 4, in *Opera omnia*, trans. L. Surius (Cologne, 1552; repr. Farnborough, Hants, England, 1967), pp. 370-71.

⁹² For *copia*, see Cicero, *De oratore*, I, 12, 50; III, 31, 125; *Brutus* (ed. Wilkins, *Rhetorica II*), 11, 44; *Topica* (ed. Wilkins, *Rhetorica II*), 18, 67; Quintilian, *Inst.*, I, 8, 17, p. 57; IV, 2, 117, p. 222; VII, *proh.*, 1, p. 365; XI, 3, 56, p. 664; XII, 4, 1, p. 710.

For *thesaurus*, see Quintilian, *Inst.*, XI, 2, 1-2, p. 642 (also *memoria, copia*).

For *flumen orationis, flumen verborum*, see Cicero, *De oratore*, III, 15, 62; II, 45, 188; *Orator*, 16, 52-53. See also Quintilian, *Inst.*, X, 1, 61, p. 579 ("beatissima rerum uerborumque copia et uelut quodam eloquentiae flumine"); X, 1, 78, p. 583.

⁹³ *Contra detestabilem*, a. 19, p. 229.

⁹⁴ The theme runs throughout Gansfort's *Scala meditationis*, I (*Opera omnia*, Gronigen, 1614), but see especially I, 7, pp. 203-205, and I, 19, pp. 218-19 ("Quod sicut in oratione, sic & in opere nostro, semper finis constitutus attendendus est, ut digne exerceamur").

even more true of the art of praising God.⁹⁵

In the latter articles of his treatise, Denys offers a variety of more popular techniques directly applicable to liturgical prayer. All of these depend upon the same principle as his anagogic meditations. Adapting a motif from William of Auvergne's *De rhetorica divina*, Denys recommends an image easily recalled in choir: the golden altar of Apocalypse 8, 3.⁹⁶ This image properly signifies Christ's propitiatory sacrifice. Around this prop one should gather all of the objects of Christ's Incarnation and Passion; to this fixed stake he should bind all of his thoughts and affections. From this treasure-chest, one may withdraw the distinct articles of Christ's life and death, and apply them one by one to single nocturns, hours, or psalms.⁹⁷ Assigning stations of the Passion to each office of the day was a common device in Denys' time, notably in Books of Hours with their accompanying miniatures. The single verses of the psalms accommodate several techniques of meditation and prayer. While reciting them, one may imagine himself in the heavenly company before the throne of God, attributing each verse to a different saint. Denys says that these assignments should follow the order of saintly dignity, or some personal order.⁹⁸ I presume that he means the generic order of the Litany, or the order of one's patrons. Moreover, in reciting the psalms one may use the *ars digitorum*, which engages the senses of both sight and touch in the service of memory. According to this art, one localizes points to be remembered on each of the joints, sections, and tips of the four fingers of the left hand. By pressing the thumb at the right place, one can recall the point attached there. This technique, which literally "leads one by the hand" (*manuducere*)⁹⁹ to God, was often used in conjunction with the alphabet. Denys is not remiss. Guided by the first letters of psalm verses, he says, one may direct superlative aspirations to God. For example, if a verse begins with the letter *D*, one might praise God as *dulcissime*, or *dilectissime*, and so on. Again, one might pray for a virtue corresponding to the first letter, or likewise invoke the name of a saint.¹⁰⁰ Denys doubtless knew the alphabetical and digital art of prayer

⁹⁵ *Contra detestabilem*, a. 29, p. 255; 2. 31, p. 259.

⁹⁶ *Rethorica divina de oratione domini Guilermi Parisiensis* (Kilian Fischer, Freiburg, 1490-91), 42, 45v^{a-b}.

⁹⁷ *Contra detestabilem*, a. 24, pp. 246-48.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, a. 25, pp. 248-49.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, a. 1, p. 195.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, a. 26, pp. 250-51.

set forth in the *Alphabetum divini amoris*, usually ascribed to Johannes Nider.¹⁰¹ Interestingly, however, the author of that text remarks that the *ars digitorum* is practiced especially among the Carthusians, who are accustomed to constitute the whole psalter on their hands, reciting the psalms as if playing a cithern.¹⁰² This method attains its apotheosis, as it were, in Jan Mombaer's *Directorium solvendarum horarum per Chiropsalterium*.¹⁰³ Mombaer invests the hand with a storehouse of topics of rhetorical invention, all indexed alphabetically.

From the perspective of the modern historian, Denys of Ryckel's *Contra detestabilem cordis inordinationem* looks back, through the lens of scholastic theology, to themes of meditation in early monasticism, and forward to the methods developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the end, Denys advises that "the most fruitful manner of reciting the psalms is to attend to their sense, drawing all that is heard or read into affection, by which the heart is vehemently inflamed with the love of God."¹⁰⁴ In divine praise, one's mind should agree with his voice;¹⁰⁵ fortunately, Carthusian custom prescribes a measured, deliberate recitation that allows for sustained meditation.¹⁰⁶ Carthusian life, which like a well-composed art offers a direct, compendious path to its end,¹⁰⁷ provided other advantages for Denys' style of meditation. From Henry Suso's *Horologium sapientiae* Denys excerpts a "most salutary formula." Wisdom tells her disciple that one who seeks purity of heart should withdraw completely from the company of men, and insofar as his superior and vows allow, seize every occasion of solitude, which keeps one from excessive contact with worldly images.¹⁰⁸ But in his solitude among the Carthusians, Denys was not removed from silent conversation

¹⁰¹Printed in *Joannis Gersonii Opera omnia*, ed. E. Du Pin, III (Antwerp, 1706), 770-99. See especially XIII, 788-91. On the question of authorship, see P. M. Viller, "Nider est-il l'auteur d'Alphabetum divini amoris?", *Revue d'ascetique et de mystique*, IV (1923), 367ff.

¹⁰²*Alphabetum divini amoris*, XIII, 791.

¹⁰³See *Rosetum* (1510), *Titulus V*, *Alphabetum XVIII-XIX*; Debongnie, pp. 172-81, *et passim*.

¹⁰⁴*Contra detestabilem*, a. 26, p. 251.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, *Prooemium*, p. 193.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, a. 23, p. 246.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, a. 23, p. 243. For the terms "cujus semita ad coelum recta est, compendiosa" (applied here by Denys to Carthusian life) applied to the art of dialectic by John of Salisbury, Lambert of Auxerre, Albertus Magnus and others, see Neal Ward Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts of Method* (New York, 1960), pp. 55-58.

¹⁰⁸*Contra detestabilem*, a. 28, p. 253.

with books, from which he garnered abundant life-giving images. "All whom we receive", Denys says, "we teach to write". Even in manual labor Denys' attention was not diverted from good books.¹⁰⁹ Wisdom's disciple says that life is short, and thousands are the books treating religious life, the vices and the virtues, and subtle questions. The art of Denys of Ryckel was long; he not only read but wrote scores of such books. Speaking of Denys and his works, the later Carthusian Petreius defines a fivefold activity of the monk: reading, *writing*, meditating, praying, contemplating.¹¹⁰ In the very act of writing, whereby he digested, redispensed, and localized what he had read, Denys was able to practice an art of continuous meditation.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, a. 23, p. 243.

¹¹⁰Theodorus Petreius, *Bibliotheca Carthusiana, sive Illustrium sacri Cartusiensis ordinis scriptorum catalogus* (Cologne, 1609; repr. Farnborough, Hants, 1968), p. 50.

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