

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE JESUITS IN THE LOW COUNTRIES AND THE OLDER MYSTICAL TRADITION

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1. LEONARD LESSIUS (LENNAERT LEYS, 1554-1623)

When, as an old man, he [= Lessius] was asked advice concerning the works of the most holy and divine contemplative Ruusbroec, he gave a written confirmation of how much he had been devoted to his doctrine as a novice. There, he said that he had learned, already fifty years before, how good it is to dwell with oneself and with God, whom he kept continuously present in the ground of his soul. Thus, he has followed the mystical wisdom according to the law of the Society of Jesus. He omitted nothing as to the action, but had provided himself with two wings, with which he would fly to the top of perfection. (Wijns, f. 15 v., quoted by Albert Ampe, 'De mystieke diepgang van Lessius' leven en leer' in: *Bijdragen* 15 (1954), p. 280).

The fifth mode [of union with God] happens through the transformation into our origin and the passing over into the idea [Ruusbroec: *beeld*] from which we have flowed forth. Some authors teach in a contemplative manner that our beatitude consists in this that we fall short of ourselves and of our created existence (*esse*), and pass over into our uncreated and superessential existence (*esse*), which we have from all eternity in our idea, where we are one with God, one essence, one life, one light, one beatitude, one spirit. (*De summo bono*, p. 514)

Those sentences can be understood in two ways. Firstly, [they can be understood] in such a way that our created existence (*esse*) ceases to be as created existence, and that it is changed into the uncreated existence (*esse*). This was the heresy of some people in the time of the most holy and admirable man John Ruusbroec, who flourished around the year 1370. (...) Secondly [these sentences can be understood] in such a way that our created existence (*esse*) does not cease to be as created existence, but only in the awareness (*sensum*) and the experience (*affectus*) of the contemplative. He is so enraptured towards God that he does not feel himself any more, but only God, in whom he has the impression of being transformed. They call this "the mode of fruition," in which the soul enjoys God, forgetting itself completely, experiencing and tasting God's sweetness with ineffable enjoyment, just as if the soul itself were transformed into God. That is how this sentence is understood by Ruusbroec, Dionysius and other contemplatives. And it does not contain anything problematic. (*Ib.*, p. 515)

Gerson attributed it [= this opinion] to Ruusbroec himself, unjustifiably, as Dionysius the Carthusian clearly showed in his third book on contemplation, in the last chapter. Ruusbroec himself condemns this as a most impious heresy in his *Seven Enclosures*, chapter 14, and his *Spiritual Espousals*, chapter 76 and following, and in the booklet which is entitled *Samuel or On the True Contemplation*. (*Ib.*, p. 514)

2. ANTOON SUCQUET (1574-1626)

It is called *passio*, since it is perfect, humanly speaking. Firstly because the soul sees without effort and loves when it contemplates. And secondly, since the contemplation is beyond the natural powers, and is a free and supernatural gift of God's wisdom. Indeed, the Lord draws the soul to himself. (*Via vitae aeternae*, p. 718)

3. MAXIMILIANUS SANDAEUS (MAX VAN DER SANDT, 1578-1656)

Essential union (unio essentialis) with God. Not a few reprehend this expression in the works of the mystics. Johannes Crombecius gives many arguments against it (*lib. 1. De studio perfectionis, cap. 30*). However, the mystics do not understand by this expression, as some think, a union which constitutes one essence. But they mean an immediate presence of the divine being with the essence or the ground of the soul. (*Pro theologia mystica clavis, p. 369*)

Union without difference or distinction. Sometimes mystics use this expression when they further clarify the characteristic of the essential or immediate union. But do they consequently think that the creature ceases to exist or would be converted into God? Not at all, as it is shown most clearly by the words and examples given by Ruusbroec. (*Ibid.*)

I myself would dare to declare that, even though it does not belong to the task of the Society to dwell in the solitude, which is the dwelling place of the mystics, yet there have been not a few men in the Society during the first century — and there are still some now — of exceptional contemplation, men who cultivate the hidden wisdom with much care, who have excelled the best in the knowledge of that experience, who have contributed much about it in holy erudition, and who have been eminent in each [= experience or erudition] or in both, as far as they can be connected mutually. (*Iubilum seculare, reprint of 1922, p. 14*)