

Article

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

Rob Faesen ^{1,2,3}¹ Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven, 3000 Leuven, Belgium; robertus.faesen@kuleuven.be² Ruusbroec Institute, University of Antwerp, 2000 Antwerpen, Belgium³ Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, Tilburg University, 5037 AB Tilburg, The Netherlands

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

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



Citation: Faesen, Rob. 2022. Christ's Wounded Body, Sorrowful Soul and Joyful Spirit: The Interpretation of Christ's Passion in a Forgotten 16th Century Classic of Mystical Literature. *Religions* 13: 365. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040365>

Academic Editor: Salvador Ryan

Received: 17 February 2022

Accepted: 4 April 2022

Published: 15 April 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

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

“If, therefore, a man wants to become spiritual, he must forego all fleshly affection and cling to God alone with desire and affection and possess him in that way. This will drive out all encumbrance from images and all disorderly affection for creatures. And if he possesses God with affection, man will be freed from images inside, since God is a spirit and no man can make a proper image of him. Yet in his practice man should concentrate on good images, such as the passion of the Lord and all things that may rouse him to more devotion. But when he possesses God, man must enter into a bare imagelessness which is God”.¹

In an earlier paragraph, Ruusbroec had described the ambiguity of religious images, namely that they may be useful because they refer to the invisible God, but that they may also be problematic because people may become attached to these created images, with the unfortunate consequence that such images might become a distraction from the Creator to whom they are intended to refer. It is advisable therefore, Ruusbroec writes, to make a

distinction. In pursuing the virtuous active life, oriented to God, images may be useful and beneficial. In the encounter with God, however, they must obviously be relinquished since they are superfluous. Images that impose themselves as a hindrance or intermediary in the direct encounter with God are evidently problematic. The “image” of the suffering of Christ is never a problematic image, however, because this suffering necessarily refers to the One who suffers, and thus fosters and nourishes the relationship between the human person and Christ.

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

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

The Cologne Charterhouse of Saint Barbara played an important role in the development, patronage, and circulation of mystical literature (Chaix 1981, p. 103ff). Prior Pieter Blommeveen (Petrus Blomevenna, 1466–1536) published several spiritual works, including a Latin translation of Hendrik Herp’s *Spiegel der volcomenheit* (*Directorium aureum contemplativorum*), in 1509. Later, the charterhouse engaged in far more extensive projects. The publication of the enormous *opera omnia* of Dionysius the Carthusian (c. 1402/3–1471) between 1530 and 1540 was evidently the most important of these projects.

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

This extensive text consists of 170 chapters in a variety of literary genres, such as prayers, liturgical reflections and short mystical treatises. This to a large extent explains its popularity: it could be read both by beginners in the spiritual life and by more advanced, mystically gifted readers. The text’s central concern is God’s presence in the human person as a hidden and priceless pearl (cf. Mt. 13, 44), the search to identify this presence, to be transformed in union with God, and consequently to live a divinely inspired life. The text was influenced by a range of older sources, which are often integrated in very innovative ways (Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Eckhart, Marquard of Lindau, Richard of Saint-Victor, Ruusbroec, Tauler, etc.). The *Pearl* is thus a good example of the influence and

reception of the medieval mystical tradition in the Early Modern Period. The text was very influential, largely thanks to the edition and Latin translation made at the Charterhouse of Saint Barbara. It was later translated into French (1602) and German (1676 and 1698). The so-called *Institutiones Taulerianae*² includes extensive fragments of the *Pearl*, and was translated into Spanish (1551), Italian (1568) and French (1587). The *Pearl* influenced many famous authors, such as Petrus Canisius (1521–1597), Ludovicus Blosius (Louis de Blois, 1506–1566), Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629), Benoît de Canfield (1562–1611), François de Sales (1567–1622), and Angelus Silesius (1624–1677). No comprehensive study has hitherto been devoted to this extremely popular and influential work.³

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

accomplished, in the most sublime perfection for our re-creation, to the glory of the holy Trinity".⁴

3.2. The *Pearl* then reflects on the passion of Jesus Christ according to this tripartite structure. Chapter 13 provides a short introduction to the section. Our soul—"always inclined to faults"—must remain close to the "Master Physician" and wash itself in the precious blood that he spilled for us. Indeed, nobody can ascend to the "mountain of the Godhead" except those who have washed themselves in the blood of the Lamb. "These," the text explains, "are received by the Holy of Holies, are set before the face of the Lord, their original place, and receive their paternal blessing".⁵ This brief introduction confirms a number of foundational elements of the Christian doctrine of the faith on the crucial importance of the salvific suffering of Jesus Christ. The formulation is a creative integration of several well-known biblical themes, which are developed further in the following chapters.

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

3.3. Chapter 14 is devoted to the first, namely Christ's *wounded body*. The text surveys the wounded body starting with the feet and progressing to the knees, torso, heart, hands and arms, to Christ's mouth, eyes and ears, and finally his head. The salvific significance of each body part is briefly mentioned, for example: "we should approach his feet, with which for thirty-three years He so humbly sought after us; now He has allowed himself to be nailed on the cross in order to remain near us forever".⁶

The perceptive sixteenth-century reader of the *Pearl* would most probably have recognized that this passage creatively alludes to the famous hymn *Salve mundi salutare*, which was probably composed by Arnulf of Leuven (†1250), abbot of the renowned Cistercian abbey of Villers.⁷ This long hymn of seventy-four verses reflects in a similar (though not in all respects identical) way on the wounded body of Christ, moving from the feet to the head (*ad pedes, ad genua, ad manus, ad latus, ad pectus, ad cor, ad faciem*).⁸ The final verses are particularly well-known because they inspired the later Passion hymn *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* by Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676), which was integrated into the *Mattäuspasion* by Johann Sebastian Bach. In terms of content, this chapter also alludes repeatedly to the thirteenth-century hymn, such as when the text refers to "his loving heart, which was opened with love as wide as heaven so that we might dwell therein"⁹—the hymn develops the theme of dwelling in Christ's heart extensively.

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

"Note well, this is how the sensual lower man has climbed his ladder, by means of the body of Christ, and stands at the foot of the mountain; he can come no farther in this life. Therefore, we are people who are always beginning, and must remain in the active life, according to the humanity of Christ, who was always doing good".¹⁰

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

"And how his soul, together with all loving souls, was opened and pierced, and what it felt, no one can describe: the interior suffering by which the soul of Christ was crucified and outstretched, was as different from his exterior suffering as heaven is from the earth. The exterior suffering was uncommonly great, but his interior suffering was immeasurably greater, insofar as He loves souls more than bodies. The wounds of his soul were ineffably greater, wider, and deeper and ran

much more with overflowing love and mercy than did the wounds of his body with blood".¹¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Thus you are guarded in all your ways, that is, if you savor nothing more in your passage upwards, downwards and inwards than you are granted or is promised

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

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

3.5. Chapter 17 shifts the focus to the third dimension of the crucified Christ, namely his *joyful spirit*. To the contemporary reader, this dimension may appear somewhat surprising.

The text begins with a confirmation that the spirit of the crucified Jesus Christ was completely joyful:

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

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

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

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

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

The deification thus implies that also our spirit—whatever the pain of the body or the sorrow of the soul may be—remains (with Christ’s human spirit) united with the Father.

Moreover, this aspect of deification is explicitly described as “common”. Although it is received in a unique way by each person, it is also something given to all people in common, and is therefore the foundation of community:

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

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

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

Finally, the text develops the traditional theme of “mystical death”, and in a surprisingly accessible and yet sophisticated way:

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

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

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

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

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

“But you should know that all faithful and good men are the sons of God. For they are all born out of the Spirit of God and the Spirit of God lives in them, and he moves and impels everyone in particular, according to his ability, towards virtue and good works in which he is pleasing to God. But because they have turned to God in different degrees and because their practice is different, I call certain people faithful servants, others secret friends, and some secured sons. Yet they are all servants and friends and sons, for they all serve and love and intend one God and they all live and work out of the free Spirit of God”.²⁴

These distinct dimensions (active, interior, and contemplative) are each constituent parts of the same relationality, and they are thus inextricably linked, though not all people are conscious of each one simultaneously.

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

These descriptions may appear to suggest that they are sequential stages, and that the prior stages are abandoned or become irrelevant as one progresses.²⁵ Ruusbroec ardently opposed this misconception (e.g., Ruusbroec 1981a, pp. 115–21).

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

4. Conclusions

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

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

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

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

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ Ende hier omme, sal de mensche geestelijc werden, soe moet hi alre vleeschelijcker liefden vertien ende ane gode alleene met loste ende met liefden cleven ende hem alsoe besitten. Ende daer mede wert verdreven alle verbeeltheit ende alle ongheordende liefde ten creatueren. Ende inden besittene gode met liefden, soe wert die mensche van binnen onghebeelt; want god es een gheest die niemen eyghenlijc ghebeelden en can. Maer inder oefeninghen sal de mensche goede beelden vore nemen alse dat doghen ons heeren ende alle die dinghe diene verwecken moghen te meere devocien. Maer inden besittene gode, so moet die mensche vallen op eene blote onghebeeltheit die god es. Ruusbroec (1991, pp. 105–7).

- ² The *Institutiones Taulerianae* is a compilation based on the first printed edition of the works of Tauler, namely the incunable print of 1498 (Leipzig). Petrus Canisius (1521–1597) collaborated with the Carthusians to prepare another, even longer edition in 1543: *Des erleuchten D. Johannis Tauleri, von eym waren Evangelischen leben, Göttliche Predig, Leren, Epistolen, Cantilenen, Prophetien* (Tauler 1543). This edition contained many texts that were not included in the earlier versions, including anonymous pieces, but also passages from Ruusbroec, Eckhart, and others. Laurentius Surius, a friend of Petrus Canisius, published a slightly amended Latin translation of this edition only a few years later, in 1548: *D. Ioannis Thauleri sublimis et illuminati theologi, saluberrimae ac plane divinae institutiones aut doctrinae, recens inventae* (Tauler 1548) The only extensive studies of the so-called *Institutiones* are: (Ampe 1966; Gueullette 2012).
- ³ For the historical aspects (author, sources, edition, etc.) of the *Pearl*, see the first volume of the recent critical edition: (Peerle 2021).
- ⁴ *Ende dese drie leven hebby mi selver geleert ende voor gegaen in die alder hoochste wise. Want in dat opperste deel uws geests waerdi altoos verheven in dat gebruycken uwer godheyt. U memorie was verheven in ongebeelder blootheyt ende vervult met ewigher blijschap. Dijn reyn ghesichte door ghinck den afgront dijns godlijcken wesens. Ende dijnen wil was gesoncken ende ombevangen inden afgront dijnre minnen ende in weselike onberuerlicke ruste, daer ghy altyt antwoord dijner heyliger drievuldiger eenvuldicheyt, ende ghy bekendes ende mindes alle dingen in u selver. Ende ghy leydes in dijne sielen een voortgaende duechdelic leven, ende si was altyt gesoncken in weseliker ootmoedicheyt, ende neychden ende buychden haer met alder reverencien ende weerdicheyt onder u hoge mogende godheyt, daer si van gewracht wert in volmaectheyt alder duechden. Ghy leydes in u reyn lichaem een stervende werckende leven, want die werelt ende die sinlike lust en had daer geen leven in, want het was reyn ende onbeolect van alle begeerte der sonden ende was een woninge dijne godheyt ende een instrument daer ghy onse verlossinge ende salicheyt mede gewracht hebt. Ende het was u in allen dingen gehoorsaem ende onderdanich ende bereyt te wercken dat dye geest eyschte.* (Peerle 2021, pp. 84–85), our translation.
- ⁵ ... die werden ingeleyt inden berch der Godheyt, ende werden ontfangen van dat heilich der heiligen, ende geset voor dat aensicht des Heren, dat haer oorspronckelike stede is, ende ontfangen die vaderlike benedictie. (Peerle 2021, p. 274). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 240).
- ⁶ Ten eersten sullen wi comen aen zijn voeten, daer hi ons XXXIII jaer so ootmoedelic mede heeft gesocht, ende nu heeft hi hem laten nagelen aenden cruce om ewelic by ons te bliven, ende bidden ghenade van onsen sondigen leven, ende bidden dat wi voortaan den rechten wech wandelen mochten. (Peerle 2021, p. 275). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 240).
- ⁷ The oldest known manuscript of the text, MS Brussels, Royal Library 4459–70, reads: *Oratio, quam fecit dominus Arnulphus de Lovanio, quintus decimus abbas Villariensis*; this text was edited in (Dreves and Blume 1909, vol. 1).
- ⁸ This theme is also a common subject of visual art, such as in the *Bearing of Christ's Body to the Tomb* by a follower of Rogier van der Weijden (Paris, Louvre, inv. 20666).
- ⁹ *zijn minnende herte, dat also wijde ontloken was als die hemel van minnen, opdat wi daerin souden wonen.* (Peerle 2021, p. 275). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, pp. 240–41).
- ¹⁰ *Siet, hierin is die sinlike, nederste mensche opgeclommen in sinen graet door dat lichaem Christi, ende staet op den voet des berchs, ende en mach niet voordere comen in dit leven. Ende daerom zijn wi altyt beginnende menschen, ende moeten blijven inden werckende leven na die menscheit Christi, die altyt werckende was dat goede.* (Peerle 2021, p. 276). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, pp. 241–42).
- ¹¹ *Ende hoe dit die siele ende alle minnende sielen opgedaen ende ontloken wort ende int bevoelen wort gegeven, dat en can men nyet beschreven. Want dat inwendige lijden daer dye siele Christi in gecruyst ende uutgerecht was, dat was also ongelijc meer by zijn uutwendich liden als die hemel is vander aerden. Dat uutwendige lijden was ongemeten groot, mer zijn inwendige liden was also ongemeten meerder als hi de sielen meer minden dan de lichamen. Die wonden zijnre sielen waren ontallijc meerder, wijder ende dieper, ende vloeyden veel meer van overvloeyender minnen ende barmherticheyt dan dye wonden zijns lichaems van bloede.* (Peerle 2021, pp. 276–77). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 242).
- ¹² *Dat roepen zijnre sielen doorgaet den verborgen afgront met groten geluyt des suchtens ende schreyens na dye verdoelde sielen, met veel minliken ende treckende woorden etc. Dye armoede ende gelatentheyt zijnre sielen was alsoo groot, dat hi gheen onthout noch voetsel noch troost van zijnre Godheyt en had. Mer hi hinc naect ende bloot, ende ellendich gelaten vander Godheyt ende van allen sielen, met geschoorden aderen der liefden ende met gebroken leden der afgekeerder sielen, also dat hi niet één siel en had daer zijn hooft op mocht rusten of daer hi zijn dorstige siele mede mocht laven.* (Peerle 2021, p. 277). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 242).
- ¹³ *'O edel siele, die na my gebeelt zijt ende goden zijt ende mijn kinder, mijn suster ende mijn bruyt, daer ic mi in u gheëenicht heb ende besloten in dat beelt uwer sielen, daer ic een ewich verbont mede gemaect heb om met u ewelijc te zijn, die my also gelijc zijt ende dien ic also seer minne, waerom hebby mi gelaten?* (Peerle 2021, p. 277). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 243).
- ¹⁴ *Ende ic stae met uutgerechten armen der minnen ende der begeerten dy om te helsen ende u aen mijn hert te drucken, opdat ghy gevoelt dye hitte mijnre minnen, ende dat ic u aendoen mach dat cleet mijnre schoonheyt ende u vercierien als een bruyt ende maken u één gheest met my.* (Peerle 2021, p. 277). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 243).
- ¹⁵ *Als dye siele dit verstaet, so recht si haer op met allen haren crachten, ende rect uut ende druct haerselven inden inwendigen cruce, ende begeert met allen crachten haren bruydegom aen te hangen ende na te volgen, ende geeft haer geheelic over, dat hi haer siele mach besitten ende regeren na zijnre begeerten.* (Peerle 2021, p. 278). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 243).
- ¹⁶ *Hiertoe en mach die nederste mensch niet comen, want dye natuer is daer te cranck toe, ende si en mocht dat nyet lijden. Waert dat dat menschelike herte dat inswelgen woude, daer die siele mede overgoten is ende dat in haer gewrocht wort, het moest versmoren ende soude*

- in onmacht vallen. Ende daerdoor soude die siel belet worden aen haren opganc, ende de geest soude den inganc verloren blijven, ende dye nederste mensche soude sinen voortganc in dye werckelicheyten benomen worden. (Peerle 2021, p. 278). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 244).
- 17 . . . so wordy bewaert in al dijnen wegen, als ghi nyet meer en smaect in dijnen afganc ende opganc ende inganc dan u gegeven wort ende u georloft en is. Opdatmen hierin bewaert mach blijven, so salmen segghen ende bidden: ‘O Heere, neycht dijn ooren ende verhoort my, ende bewaert my in al mijnre wandelinghe, want ic van myselfen nyet en vermach. Ende bewaert mijn siele, want si van u geheylicht is. Ende behout mijnen gheest, want ic in u gehoeyt heb, mijn Here ende mijn God.’ Als dye siele aldus opgeclommen is als voor geseyt is, so moetse daer blijven in haren gront ende nyet voorder ingaen noch weder achterwaert. (Peerle 2021, pp. 278–79). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 244).
- 18 . . . die geest Christi, dye daer vast ende onberuerlijc bleef in die volcomen vruechde ende gebruycken zijne Godheyt, in weseliker eenicheyt zijne overster crachten, in volheyten der weelden, daer hy hem noyt oghenblic uut en keerden, in wat lijden ende gelatenheit zijn siele ende lichaem waren. (Peerle 2021, p. 279). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 245).
- 19 Hier wort onsen geest verheven ende ingeleit met den geest Christi inden berch der Godheit, ende hi coemt weder in zijn aerde, ende wort ontfangen in sinen oorspronc, ende omhelst ende omvangen vander heyliger Drieuldicheyt. (Peerle 2021, p. 279). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 245).
- 20 Daer wort die geest overgeswanct in dat overweselijcke goet in een licht der waerheyt, ende gevesticht voor dat aensicht des Heeren met een simpel gedacht ende een reyn gesicht ende met een ongebeelde minne, altyt God te aenschouwen inden verborgen gront ende binnensten des gheests, ende wort in dien overghemelt dye daer den geest geweldich is geworden ende heeft dien aen hem gehaelt ende doorlicht in kennisse zijne claerder waerheyt, ende doorvloeyt den geest, siele ende lijf, herte ende sinne, ende verwandelt den mensche in een godlijc bekennen, ende cleet hem met een godlijc licht, met dat eerste cleet der puerheyt. (Peerle 2021, p. 279). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 245).
- 21 Ende daerin siet die geest hemselven in een ongemeten licht omvangen, ende doorsiet sinen verborgen gront (. . .) Ende dit selve bekent hi ooc in anderen menschen, want alle dingen zijn hem int licht (. . .). Want hi aenschout God van aensicht tot aensicht inden verborgen afgront, in allen eynden van aertrijck, dat is: hi aensiet God eenvuldich inden verborgen, diepen afgront, inden binnensten zijns geests ende in al die gronden der sielen ende herten der menschen, dye God al in hem begeerden te trecken, waren si van allen hijndernissen vrije. (Peerle 2021, p. 279). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 245).
- 22 . . . ende verwandelt den mensche, ende maect hem van graciën dat Christus is van natueren. Also heeft hi den wil vereenicht met sinen godlijcken wil, ende die begeerte met zijn godlike begeerte, die meyninge met zijn godlijcke meyninghe, des menschen natuer met zijn godlike natuer, ende wort in hem geboren, ende leeft daerin ende wandelt daerin, ende werct ende lijdet daerin, ende verrijst ende verblijft hem daerin, dat hi eenen mensche gevonden heeft na zijne herten. Hierin is die mensche te niet geworden van al sinen doen ende laten, woorden ende wercken, ende heeft verloren sinen schijn ende nyet zijn wesen; ende hi leeft tehants niet, mer Christus leeft in hem. (Peerle 2021, p. 280). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 246).
- 23 Gelijc een goet mense, als hi sterft, zijn siele uut sinen lichaem ende bloede wort geloost ende getogen, ende wort ontfangen in die armen Gods ende ingeleyt inden hemel—want God is inder sielen ende trece in hem, dye selve den hemel der hemelen is—also heeft die Godheyt die siele doorlicht ende overgegoten, ende alle dye crachten aen hem getogen ende ombevangen met die godlijcke claerheyt, dat die siele meer leeft in God dan in haren lichaem, ende die Godheyt leeft meer inden lichaem dan die siele. Ende haer wandelinghe is meer inden hemel dan inder aerden, want si wandelt stadelijc inden hemel met God, dat is: inden eersten gront der sielen, die eenen hemel is daer God stadelijc in woont. Dit is den hemel daer Sint Pauwels in getogen was, daer hi God aensach sonder middel inden derden hemel, dat was: in dat eerste wesen der sielen. Want Sint Pauwels en was nyet doot, zijn siele was in sinen lichaem, mer zijn siele was getogen inden eersten wesen zijne sielen. Daer aensach hi God weselijc boven alle vernuft ende boven allen beelden ende boven gelijckenisse in sinen bloten wesen, also als hi hem nu aensiet inden ewighen leven. (Peerle 2021, p. 280). Translation by Helen Rolfson, in: (Van Nieuwenhove et al. 2008, p. 246).
- 24 Nochtan seldi weten dat alle ghelovighe, goede menschen die sonen gods sijn. Want si werden alle ghebornen uten gheeste gods, ende die gheest gods levet in hem, ende hi beweecht ende drijft yeghewelcken sonderlinghe na sine heb lijcheit ten duechden ende ten goeden werken, daer hi gode in behaecht. Maer omme die onghelijcheit haers toekeers ende hare oefeninghen, soe noeme ic selcke menschen ghetrouwe knechte, ende selcke heetic heimelijcke vriende, ende selcke verborghene sonen. Nochtan sijne alle knechte, vriende ende sonen; want si dienen ende minnen ende meynen alle eenen god, ende si leven ende werken alle uten vrien gheeste gods. (Ruusbroec 1991, p. 141).
- 25 One may think, for example, of the debate around so-called “quietism”, such as in the statements mentioned in the Constitution *Ad nostrum* from the Council of Vienne in 1312, the suspicion in which the Spanish Inquisition held the *allumbrados*, the problems Balthasar Alvarez (1533–1580) experienced in the Society of Jesus, or the papal bull *Cum alias* (1699), promulgated by Pope Innocent XII.

References

- Ampe, Albert. 1966. Een kritisch onderzoek van de ‘Institutiones taulerianae’. *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 40: 167–240.
- Ampe, Albert. 1983. Perle Évangélique (Die evangelische peerle). In *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité XII-1*. Paris: Beauchesne, pp. 1159–69.
- Chaix, Gérald. 1981. Réforme et contre-réforme catholiques: Recherches sur la chartreuse de cologne au 16e siècle. In *Analecta Cartusiana* 80. Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, vol. I.
- Dreves, Guido Maria, and Clemens Blume. 1909. *Ein Jahrtausend lateinischer Hymnendichtung*. Leipzig: Reisland.

- Faesen, Rob. 2010. *Dupliciter intelli potest: Jan van Ruusbroec in the First Century of the Society of Jesus*. In *De letter levend maken: Opstellen aangeboden aan Guido De Baere bij zijn zeventigste verjaardag*. Miscellanea Neerlandica XXXIX. Edited by Kees Schepers, Frans Hendrickx, Rob Faesen and Ineke Cornet. Leuven: Peeters, pp. 285–307.
- Faesen, Rob, and John Arblaster. 2017. The Question of Mystical Anthropology. In *Mystical Anthropology: Authors from the Low Countries, Contemporary Theological Explorations in Christian Mysticism*. Edited by John Arblaster and Rob Faesen. London: Routledge, pp. 1–15.
- Gueullette, Jean-Marie. 2012. *Eckhart en France: La lecture des 'Institutions spirituelles' attribuées à Tauler 1548–1699*. Grenoble: Jérôme Millon.
- McGinn, Bernard. 2008. A Forgotten Classic of Late Medieval Women's Mysticism: The Evangelical Pearl. *Archa Verbi: Yearbook for the Study of Medieval Theology* 5: 97–121.
- Peerle. 2021. *Die grote evangelische peerle, I: Historische en filologische studie; II: Tekst*. Miscellanea Neerlandica XLVIII. Edited by Guido De Baere. Leuven: Peeters.
- Reypens, Leonce. 1928. Nog een vergeten mystieke grootheid: De schrijfster van de Evangelische Peerle. *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 2: 52–76, 189–213, 305–41.
- Ruusbroec, John. 1981a. *Boecksen der verclaringhe (Little Book of Clarification)*. Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 101. Edited by Guido De Baere. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Ruusbroec, John. 1981b. *Die geestelike brulocht (Spiritual Espousals)*. Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 103. Edited by Joseph Alaerts. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Ruusbroec, John. 1991. *Vanden blinkenden steen (The Sparkling Stone)*. Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 110. Edited by Hilde Noë. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Schepers, Kees. 2013. Wat zeggen de vroegste edities over de auteur van Die evangelische peerle? *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 129: 26–54.
- Tauler, John. 1543. *Des erleuchten D. Johannis Tauleri, von eym waren Evangelischen leben, Göttliche Predig, Leren, Epistolen, Cantilenen, Prophetien*. Köln: Jaspar von Gennip.
- Tauler, John. 1548. *D. Ioannis Thauleri Sublimis et Illuminati Theologi, Saluberrimae ac Plane Divinae Institutiones aut Doctrinae, Recens Inventae*. Köln: J. Quentel.
- Van Nieuwenhove, Rik, Rob Faesen, and Helen Rolfson, eds. 2008. *Late Medieval Mysticism of the Low Countries*. Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press.