The Inner Ascent to God and the Innermost of the Human Person in the *Arnhem mystical sermons*

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The *via mystica* is traditionally described with the stages of purification, the illumination of the faculties, and union with God in the spirit, the innermost of the person, representing an ascent from the outer to the inner dimensions of the human person. In the *Arnhem mystical sermons*, the inner ascent to union with God and the anthropological concepts that underpin this ascent are embedded in the liturgical-mystical character of the sermons. The liturgy functions as the main source of metaphors for the human person and union with God. The influence of the liturgy is clear throughout the collection, as the sermons are systematically structured according to the liturgical calendar. Each sermon consists in a commentary on elements from the liturgy, mostly on the readings from the Missal, but also on the Latin Divine Office, the Eucharist, and other prayers, gestures, and rituals that are part of the liturgical celebration. All these elements are applied to the inner ascent of the human person, which is described as the inner dimension of the liturgy. Sermon 85 succinctly summarises the underpinning paradigm that the outer liturgy, which is the re-enactment of God’s saving works through human mediation in a dedicated space, is also celebrated within the spirit of the person, because God Himself dwells there:

> But when they [the senses] bring into a person the feasts and solemnities of the church, and the soul turns herself with them or through them purely to God in the spirit, where all solemnities are truly renewed and celebrated by God, then the senses and images are necessary and good until this moment, in so far they lead the soul into and point towards the truth of the solemnities in the spirit.¹

The outer liturgy is reflected in the “solemnities of the spirit,” celebrated by the indwelling God. The sermons focus on the inner celebration of Christ’s life as commemorated in the liturgy. In the human spirit, “[…] Christ has been born, has lived, felt, taught and suffered, and he suffers now and dies and rises with Him as a result of the death of love in newness of life, and ascends

¹ *AMS*, Sermon 85, fol. 177rb-va.
in Christ to heaven, and is filled with the Holy Spirit.” This systematic reflection on theme of the inner celebration of the liturgy is quite unique. In this regard, the sermons are similar to the *Evangelical Pearl*, the *Temple of Our Soul*, and Johannes Tauler. One of the most explicit connections between the liturgical celebration of the great feasts and the inner celebration is made in *Pearl III*, 3, entitled: “How God wants to fulfil all the great feasts in the soul, and wants to renew them in her always.” The author states that the high feasts of the Church ought to be celebrated interiorly as well: All the other great feasts that were outwardly celebrated by me [= Jesus Christ] should also be fulfilled spiritually within you, for which reason they should be celebrated, since you should constantly have and carry in your heart my whole life […]. Similarly, chapter 8 of the *Temple of Our Soul*, entitled “How the Exterior Liturgy in the Holy Church is carried out for the sake of the Interior Liturgy,” illustrates how the liturgy of church dedication is celebrated within the person. Subsequent chapters elaborate on the mystical celebration of the *Temporale*. The Middle High German mystical sermons of the Dominican Johannes Tauler (ca. 1300-1361), which were widely read in the Low Countries, reflect the same celebration of the liturgy within the person. According to Tauler, the liturgy of Church dedication in its true, full sense happens within the human person, without ceasing: “all modes and exercises of the Holy Church all point to the inner person, in whom the church dedication truly takes place without ceasing.” In another sermon, Tauler refers again to an inner Church dedication: the Church dedication of the “loving temple” is “much more real than in all temples that are ever built or dedicated.”

In order to understand the deepest self and the inner ascent to this in the *Arnhem mystical sermons*, this chapter first analyses sermon 128 (Church dedication), in which metaphors from the liturgy dominate and the inner ascent to God alongside the various dimensions of the human person, is clearly outlined. The second section of this chapter investigates two concepts used to describe the innermost being of the human person, which are spirit and ground.

**The Human Person in the Church Dedication Sermon**

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2 *AMS, Sermon 83, fol. 165ra.*
4 *Pearl*, 222-223.
This sermon (128) elaborates on the mystical meaning of the rite of Church Dedication. This rite starts when the bishop and the community gather outside, at dawn, while the litany is sung and twelve candles are lit, and they walk three circuits around the Church, during which the outer walls are purified by sprinkling them with holy water. After entering the Church, the bishop signs in dust on the floor crosswise the ABCdarium, letters from the alphabet referring to Christ, symbolising Christ declaring the Church as His dominion. The altar and the inner walls are also purified with holy water and by marking them with twelve dedication crosses and lighting twelve candles in front of them. After the altar is consecrated with oil, marking it with signs of the cross and burning incense, the relics are carried into the Church. Holy mass concludes the rite. The full rite of Church dedication was only performed once for any given Church, but was commemorated yearly with a special Eucharistic Mass with adapted readings and antiphons and a dedication sermon. Sermon 128 applies this rite to the inner ascent of the human person, based on the commonly accepted concept of the soul as God’s inner Church. The sermon represents an ascent towards the full loving union with God in the spirit, which requires a full dedication of oneself to God. This ascent entails three stages: purification of the body (symbolised by the outer church), illumination of the faculties (symbolised by the inner choirs of the church), and union with God in the spirit (symbolised by the innermost of the church, the altar).

The sermon opens with designating the yearly celebration of the Church dedication as an occasion to perform the dedication of the soul:

On the solemn day of the Church dedication, a faithful, inner soul should turn inwards earnestly, and observe the temple of her soul, which the Lord has purified and adorned with Himself: how it is now polluted and vitiated with sins and wicked pleasures.

The first dimension of the person, the outer temple, the “windows,” “walls,” and “floors” is to be cleansed. This is explained as the purification of the “outer senses”, the “outer members” and the “heart” of all bad intentions and volitions, till “the outer temple of her body is then purified and adorned with all the perfect holiness of Christ Jesus.” Whereas sermon 128 does

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9 Bowen 1941, 469-470; Horie 2006, 92-96.
10 AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 286rb.
11 AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 286rb-287rb.
12 AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 286rb-287rb
13 AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 287ra.
not provide more details about the outer dimension of the human person, some other sermons outline more on the lowest dimension as well. Sermon 97 describes the inner hearing, seeing, smelling, appetite, and inner feeling, along with the senses of hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, feeling. Sermon 11 likewise describes the inner and outer emotions, and refers also to the emotions in the lowest dimension in the person, which are natural love, joy, hope, fear, hate, sadness, and shame.\textsuperscript{14}

The second dimension, which is the inner temple contains, parallel to the twelve dedication crosses on the wall made by the bishop, nine faculties and the three theological virtues, located in the middle choir and the high choir, drawn and impressed by Christ, the “highest, veritable bishop of the soul.”\textsuperscript{15} The high choir, the spirit, encompasses three faculties in their passivity: the faculties of memory intelligence, and love, and the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.\textsuperscript{16} The middle choir, the soul, entails the six more active counterparts. Remembering, understanding, volition and love, are related to the three faculties, and desiring, discerning, and lastly hating or loving\textsuperscript{17} have a more affective emotional connotation associated with these powers and are similar to the concupiscible, rational, and irascible powers, which are subordinate to the faculties. By distinguishing between a middle and high choir, the author describes the faculties in their receptivity and in their action, a distinction which is regularly employed in the sermon collection.\textsuperscript{18} Whereas Christ impresses these crosses on the person, the soul finds that Christ cannot perceive these crosses in the temple of the soul, unless by shining His own light into it.\textsuperscript{19} The person responds to Him by lighting the candles, which is symbolic for the purification of her faculties by Christ’s faculties: “And she takes, as twelve candles, the highest and purest mind of Christ and places it against her own impure mind, and she then takes His highest divine intellect and places it against her own darkened intellect, and similarly His most divine and highest love against her worthless, misdirected love.”\textsuperscript{20} After all the faculties have been illuminated by Christ, the soul decorates herself so as to praise Christ.\textsuperscript{21}

The third dimension of the human person is the “highest and innermost choir,” the “sancta sanctorum”, where the “altar of love stands” in the “highest part of the spirit.”\textsuperscript{22} Parallel

\textsuperscript{14}AMS, Sermon 11, fol. 20rb-va.
\textsuperscript{15}AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 287va.
\textsuperscript{16}AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 287rb.
\textsuperscript{17}AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 287vb.
\textsuperscript{18}This distinction has been pointed out by Schepers 2012, 140-148.
\textsuperscript{19}AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 287va.
\textsuperscript{20}AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 287va-vb.
\textsuperscript{21}AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 288va-289ra.
\textsuperscript{22}AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 289ra.
to the liturgy in which the altar is the “focal point” and “heart” of the rite, the focal point of the person is the “altar of love.” The altar is approached by turning inwards, and it is adorned with the qualities of Christ’s spirit:

After all this she turns to the highest and most interior choir, that is, to the sancta sanctorum, where the highest and most delightful altar of love is raised, and she finds it prepared with six most enchanting crosses, that by the irradiation and brightness of the created spirit of Christ light up the highest part of her spirit, and she takes most silent silence, the most empty emptiness, the more bare bareness, the most silent tranquillity, yes, the most poor poverty with the nothingness, and the most godlike godliness and adds to it her most impure silence, emptiness, bareness with what is most ungodlike in her spirit, and she makes with a bundle of the most precious herbs and flowers and strews and embellishes with them the high altar of love and the whole floor and the walls of the spirit.

The inner ascent towards God involves detachment of the self, which is reflected in the use of nouns such as nothingness and tranquillity. The author uses negative theology to describe the total annihilation of all earthly categories in the encounter with God who is beyond comprehension. On the altar of love, the “the highest part of her spirit,” union with God takes place. This union with God is linked to the person’s passive dimensions:

After all these activities, preparations, washing and decorations, praise of organ playing, the raising of the voices, offerings and thanksgiving, which, like in a flash, in a sweet melting, bring together and combine in Christ Jesus the affections and soul’s faculties, a miraculous, divine tranquillity originates immediately in the soul, and she is completely robbed of herself by God. And in this tranquillity, the Personal, Eternal Word comes and performs the high sacrifice in the soul, and offers Himself in her, and [offers], melted and united in Him, to the Father in the Godhead, for the eternal delight and enjoyment of His love.

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23 The centrality of the altar is also outlined in Horie 2006, 8.
24 AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 289ra-rb.
25 AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 289va-vb.
The preparation of the person in order to experience God innerly consists in the bringing together of all one’s faculties into the centre of one’s being. This is the condition that makes a God-given tranquillity in the soul possible. Though one can prepare oneself for this, the divine tranquillity is ultimately given by God Himself: the person “is completely robbed of herself by God.” The inner union with God, which is the climax of this sermon, is expressed in Eucharistic language: The Word performing “the high sacrifice in the soul.” This passage refers to the indwelling of God by referring to Christ coming into the soul as a priest. The coming of Christ as priest to the altar in the soul’s temple is parallel to the coming of the priest to the altar in order to perform the sacrifice. The union between the person and Christ is the ‘inner liturgy’ of the sacramental communion with Christ. In this union with God, the spirit is not only passive, detached and receptive to God’s love, but is actively involved in “delight and enjoyment.” The sacramental and inner participation in the Eucharist unites the person with Christ so intensely that the human person can be lifted up into the divine reality. S/he becomes a son of the Father, so that s/he is loved with the same love as the Father has for the Son and the Son for the Father:

Through this sacrifice of the Eternal Word, the soul’s form is transformed and made one with God’s form, and the loving Son of God presents this form in His own unity to the Father and the whole heavenly host, and the Father in the Godhead delights Himself in this soul’s form in the Son and that of the Son in the soul, [...] and how and what happens there to the soul, that is more to experience than to pronounce.  

The sermon clearly states that this experience transcends linguistic and intellectual categories. The union of love unites the person and God so much that the human person is deified: the “soul’s form is transformed and made one with God’s form.” The sermon continues by making clear that not everyone who dedicates himself to God and is united with God will experience this deeply. S/he describes that though not everyone experiences this deifying union, it happens in everyone who is God-like in virtues and who is turned inwards. The transformative union “occurs in him through God being just as real in darkness and unknowing as it ever happened in any God-loving person with divine experience.” The accompanying
experiences of mutual enjoyment are to a certain extent secondary: they are only good insofar as it brings the person “out of sins, in grace.”

But the person who has never experienced this experiential light and God’s inworking, and is nevertheless always in humble releasement, and does not regard and follow God any less, may be a thousand times more blessed and perfect, although he does not know it. […] Whoever is the most alike and pure as to the profound surrender and releasement of the will in God’s eternal will, is the most pleasant and perfect and holy before God.

The sermon exhorts the listeners towards a surrender of the will to God, whether it is accompanied by experiences or not. The sermon holds together the inner ascent towards God in the spirit and the transformation of the human person that flows forth from the spirit to all faculties and senses. This liturgical depiction of the inner ascent of the human person and the union with God has striking similarities with Tauler’s sermon *Fuit in diebus herodis*. This sermon uses the sacrifice of the priest Zachariah as a metaphor for the performance of the priestly sacrifice in the person’s spirit, which Tauler also calls a *sancta sanctorum*: He also refers to being robbed of oneself, to sacrificing the Son within to the Father, to being transformed by God, and not to rest in experiences, but to obey the will of God. This shows that, amidst differences, concepts of the human person and the inner ascent overlapped across time and regions. The next section focuses on the two concepts that describe the innermost being most frequently: the spirit and the ground.

**The Innermost in the Arnhem mystical sermons**

*The Concept of Spirit (Geest)*

The concept of spirit is one of the most frequently used concepts in the *Arnhem sermons*, occurring almost 1000 times, though not all references apply to the human spirit, but to the divine spirit as well. Like Ruusbroec, the author defines the spirit both as the active unity of the faculties and the innermost part of the human person that rests in God. The resting in God is

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32 AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 290va.
33 AMS, Sermon 128, fol. 291ra-rb
referred to in terms of an ontological union with God: “But your spirit has no life, being or form except for my Divinity. Therefore, nothing works in your innermost being of the spirit except my Divinity […]”\(^{36}\) and “the ‘is-ness’ (dat is) of the spirit - that contains the sublime divine persons in one being in itself.”\(^{37}\) This ontological unity of the spirit with God is the fundament for the experiential unity of spirit with God, as sermon 103 illustrates:

For He made us out of nothing, that is, out of Himself, Himself alike, because He could not find anything more precious from which He could make us than out of nothing, Himself alike, and breathed into us the spirit of His life, and united Himself so indistinctively to our spirit, because He wanted to rest and work in it forever with His high, indistinct triune unity, and wanted to enjoy Himself and us in one, as it always pleased and delighted him in eternity.\(^{38}\)

The spirit is receptive to God, because it rests in Him, and it is capable of responding to God’s love without intermediary. Love is the most fundamental characteristic of the spirit. Sermon 128 describes the spirit as the “altar of love.” Many sermons illustrate the spirit’s union with God with love: “through all this the god-loving spirit is turned with strong love in tranquil, unshakable rest into the spirit of God;”\(^{39}\) “having one spirit in one love;”\(^{40}\) “our spirit with absolute love is entirely turned towards God;”\(^{41}\) “with love one spirit in God;”\(^{42}\) “one spirit united in love in my blessed divinity.”\(^{43}\)

The experience of God in the spirit is beyond all concepts and words, as the Church dedication sermon stated. Sermon 85 mentions as well how the spirit experiences God in a way that cannot be understood by the senses, emotions, and faculties: “What the spirit of a person experiences there of God and how he is pervaded with the pure eternal truth, that is something no tongue can utter, nor heart can envisage, nor can it be understood by any of the senses.”\(^{44}\)

Union with God in the spirit involves detachment and a gathering into the innermost dimension. The Church dedication sermon referred to this as a coming to passivity, expressed through concepts of negative theology. Sermon 28 explicitly described this process of

\(^{36}\) AMS, Sermon 61, fol. 117va.
\(^{37}\) AMS, Sermon 11, fol. 21vb.
\(^{38}\) AMS, Sermon 103, fol. 228ra-228rb.
\(^{39}\) AMS, Sermon 11, fol. 21va.
\(^{40}\) AMS, Sermon 26, fol. 54rb.
\(^{41}\) AMS, Sermon 85, fol. 175vb-176ra.
\(^{42}\) AMS, Sermon 103, fol. 229ra.
\(^{43}\) AMS, Sermon 104, fol. 231rb.
\(^{44}\) AMS, Sermon 85, fol. 178rb-va.
gathering into the spirit: “To that purpose he should often gather his outer senses and pull them into the inner senses of the soul, and push them with all the faculties of the soul into the innermost of the desert, that is, into the spirit […].” Sermon 97 states that one becomes one with God in the spirit through annihilation of all selfishness: “Now, observe in the bottomless annihilation and sinking away of yourself, how Jesus Christ, who once ascended over all heavens, wants to ascend today in the heaven of your spirit. This annihilating spirit is drawn by Christ into His union with God, as Christ says: “I shall draw all loving spirits that are sunk away into the unity and enjoyment of my divinity.” Through detachment, the spirit experiences oneness with God beyond comprehension, as unlike the body and soul, it may experience God without intermediary.

This detachment from the lower dimension in the person is based on the elevated position of the spirit. Sermon 32, in which the author quotes Ps.-Augustine’s Liber de spiritu et anima, expresses this by referring to a soul-spirit dichotomy:

Here the soul is completely resting with pure mind in God and God in her. This is not achieved by the sensuality or the imagination, but the lower faculties are deprived of their own activity and the most noble part of the soul is introduced in the most hidden inner silence. In this separation the soul and all that belongs to the soul stays below, but the spirit and all that belongs to the spirit, soars to the utmost heights.

The spirit and the spiritual dimension of the person ascend to God in contrast to the soul and the lowest faculties. The sermons refer regularly to an innermost aspect of the spirit to express the spirit’s union with God, as a few examples illustrate: “from that part and innermost being of her spirit, by which she has rested uncreated and eternally in God,” and “nothing works in your innermost being of the spirit except my Divinity […]”.

A concept specifically used to describe God’s indwelling in the spirit is the term “is-ness” of the spirit. This defines the spirit as the locus for God’s indwelling and therefore as the only dimension of knowing God without intermediaries. Sermon 11 describes how the birth of God that takes place in the person is not known to the soul but only to the spirit, because the spirit has an “is-ness:”

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45 AMS, Sermon 28, fol. 64ra-rb.
46 AMS, Sermon 97, fol. 211ra-rb.
47 AMS, Sermon 97, fol. 215va. Cf. Jn 12, 32.
48 On this, see Cornet 2013.
49 AMS, Sermon 32, fol. 72ra-rb.
50 AMS, Sermon 1, fol. 1rb.
51 AMS, Sermon 61, fol. 117va.
This [the birth of God in the soul] is known only to the spirit and remains partly unknown to the soul, for what is uncreated cannot be understood or fully grasped by what is created. But the ‘is-ness’ of the spirit - that contains the sublime divine persons in one being in itself and in which nothing else has been nor can enter into - sees, feels and knows that it happens and how it happens. For the is-ness of the spirit, that is one is-ness with God in God, that by itself and by God alone is seen, understood and known, is united with the savoury, eternal wisdom in the height of the intellect, that is the sight of the spirit, and joined without intermediary to the savoury, eternal wisdom of God, which does to some extent make a supernatural light flow through and shine into the soul through the reason, but still leaves it [the soul] thereafter in a hunger, thirst and steady longing, and which leaves and keeps the spirit in a steady stillness, quiet and peace. For in his is-ness, where he is one with God, nothing can move him but God.\[52\]

The is-ness literally means the “it is”, the third person singular of the Middle Dutch verb “to be”, *sijn*. The term is used to define the specific nature of the spirit, which, in contrast to the soul, is being joined to God “without intermediary,” and “contains the sublime divine persons in one being.” This indwelling of God enables the spirit to be one being with God: “in his is-ness, where he is one with God.” Because of God’s indwelling, the spirit can only be touched and known by God: “For in his is-ness, where he is one with God, nothing can move him but God.” This implies also that the spirit is the only dimension of the person that is able to experience the birth of God. Because the uncreated God dwells in the spirit, the spirit is the only dimension of the person that can understand and feel God’s working in the spirit.

Though the is-ness of the spirit is one with God, the human person is not God himself. Sermon 121 states that God has always been uncreated, whereas the human soul is created and though one with God, different from God:

For the uncreatedness has drawn into Himself the createdness of the soul so deeply, that He Himself is her power, her knowing, loving, contemplating, and enjoyment, and the soul is and has to remain the remaining is-ness of createdness, but God alone is her property, her sustenance, and her essential

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\[52\] *AMS*, Sermon 11, fol. 21vb-22rb.
existence, in which she shall never fail the unity of the spirit with the essential bond of peace.\textsuperscript{53}

The “is-ness” of the person thus indicates at the same time the person’s indwelling in God and God’s indwelling in the spirit, as well as the remaining createdness of the person’s soul. The person’s is-ness is dependent on God who sustains her and God is its existence itself. Thus, God Himself is also described as an is-ness, a pure being, in sermon 90: “Sink away with all that you are in that bottomless nothingness that is God Himself […] and entrust yourself to the bottomless is-ness of the Godhead.”\textsuperscript{54} This concept of is-ness shows striking similarities with Eckhart, who also uses it to describe both God’s incomprehensibility and His indwelling in creation.\textsuperscript{55} He describes how the soul becomes one with God’s is-ness: “You should wholly sink away from your youness and dissolve into His Hisness, and your ‘yours’ and His ‘His’ should become so completely one ‘Mine’ that with Him you understand His unbecome is-ness and His nameless nothingness.”\textsuperscript{56} Eckhart shows that the is-ness is in the human person because God dwells in the soul: “As Our Lord said, where I am, there my servants will also be, so the soul becomes one is-ness, which is God.”\textsuperscript{57} The term is-ness of the spirit clearly demonstrates Eckhart’s influence on the Arnhem mystical sermons.

The Concept of Ground (Gront)

“Ground” is another frequently used concept to describe the innermost part of the human person. The metaphor and related adjectives occur more than 400 times in the Arnhem mystical sermons. Like the spirit, the ground is also the innermost being, where the faculties are united: “the innermost of the ground of the soul, where all the faculties work in one being.”\textsuperscript{58} Unlike the spirit, the concept of ground is not part of triads such as body, soul, and spirit. The ground is first and foremost the pure passive dimension to the human person, as sermon 83 illustrates. Whereas the human spirit receives the birth of God,\textsuperscript{59} the sermon describes how every devout person should sink into one’s ground along with the sinful senses and faculties, precisely because this is where one offers oneself to God:

\textsuperscript{53} AMS, Sermon 121, fol. 272va.
\textsuperscript{54} AMS, Sermon 90, fol. 190va-vb.
\textsuperscript{55} On Eckhart, see Morard 1956.
\textsuperscript{57} Eckhart, DW III, Pr. 64, 31-33.
\textsuperscript{58} AMS, Sermon 78, fol. 147rb.
\textsuperscript{59} AMS, Sermon 83, fol. 165vb-166ra.
[...] every devout person who would like to share in this rich treasure of merit, must sink and sink again with all his sinful senses and faculties ever deeper and deeper into the ground, until he is surrounded, captured by the truth of God and taken into His might, and he shall there sacrifice and let go of himself with a fathomless self-rejection into the most dear known and unknown eternal will of God [...].

The author adheres to the usual tripartite structure of the human person in describing the inner ascent from the senses and the faculties into the ground. The distinctiveness of the ground is its receptivity and passivity. One is exhorted to sink into one’s ground “until he is surrounded, captured, and caught by the truth of God.” The ground is not combined with active verbs such as experiencing. Sermon 85 shows a similar distinction between the spirit and the ground. The sermon describes a detachment from the senses and a gathering of all the soul’s faculties as the means to “to turn inward into his innermost ground.” It is necessary in order to enter into God who is without images and without names. The turning into the ground is followed by an experiencing of God in the spirit, which cannot be understood by the senses, emotions, and faculties. The ground is thus described as the innermost part into which one turns, whereas the spirit is the highest dimension that experiences and loves God. Consequently, the spirit may sink into the ground to be completely one with God, free from distractions: “the spirit sinks deeper and deeper into herself, until she reaches the ground into which God the Holy Trinity shines essentially and actively.” Thus, while the spirit has to detach from everything so as to be one with God, the ground denotes that aspect of the human person that is not attached to earthly matters, but sinks into God.

Comparatively, the concept of ground is much more exclusively connected to sinking into God, detachment, and negative theology. The focus is on the ground as one’s deepest dimension, which one reaches through self-detachment, sinking away, and annihilation. Sermon 103 describes the indwelling of God in the soul while frequently using the concept of ground. This sermon comments on just one verse from the Missal, Romans 11, 33: “O, the depth of the riches of God: of the wisdom and of the knowledge. How incomprehensible are...
his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways.” The soul is exhorted to sink into God, her origin. The ground of the soul is the locus of God’s dwelling in the person:

O, inner soul, what highness, what might, what wisdom, what love or goodness could fulfil and please you more than what you are filled with? For the bottomless depth of the riches of wisdom and knowledge of God are in you. You are the clear, most shining mirror of the high Godhead, in which He most clearly and purely sees Himself imaged and essentially present, and in the gazing upon which you see and know yourself most similar and most clearly therein.

In this sermon, the ground metaphor is closely related to that of the mirror in this sermon. The soul is described as the “mirror of the noble Godhead, in which he sees Himself imaged and essentially mirrored in the most bright and pure way.” The mirror metaphor powerfully expresses the unbreakable ontological relationship between Creator and creature. Like a mirror, the soul’s ground reflects God, not for a limited time span but eternally. There is no difference between God’s transcendent life and His immanent life in the soul. The ground contains God’s own “bottomless” depths of riches. Though the ground does not respond to God in love, it is not completely passive either. It has an observing capacity, as it observes and knows herself in God’s ground: “in which your ground sees and knows itself as resplendent, godlike and luminous as the Godhead knows Himself, with the distinction of persons and one in being.” This indwelling of God in the ground is at the heart of the admonishment to detach from oneself and to sink into one’s origin, which the author describes while referring to the Sursum corda, which is the introductory prayer for the Liturgy of the Sacrament:

Therefore, lift up yourself, O noble soul, with a fathomless inclining and sinking away of yourself in God and rejoice beyond all joy, that through Jesus Christ you have found and may enter your eternal, immobile origin, in which you have rested eternally.

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66 AMS, Sermon 99, fol. 226va-vb.
67 AMS, Sermon 103, fol. 226vb-227ra.
68 AMS, Sermon 103, fol. 226vb.
69 On the mirror metaphor, see Oechslin 1971, 1458.
70 AMS, Sermon 103, fol. 227ra.
71 AMS, Sermon 103, fol. 227rb.
To enter into one’s hidden ground requires a sinking away of oneself and being united with Christ. The soul is called noble because of God’s indwelling and may become one with God. Here, the author of the Arnhem mystical sermons does not use the concept of ground, as in the first part of this sermon, but shifts to spirit:

“[…] And breathed into us the spirit of His life, and thus He united Himself inseparably to our spirit, because He wanted to rest and work in it eternally with his noble, indistinctive Trinitarian Unity, and enjoy Himself and us in oneness.”72

This passage shows again that in contrast to the ground, the spirit is used to describe oneness with God.

The metaphor of bottomlessness and abyss are regularly expanded on in the sermon collection. In the first paragraph of the sermon, God is referred to as “bottomless depth:” “For the bottomless depth of the riches of wisdom and knowledge of God are in you.”73 The Middle Dutch word for bottomless, ongrondig literally means: without a ground, and indicated that God’s bottomless being dwells in the ground of the soul. The concept of “bottomless being” is another way of referring to God as an abyss, a classic interpretation of the biblical topos from Psalm 42, 7 “The abyss call to the abyss,” also quoted in this sermon to refer to the bottomless dimensions of both the soul and God. Because the infinite God lives in the person, the soul’s ground should not be understood as “bottom,” but as bottomless as God Himself. The grounds of both the human being and God are portrayed as abyssal:

Because its [the solemnity] dignity demands of us its own image and likeness, subservience and secret praise, that goes beyond all created praise, such as to offer and to sink our soul in the hidden abyss of the Godhead, who without cease calls to the deep of our nothingness, as the prophet says: “O God, you are truly a hidden God,”74 and also: “The abyss call to the abyss.”75

This passage illustrates how God’s ground (abyss) and the human ground call to each other. The metaphor of abyss describes both God, who calls the abyss of the soul into Himself, and the human soul, in which God dwells. Because the transcendent God is beyond all human

72 AMS, Sermon 103, fol. 228ra-rb
73 AMS, Sermon 103, fol. 226vb.
74 Cf. Is 45, 15.
attributes, names or attributes stemming from positive theology vanish: “For just as little as the Godhead has a name in itself, does the soul have a name in this. For she has flown over into that modeless being, faster than in the blink of an eye.”  

Both God and the human person, in whom God dwells, are infinite and thus not exhaustively knowable. Sermon 139 (St. Petrus ad cathedra) elaborates on the bottomless aspect of the ground of the person:

Thus one should know, that this sinking into the bottomless nothingness is nothing else than a bottomless release of everything that is not God, and that should and has to happen, not only once, but so often and ceaselessly, that one is not able to stay in anything that is not God for even one moment without sinking, that is, without release. Thus the ground of the person should feel like being ceaselessly drawn by God in that which is the most bottomless, like a stone that is thrown in a bottomless sea, which constantly has to fall by necessity, because it cannot find ground. […] Coming into the bottomlessness of God should happen through a bottomless, plain, naked sinking away and release of the self, and of everything that is, and without any help. So he will be lifted up by God ceaselessly and without intermediary, through the bottomless darkness of himself, into the bottomlessness of God (…). One may only undergo being drawn through the abyss of his failing into the abyss of [God] Himself, how and in which manner and when He [=God] wants. 

This sermon describes how the ground of the person “cannot find ground” because it sinks into God’s abyss. The concepts of bottomlessness, abyss, and nothingness illustrate that God cannot be understood by human categories. In order to reach this unknown God, the ground has to sink into God ceaselessly, thereby leaving behind everything that is not God. Because the ground is the place in which God’s groundless depths dwells, the ground is abyssal and always sinking into God. Though it does not respond to God with active love as the spirit, is has a dynamic aspect as well, which is its constant sinking into God.

In describing the “abyssal dimensions” of the human person, the author stands in the tradition of various mystical authors. In the Middle Dutch region, we find it in various works, for example in the writings of Hadewijch. According to her, God is an “abyss” of “unfathomable depth” in which “the souls who love” will “lose themselves.”

76 AMS, Sermon 103, fol. 229va-vb.  
77 AMS, Sermon 139, fol. 310ra-vb.  
lost in God and God in her, for “the soul is a bottomless abyss in which God suffices to Himself; and his own self-sufficiency ever finds fruition to the full in this soul, as the soul, for its part, ever does in Him. […] [God’s] inmost depths […] cannot be touched except by the soul’s abyss.”

The fourteenth-century mystics of the Rhineland, like Eckhart and Tauler, used ground and comparable nouns and derivations like abyss and groundlessness very frequently to describe the mutual indwelling of God and the person, and they clearly influenced the author of the *Arnhem mystical sermons.*

**Conclusion**

In defining the human person and the inner ascent, the *Arnhem mystical sermons* frequently use concepts from the liturgy in a way similar to Tauler, the *Pearl* and the *Temple.* The mystical ascent is described as an inner liturgy in the *Arnhem mystical sermons,* and consequently, all elements of the outer liturgy are applied to the human person and the spirit’s union with God. Exemplary is the sermon on Church dedication (128) which illustrates important theological concepts of the sermon collection with metaphors from the liturgy: the soul as God’s temple, the inner ascent that encompasses purification, illumination, and union with God, the coming to passivity and enjoyment, the central role of the Eucharist, the mutual indwelling of the human person and Christ, and the transformation of the human person flowing forth from union with God.

The mystical interpretation of the liturgy, particularly of the readings from the Missal, colours also the concepts for the innermost person. Both the spirit and the ground are often described with biblical and liturgical metaphors, such as altar, sancta sanctorum, and abyss. The spirit is the most frequently used concept for the innermost being of the human person. The spirit consists in the unity of the faculties, and is the locus of God’s indwelling, similar to Ruusbroec. This ontological union is the basis of the experiential and loving union with God which may take place in the spirit. The unity of the spirit with God can be reached through detachment, which enables one to experience of God who is beyond comprehension. The spirit’s is-ness denotes the unbreakable union between God and the human spirit in which God dwells in a way similar to Eckhart. Like the spirit, the ground also functions as the unity of the faculties. Unlike the spirit, the ground is neither combined with active verbs such as

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80 McGinn’s handbook provides a useful account on the occurrence of ground in Eckhart and Tauler: McGinn, 2005. De Vooys referred to the concepts of bottomlessness, nothingness and is-ness as typical for Eckhart: de Vooys 1905, 55-57.
loving or experiencing God, nor with unity with God. The ground denotes the ceaseless in-
God-sinking dimension of the human person, and at times the place in which the human spirit
sinks. The concepts of bottomlessness, abyss, and nothingness are applied both to God’s and
the human ground, expressing that the human ground is bottomless precisely because the
infinite and incomprehensible God dwells in there. These concepts from negative theology
also clearly show the influence of the Rhineland mystics.

The anthropological concepts used by the author of the *Arnhem mystical sermons* are
thus proven to display the influence of a large tradition, including Ps.-Augustine, Ruusbroec,
Eckhart, and Tauler, while also being similar to the contemporaneous *Pearl* and the *Temple*.
Yet, the author combines all this into a unique concept of the human person, which is
characterised by the synthesis of different traditions and the systematic integration of liturgy
into the inner ascent and the structure of the human person.