The Incorporation of Ruusbroec’s *Spiritual Espousals* into the Sixteenth-Century *Arnhem Mystical Sermons*. 
A Comparative Textual Analysis*

Ineke Cornet

Abstract

The anonymous *Arnhem Mystical Sermons* (Royal Library, The Hague, ms. 133 H 13), copied around 1560–1575 in the St. Agnes convent in Arnhem, is the largest sermon collection that has no other corresponding compilation. Till now, no concrete sources had been identified. This article elaborates on my discovery that one sermon (111) has incorporated a part of Ruusbroec’s *Spiritual Espousals* with significant adaptations. This article provides a detailed analysis of the similarities and modifications, thereby showing the continuity and discontinuity with the fourteenth-century Ruusbroec and relating these differences to the context of the sixteenth-century by showing parallels with other mystical works from the region of Arnhem, namely the *Evangelical Pearl* and the *Temple of Our Soul*.

Keywords
Arnhem Mystical Sermons; sixteenth century; mysticism; Low Countries; Ruusbroec; theology; spirituality

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Introduction

The largest collection of Middle Dutch sermons, the so-called the *Arnhem Mystical Sermons* (abbreviated hereafter as AMS), has been handed down to us as completely anonymous. While in recent years more details about its origin have come to light, this article is the first to show concrete textual correspondences between the AMS and the fourteenth-century Flemish mystic Ruusbroec. About their origin it is known that the sermons were copied around 1560–1575 at the St. Agnes convent in Arnhem, a women’s convent that had its origin in the Modern Devotion and that adopted the rule of St. Augustine in 1459. The fact that this manuscript has the characteristics of being a copy indicates that the sermons might have been written earlier, but the most concrete *post quem* indication is a reference to the Carthusian Petrus Blomovenna (1466–1536), who was prior of the Cologne Charterhouse from 1507 till his death. The AMS are part of a revival of mystical literature in the Arnhem region that started in the first half of the sixteenth century, also testified, for example, by the appearance of the *Evangelical Pearl* (hereafter *Pearl*)

1) The collection is listed in Maria Sherwood-Smith and Patricia Stoop, *Repertorium van Middelnederlandse preken in handschriften tot en met 1550/Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons preserved in manuscripts from before 1550*, 2 vols. [Miscellanea Neerlandica 28–29] (Leuven, 2003), 2: 1079–157. The sequence of this repertorium, the volumes four to seven, written by Daniel Ermens and Willemien van Dijk (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), shows that to date no larger collection has been found.


3) The most recent discoveries related to the dating of the manuscript are listed in: Kees Schepers, ‘De historische verankering van het Sanctorale in de Arnhemse Mystieke Preken,’ *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 81 (2010), pp. 64–100.

and the *Temple of Our Soul* (hereafter *Temple*). This growth of mystical literature is part of a broader network. For example, the Carthusian Charterhouse in Cologne was known for disseminating mystical literature, which they regarded as a way to revitalise the Church. All of Ruusbroec’s works were translated into Latin by the Carthusian Surius, and this community published many other mystical works, for example the *Pearl*. The St. Agnes convent was involved in this network through its relationship with the Carthusians and through the mystical writings that were read and produced in that community. Thus, the *AMS* are one of the texts that appear during a revival of mystical life and literature in Arnhem and its immediate spiritual environment in a time of curious dynamics between Protestants and Catholics in the sixteenth century.

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6) These mystical works are likely to have come from St. Agnes or its immediate spiritual environment. A key argument for ascribing the *Pearl* and the *Temple* to St. Agnes is the fact that a unique textual witness of the *Pearl* (Manuscript Royal Library The Hague, 71 H 51) has been ascribed to St. Agnes, see Kienhorst, ‘Meer mystiek uit het Arnhemse Agnietenklooster,’ 212–213; Kees Schepers, ‘Het verborgen leven van de zusters Agnieten. Mystieke cultuur te Arnhem in de zestiende eeuw,’ *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 79, no. 3 (2008): 285–316, there 295. Further arguments in favour of this hypothesis are the plausible scenario that the *Temple* was written by the same author as the *Pearl*, and the strong thematic correspondences between the *AMS* and both the *Pearl* and the *Temple*. (Ibid., 300–302). A concrete textual comparison on the topic of the Christmas Liturgy, showing striking similarities, has been made by Rob Faesen: Rob Faesen, ‘The Three Births of Christ and the Christmas Liturgy in the *Temple of Our Soul*, the *Evangelical Pearl* and the *Arnhem Mystical Sermons*,’ *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 81 (2010), pp. 121–137. Other female convents that originated from the Modern Devotion, such as Maaseik and Geldern, also testify to an increasing number of mystical publications. See Hans Kienhorst, ‘Mystiek op schrift in vrouwenkloosters uit de traditie van de Moderne Devotie. Een oriënterende vergelijking van drie collecties: Arnhem, Geldern en Maaseik,’ *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 81 (2010), pp. 38–63.


9) Kees Schepers has elaborated on the contacts between the Carthusians and St. Agnes. (Schepers, ‘Het verborgen leven van de zusters Agnieten’ (see above, n. 2), 302–304).
The collection contains 162 sermons, written on 381 paper leaves. Several characteristics make the collection a special item. First, there are many mystical treatises and similarly many moralistic sermons, but the AMS is one of the few manuscripts with mystical sermons. Second, sermon collections rarely include sermons for both the Cycle of Seasons and the Cycle of Saints, as the AMS does. Third, the collection is an important source for mystical terminology. *Hapax legomena* appear in abundance. Fourth, their mystical theology and spirituality are synthetic. The sermons prove to be a combination of different mystical traditions from a variety of sources. Though different sources are used, they are moulded into one stylistic unity. The sermons testify to a unique mystical theology in the context of the spread of mystical literature in the sixteenth century, in which the St. Agnes convent played an important role.

Earlier, though sporadic, research into the collection hinted already at strong similarities between the AMS and fourteenth-century mystics. De Voors noticed that the sermons testify on every page to the influence of these mystics by an abundant use of Eckhart’s and Ruusbroec’s terminologies. At that time, no concrete textual correspondence had been found. Recently I discovered that AMS, Sermon 111 (*Dominica 7 post Trinitatem*) is clearly based on the part in

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13) The sermons have hardly been studied. Recently, some sermons have been published, both in Dutch (ibid.) and in English. See Kees Schepers, ‘Mystical Sermons,’ in *Late Medieval Mysticism of the Low Countries*, eds. Rik Van Nieuwenhove, Rob Faesen, and Helen Rolfsen [The Classics of Western Spirituality] (New York, 2008). For this article, I used the preliminary version of the transcriptions for the critical edition which Professor Kees Schepers is preparing.

the second book of Ruusbroec’s *Spiritual Espousals* (hereafter: *Espousals*) which is about the seven inner gifts of the Spirit.\(^{15}\) The original Middle Dutch version of *AMS*, sermon 111, is provided in the appendix, whereby each sentence is assigned a verse-number. These lines are referred to in my own English translation of the sermon. For Ruusbroec’s *Espousals* Helen Rolfson’s English translation of the *Opera Omnia* has been used.

The aim of this article is an in-depth analysis into how the sixteenth-century *AMS* have reworked Ruusbroec’s *Spiritual Espousals*. A guiding assumption is that the way in which the *AMS* have reworked Ruusbroec is influenced by the sixteenth-century context of a mystical revival and reformations. Therefore, the focus is on the textual comparison between Ruusbroec and the *AMS* but also with attention to the similarities between the *AMS*’ accents and their parallels in the related mystical works of the *Pearl* and the *Temple*. The article is structured as follows. First, the textual correspondences between Ruusbroec and sermon 111 will be highlighted. Second, the differences between Ruusbroec’s *Espousals* and sermon 111 of the *AMS* that are related to the sermon genre will be analysed: (a) the genre of liturgical mysticism: which is also present in the *Pearl* and the *Temple* and (b) the hortatory function of the *AMS*. Third, the article provides a comparative detail-analysis of the content of the four gifts in the *Espousals* and the *AMS* by analysing three of the composer’s different strategies: the passages which are both in the *Espousals* and the *AMS*, but modified, the passages from the *Espousals* that have been left out, and the additions typical for the *AMS*, exploring the passages that are only present in the *AMS*. Lastly, the similarities and differences regarding content will be synthesised and related to the context of the sixteenth-century contemporaneous works, namely the *Pearl* and the *Temple*. This article will contribute to opening perspectives on the specific character of sixteenth-century mysticism in the Low Countries, as seen in how the *AMS* reworked Ruusbroec.

\(^{15}\) The section on the seven gifts of the Spirit is found in part B of Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia 3: Die geestelike bruolocht/The Spiritual Espousals*, ed. J. Alaerts [Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 103] (Tielt and Turnhout, 1988). The Middle Dutch text goes from p. 491 (line b1818) till p. 525 (line b2157), the English translation goes from p. 490 (line b1565) till p. 524 (line b1857). Further references in this article refer to the line numbers of the English translation.
1. Textual Correspondences

Sermon 111 adopted the typical tripartite structure of a Middle Dutch sermon, which consists of introduction, corpus, and conclusion.\(^{16}\) The scheme below shows that the composer of the sermon has incorporated Ruusbroec’s treatise into the *dilatatio*, which is the main part of a sermon.\(^{17}\)

**Table 1. Structure of AMS, Sermon 111.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>“I have compassion for the crowds, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat” (Mt 15,32/Mc 8,2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Corpus</td>
<td>Introducicio thematist(^{18})</td>
<td>“Oh, dearly beloved, let us notice which crowds are there within us that stay with Christ for three days, on which He has compassion because they have nothing to eat.” [...]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divisio</td>
<td>“He feeds them [the crowds] with seven loaves, which are His sevenfold gifts [...]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dilatatio</td>
<td>Exposition on the seven gifts of the Spirit, which is very similar to Ruusbroec’s <em>Spiritual Espousals</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Conclusion</td>
<td>Summary/Exhortation</td>
<td>“Oh, dearly beloved, ah, that thus in fasting three days, that is not enjoying ourselves in any thing, we may follow the Lord Christ Jesus, the Light of Truth [...]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Closing formula</td>
<td>“May God grant this to us all. Amen.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The similarities between sermon 111 and Ruusbroec are thus most visible in the *dilatatio*, within which Ruusbroec’s disquisition on the seven gifts of the Spirit has been integrated. The Gospel reading of the day, which speaks about the seven loaves with which Jesus satisfied the crowds, is in line with the third sense

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\(^{16}\) Mertens, ‘De Middelnederlandse preek’ (see above n. 8), p. 11.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 12–13.

\(^{18}\) Thom Mertens points out that the *introducicio thematist* is a rather rare phenomenon in the Middle Dutch sermon tradition: Ibid., 12.

\(^{19}\) As mentioned before, these lines correspond to the verse-numbers of the original Middle Dutch sermon, as provided in the appendix.
of mystical exegesis applied to one’s personal life. In this sermon, the loaves symbolise the seven gifts of the Spirit. For this exposition the composer of sermon 111 has used Ruusbroec’s work on the seven gifts of the Spirit. Sermon 111 has thereby kept the same structure as Ruusbroec following the same order of the seven gifts. There are also strong correspondences in content. Even whole sentences have been copied sometimes with only slight adaptations, which will be clear in the detail-analysis of the gifts.

There are no convincing arguments for the composer of the AMS not using an original Ruusbroec manuscript but an already thoroughly modified one: the parallels are striking. Furthermore, in what remained of the St. Agnes’ library, four manuscripts out of nineteen contain several parts of Ruusbroec’s works. Although no manuscript containing the Espousals has been identified so far, it is quite likely that St. Agnes possessed a copy. And even if the composer of the AMS used an already modified version of Ruusbroec, the comparison between the AMS and the original Espousals still provides a solid base for highlighting the similarities and differences between the two, which sheds light on the distinctiveness of the AMS in contrast to Ruusbroec.

The parts of the sermon that are unique and not found in Ruusbroec are those outside the dilatatio: the introduction, the first part of the corpus and the conclusion. These components, typical for the sermon genre, will be analysed in paragraph two of this article. The detail-analysis of the adapted Ruusbroec text on the seven gifts of the Spirit found in the dilatatio will follow in paragraph three.

20) The personal application is the third sense in medieval exegesis: the first sense is the historical dimension, the second sense is allegory; the third sense is mystical tropology and the fourth sense is anagogy: Henri de Lubac, Medieval Exegesis. The Four Senses of Scripture, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI and Edinburgh, 1998–2000), 1: 1–2; 2: 129–135.

21) The most up to date list of manuscripts from St. Agnes can be found in: Schepers, ‘Het verborgen leven van de zusters Agnieten’ (see above n. 2), pp. 309–312. The four manuscripts containing Ruusbroec are: 1. Brussel, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 2412–2413, containing A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness and Little Book of Enlightenment; 2. Brussel, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 14716, containing The Mirror of Eternal Blessedness; 3. Olim Gaesdonck, Collegium Augustinianum, ms. 16, containing The Seven Rungs (redaction); 4. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, BPL 2692 (olim Gaesdonck ms. 62), containing The First Letter and The Seven Enclosures.
2. The Specificity of the Sermon Genre

The sermon’s structure has at least two implications: first of all, mysticism is embedded within the Church year’s liturgy, which leads to a specific genre of a liturgical-mystical sermon (paragraph 2.1); second, mysticism in the AMS also has a hortatory function (paragraph 2.2).

2.1. The Liturgical-Mystical Genre

The first implication of the choice for a sermon collection is the embedding of mysticism within the liturgical year. In the AMS, mystical experiences are the inner reliving of the events celebrated in the liturgy. In this regard the AMS belong to the tradition of liturgical mysticism. In this current within more general Christian mysticism, the immediate experience of God is linked to liturgical celebrations. Liturgy and mystical experiences are not opposed to each other, but rather entwined. Participating in the richness of the objective liturgical year is a locus mysticus. Thus, liturgy is not merely a symbol of the inner life nor is it merely external and ritualistic; in fact, liturgical participation introduces the inner experience of the truths that the liturgy expresses. And likewise, the liturgy provides words and symbols to interpret experiences of God’s presence. The AMS refer to several aspects of the liturgy: the biblical readings, song texts, the Eucharist, the church building, et cetera. Scriptural readings in particular are interwoven with mysticism because the AMS sermons are structured as a mystical commentary on the readings of any particular day. The sermons thus depict the inner communion with

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22) Kees Schepers mentioned that the reliving of the liturgy is one of the key features of the AMS: Schepers, ‘Mystical Sermons’ (see above n. 7), p. 353.

God, which is also symbolised by the whole of the liturgy: its structure, texts, music, ornaments, and the consecrated buildings in which it takes place. The Church dedication sermon is in this sense programmatic for the whole collection.

The interconnectedness between liturgy and mysticism, which is found already in the patristic period, is also visible in the Middle Dutch tradition. The thirteenth-century mystic Hadewijch is one of the many female mystics whose visions take place in the context of liturgical celebrations. She often describes her visions taking place during mass, and she indicates exact moments, for example, during the reading of the epistle. Ruusbroec connects his mystical theology to the office of the seven hours of the passion meditation in his *The Twelve Beguines*, but the interaction is not so clear, and in general he does not refer to the liturgy in his writings. However, it is only in sixteenth-century writings from St. Agnes convent or its immediate environment that we find such an elaborate form of liturgical mysticism and where the liturgical year is systematically connected to mysticism. At least three texts testify to this: the *AMS* (162 mystical sermons ordered along the Temporale and Sanctorale), the *Temple* (53 chapters of mystical treatises ordered according to the Temporale of the liturgical year) and the *Pearl*.

The *Temple* elaborates on the theme that the inner celebration perfects the liturgy. It summarises the right attitude in Chapter 8, entitled “How the exterior liturgy in the holy church is carried out for the sake of the interior liturgy.” The *Temple* warns against merely celebrating outwardly, one should attend the liturgy with the aim of celebrating the inner liturgy simultaneously: “A person who exercises the virtues has always a high feast in himself.”

27) Jan van Ruusbroec, *Opera Omnia 7A: Vanden XII Beghinen*, ed. Mikel M. Kors [Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 107A] (Turnhout, 2000). The contemplation of the Christ’s passion is elaborated upon in part 2c, pp. 403–537. I am grateful to Dr. Pieter Mannaerts for this insight.
29) Ibid.
it has no aim other than to be perfected in this inner temple.”

30 The exterior and interior liturgies are mutually interdependent. Therefore, the Temple can be characterised as a “mystical liturgy-experience.”

31 The inner experiences and the liturgy are integrated into a coherent whole. 

32 Alaerts even proposes to read the Temple as a liturgical sermon collection. However, there is still a big difference between the Temple and the AMS. As to the literary genre, the Temple’s chapters are more like treatises than sermons. The AMS, in contrast, inserted the expositions on mystical theology, like in sermon 111, into the threefold structure of a sermon, including the readings of the day. Thus the connection with the liturgical year is even more systematically elaborated upon. Though the general structure of the Pearl encompasses a wide range of devotions, the third chapter of Part three expands on the explicit connection between liturgy and mysticism, entitled: “How God wants to fulfill all the great feasts in the soul, and wants to renew them in her always.”

33 The outer liturgy (here: the great feasts) is carried out so that the feasts are “fulfilled spiritually within” the believers. The inner liturgy is thus a recollection of Jesus’ life, which is celebrated in the Church. In contrast to the external liturgy, the inner liturgy takes place “always.” The external liturgy effectuates the inner liturgy, which continues even after the external liturgy has finished.

This systematic interconnection between ecclesial liturgy and mysticism in the AMS and other sixteenth-century writings could be interpreted as a programmatic statement. Whereas from the Late Middle Ages on the liturgy was shortened by the mendicant orders, the number of extra-liturgical activities grew, and the focus was in general more on the rituals as such, the AMS
seem to strive for a renaissance of the liturgical awareness connected with a deep inner spirituality. The awareness of liturgy’s importance could have been increased as well by the Protestant break with the Roman liturgy, which in general prompted the Catholics in the Low Countries to explore and disseminate the depth of their own rich tradition as a means of revitalising Catholicism. Since the AMS as well as the Temple and the translated and widely read Pearl attend to the interconnectedness of liturgy and mysticism, which has not been described before as a coherent development, one may posit that this is a sixteenth-century phenomenon that deserves broader attention.

2.2. The Hortatory Function of a Mystical Sermon

The second implication of the choice for a sermon collection is the more hortatory function. Although other didactic tools such as mystical treatises and “autobiographical accounts of visionary experiences” flourished after the twelfth century, especially among female mystics, the AMS are specific in their genre of mystical sermons. Their genre stands more in the tradition of the exposition of Scripture’s mystical sense. A more explicit hortatory function accompanies this form. Both at the beginning and the end of the exposition on the seven gifts, the composer addresses his public (the dearly beloved). A closer look at the content of the introductio thematis and the conclusio will shed more light on the composer’s intentions.

The introductio thematis entails an application of several elements of the biblical verse to one’s personal life. First, the crowds of the Gospel are interpreted as different levels of the person according to medieval anthropology: the outer senses, the inner faculties, and the innermost spirit: “[3] the crowd of our

outward senses, of our conducts and body, of our inner senses and faculties and affections, with the mind, the love and intellect of our spirit.” These crowds have still within them “that which is not God” [3]. In order to be filled with God and satisfied, just as Jesus nourished the crowds, the whole person has to become self-detached:

[4] Behold, these very big crowds have to offer themselves completely for three days in God’s most beloved, unknown will, with a fathomless, essential contrition and with a fathomless, eternal sinking away from everything that they are and have been, and then also, thirdly, with an unknowable, eternal losing; and [they have to] stay thus without eating, that is, without enjoying themselves, near God in Jesus, the Light of Truth, and then on the third day—in this unknowable, eternal losing and offering in God—Christ Jesus, the light of truth, will show compassion on our uncountable crowds.

In this condition of self-detachment, someone offers himself completely to God. The verb “to offer” and “an offering” are words typical for the AMS and reminiscent of the liturgical value of offering, especially in the Eucharist. This accentuates once again a liturgical influence on this mystical sermon collection. It is in this condition of self-detachment that the second theme is addressed: the unity with Christ. Christ’s compassion is explained as the complete self-pouring of Christ Himself into the person:

[5] How will He have compassion on our wretched crowds? [6] Take careful note. [7] Through pouring Himself out in them through teaching, and, moreover, through infusing Himself in them with gifts and nourishment, He satisfies [them] and makes [them] overflow with Him. [8] Oh, is this not a real blessed compassion, that Christ Jesus infuses His holy life, His truth and His Being into our humanity, soul, and spirit, not only with teachings, but also fills it with truth and deeds, that is, with His humanity and Divinity, of which the soul receives a flowing over into all moral, holy life, with all holiness as to the soul and godliness as to the spirit in its essence. [9] He teaches our crowds how they should live, suffer and imitate his perfect, lovable image. [10] He nourishes them with seven breads, which are His sevenfold gifts, and He fulfils and satisfies them by the perfect divineness of these breads, and he lets them overflow in both His likeness and in His unity, until into His essential Divinity.

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40 The rhyming Middle Dutch expression *zeeden en leden* indicates both the moral behaviour and the outer, bodily appearance; the *leden* (limbs) are used as metonymy for the whole body. See *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (hereafter WNT), available on http://gtb.inl.nl/?owner=WNT, *Lid I, leden*, meaning 2, and the deductions *ledeschoon* and *ledeschoonte*. 
The coming of Christ into the human person effectuates the whole person becoming Christ-like, both according to Christ’s humanity and Divinity. This entails both living a holy, virtuous life and a being lifted up into His “essential Divinity,” which is His unity with the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel’s reference to seven loaves is interpreted as seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, and at this point the sermon incorporates Ruusbroec’s work on these gifts of the Spirit, which will be discussed in paragraph three.

The conclusion takes up again the same themes of the self-annihilation, offering one’s bare self to God and uniting with Christ’s humanity and divinity:

[54] Oh, dearly beloved, ah, that we thus may follow the Lord Christ Jesus, the light of truth, in fasting three days, that is by not enjoying ourselves in any thing, so that we may, after a constant, essential contrition and a letting go of all intermediaries and deficiencies, with a unknowing, eternal losing and offering of ourselves into God, deserve to be nourished and satisfied with the most precious loaves of the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit, in order that the divine and human nature of Christ Jesus finds a response from us in likeness of virtues, in union of holiness, in essence of perfection and in enjoyment of the eternal salvation, for which we are created.

Both the introduction and the conclusion testify to the same ground patterns. They demonstrate that the imitatio Christi, leads to a state of being filled by God and a sharing in Christ’s divinity and humanity, which is effected in the whole person: human nature, soul, and spirit. The imitation of Christ’s humanity especially plays a very strong role in the Christology, as we will see below. This imitation involves a strong self-annihilation and contrition and tends toward what might be called ascetic. These characteristics of sermon 111’s frame around the dilatatio about the seven gifts are not often found in Ruusbroec and thus are distinctive for the AMS. The following analysis of the way in which the seven gifts of Ruusbroec’s Espousals are integrated and modified will shed even more light on the essential theological emphases of the AMS.

3. Detail-Analysis of the Seven Gifts

An analysis of the texts’ differences already shows some of the editing patterns of the AMS’ composer. The table below compares the length of the relevant texts of Ruusbroec’s Espousals and the AMS:
Table 2. The Length of the Text in Ruusbroec’s *Espousals* and the *AMS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gift</th>
<th>Word count in Ruusbroec’s <em>Espousals</em></th>
<th>Word count in <em>AMS</em> Sermon 111</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Fear of God</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mercifulness</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Knowledge</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fortitude</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Counsel</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Understanding</td>
<td>1786</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Wisdom</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue after gift 7</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the longer passages of the *Espousals* are shortened. One reason might have been a consideration for the audience. The average length of a sermon in the collection is around 2,3 folia, recto and verso taken together.\(^{41}\) Sermon 111 has five folia and so is already twice as long. A closer look, however, indicates that shortening was not the only aim. Three gifts, namely one, two, and seven, are slightly longer in the sermons than in Ruusbroec. The author expanded some of Ruusbroec’s topics, where he might have felt them insufficiently developed in Ruusbroec. This shows that the composer of the *AMS* quotes, changes, and adds freely and independently, with the ease of an expert.\(^{42}\)

By examining the content of the gifts, I will now analyse the strategies with which Ruusbroec’s text has been edited. The text for gift one is longer in the *AMS*, and yet it bears little resemblance to its predecessor. Gift two and gift seven paraphrase Ruusbroec’s text much more extensively, yet the *AMS*’ texts are again longer. The gifts three, four, five and six, and the epilogue show a similar pattern. The author of the *AMS* is clearly paraphrasing Ruusbroec and has left out several passages so that the text on the gift becomes (much) shorter. Gift six is the extreme example of this shortening strategy, reducing the *Espousals* to almost one fifth of its original length. For the sake of concision, this article will analyse only gifts one, two, three, and six.\(^{43}\) The modifications with regard to content are to a great extent covered by this analysis.

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\(^{41}\) The collection contains 372 folia (recto and verso). With 162 sermons, the average length is 2,3 folia.

\(^{42}\) I am grateful to Professor Guido de Baere for this observation.

\(^{43}\) For further research into these gifts, the structure of both texts is outlined here. Gift four encompasses in the *AMS* the lines 25–27, which are parallel to *Espousals* lines 1605–1612. *Espousals* lines 1612–1627 have been left out. Gift five in the *AMS* encompasses the lines 28–33, of which line 28 alone is found in the *AMS*. Several passages correspond: *AMS*, line 29
3.1. Gift One: Timor Domini

**Espousals**, lines 1567–1574

[1567] When a person lives in the fear of God, in moral virtues and in outward practice, [1568] and is obedient and submissive to the Holy Church and to the commandments of [1569] God, willing and ready (to do) all good things, with a single intention, then he [1570] is God-like through fidelity and conformity of his will in his acts and omissions, [1571] according to the will of God, and he rests in God above all likeness. For through [1572] fidelity and single intention, a person fulfils the will of God, more or less, [1573] according to the mode of his likeness; and through love, he rests in his Beloved [1574] above likeness.

**AMS**, Sermon 111, lines 12–15

[12] First, He nourishes him with the first bread, and fills him with His fear of God, so that the person both in the smallest and in the largest things will fear making God angry more than his own damnation. [13] From this fear flows into him a true, fathomless humility, a true spurning of his own whole will and all created things, and [he] is constantly willing, without any postponement in the heart, to imitate Christ Jesus in both natures, so that he does not want to refrain to come through the likeness of the human nature of Christ to the likeness and unity with His Divine nature, from which he has flown out. [14] Therefore, he takes pain to exercise, practise, and cultivate his moral life according to His holy life, with all the conquering and imitating of virtues, so that he finds himself prepared and willing towards conquering and pursuing both the least and the most good. [15] Then he may, gradually rest with Christ in God above all likeness.

corresponds to **Espousals** 1628–1631; **AMS** 31 to **Espousals** 1631–1637; **AMS** 32 to **Espousals** 1644–1645; **AMS** 33 to **Espousals** 1654–1655. **Espousals** lines 1637–1644, 1645–1654, and 1655–1674 have been left out. Gift seven comprises three corresponding passages: **AMS** 44–47a correspond to **Espousals** 1808–1813, **AMS** 48 to **Espousals** 1816–1817, and **AMS** 49–51 to **Espousals** 2134–2137. The **Espousals’** lines 1813–1816 have been left out, and **AMS** line 47b is only found in the sermons. The “afterword” after the seven gifts shows two corresponding passages: **AMS** 52–52a to **Espousals** 1819–126; and **AMS** 53b to **Espousals** 1830–1833. The **Espousals’** lines 1826–1830 and 1830–1856 have not been incorporated in the **AMS**.

44) The Middle Dutch *anxt* is different from Ruusbroec’s *vresen*. However, the expression *godlicken anxt* or *anxt* *Gods* seem to be normal in the later Middle Ages. The Delfse Bijbel (1477) for example translates fear of God in the same way as the **AMS** with *anxt* (Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek, hereafter *MNW*), (SDU, 1998, cd-rom), *anxt*, meaning 2b). The sixteenth-century Temple uses the term *godlichen anxt* as well (Ampe, ed., Tempel onser sielen (see above, n. 5), p. 434). Thus, the **AMS** using *anxt* seems to be related to its sixteenth-century context.
The composer of the *AMS* permitted himself great freedom in paraphrasing the texts of the first gift. The similarities between the *Espousals* and the *AMS* are rather superficial. The only clear paraphrases are the name of the gift, fear of God, and the last sentences, about the gaining of the likeness and resting in God above all likeness (*AMS* 14–15; *Espousals* 1572–1574). The *AMS* clearly adjusted Ruusbroec’s description in several aspects. A first adjustment is a stronger emphasis on the person’s sinfulness (12). Where Ruusbroec positively states that the fear of God leads to a virtuous life, (1567–1568), the *AMS* approach the exhortation to the virtuous life from a more negative angle, namely, to avoid God’s anger, (even more than one’s own damnation). Second, the Christology is much more elaborated in the *AMS*. The imitation of Christ’s human nature in order to live the virtuous life and His mediation for the human person to rest in God are accentuated. The *AMS* underscore more the Christ-like nature of a virtuous person. Ruusbroec speaks solely about being God-like and fulfilling God’s will, but the *AMS* have inserted several explicit references to Christ’s holy life and the imitation of Christ. This fits into the more general trend of the later Middle Ages in which Ruusbroec’s theology is “made safer” by emphasising the mediating role of Christ and the *imitatio Christi*.45 In the next gifts, we will also notice several additions in the *AMS* that emphasise the Christology.

Third, the *AMS* stress more the process of becoming virtuous: one “takes pain to exercise, practise, and cultivate his moral life according to His holy life” (14). It could be said that although virtues are also important for Ruusbroec—he says that one should be “willing and ready to do all good things” (1569)—the *AMS* emphasise more the painfulness and difficulty of that process. The accent on the process and consequently exhortation to *imitatio* might be related to the sermon genre, but it also indicates a slight change in spirituality. This is related to a fourth difference: where Ruusbroec employs the verb “to be” with regard to the likeness, “then he is God-like” (1569–1570), the *AMS* stress the process by employing “to come to the likeness” (13). The *AMS* thus accentuate the dynamics of the growing in likeness, stating that it comes “gradually.” (15)

A fifth difference is that Ruusbroec’s statement on being obedient to the Holy Church and God’s commandments has been replaced by fearing God. This seems to be more from emphasising the inner exercise rather than devaluing the Church; the Holy Church is referred to as such almost twenty times

in the whole sermon collection. It is striking though that in the sixteenth-century context of the decay of monastic and Catholic life sermon 111 left out the reference to the Church. This might be due to the fact that the St. Agnes convent was still a vital religious community throughout the sixteenth century, something rather exceptional. This context might have made an appeal to obey the Church less necessary.

3.2. The Second Gift: Mercifulness

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<tr>
<th>Espousals, lines 1575–1580.</th>
<th>AMS, Sermon 111, lines 16–19.</th>
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<td>[1575] And if he exercises himself well in that which he has received from God, then [1576] God gives him the spirit of mercifulness and generosity. Thus he becomes [1577] generous of heart, meek and merciful; thus he is more full of life and the more [1578] (God)-like. And he feels that he is resting more in God, broader and deeper in [1579] virtues than before; and the likeness and the rest have the more savour for him [1580] insofar as he is more (God)-like.</td>
<td>[16] Secondly, he is fed with the second bread, which is the gift of mercifulness. [17] This gift is an outpouring of the ground towards God and neighbour in all meek love and compassion towards everyone’s needs. [18] And with this gift, the human person becomes more like Christ, and lives more in God than he did before. [19] For through the constant, generous inflowing into God and flowing out towards his neighbour, he feels broader and stronger in virtues than when he was resting in the likeness before; however, this rest has a much more sweet taste for him the more he has become Christ-like in all virtues and holiness.</td>
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The text of the second gift in the AMS is much more similar to Ruusbroec’s Espousals than that of the first gift. The AMS copy over Ruusbroec’s idea of a virtuous life, which encompasses a meek love towards one’s neighbour. Both texts speak of this meekness as a gift that enables one to grow in likeness to God: the virtues become broader and deeper (Espousals 1587) or broader and stronger (AMS 19).

However, the author of the AMS has made some important modifications. First, the AMS add the “outpouring of the ground towards God and neighbour” in line 17. Ground, though not absent in Ruusbroec, is used much more often in the AMS, relatively speaking, and describes the innermost being

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46) This counting is based on the digital version of the transcription of the sermons.
of the person, where God indwells. The German and Dutch late medieval mystics, such as Hadewijch, employed the metaphor ground to describe the dynamics of the human-God relationship. Especially in the Middle German region, the mystics of the fourteenth-century Rhineland, like Eckhart and Tauler, used ground and its substantive relatives like abyss and groundlessness very frequently to describe the closeness of God and the person. The frequent use of ground seems to provide more evidence for the influence of Rhineland mysticism in the AMS. A second change is the object of the likeness. Whereas Ruusbroec employs Godlike (1578 and 1580), the AMS have consistently changed this into Christ-like (18 and 19). Again, the Christology is brought out much more clearly.

Third, Ruusbroec’s statement that “he feels that he is resting more in God, broader and deeper in virtues than before” (1578) has been modified in the

48) The metaphor of ground occurs together with related adjectives, like bottomlessness and fathomlessness, almost 350 times in the preliminary digital version of the critical edition of the AMS. It appears also around 300 times in Ruusbroec’s Opera Omnia. The metaphor of gront itself appears around 100 times. However, the Opera Omnia’s word length is twice that of the AMS. The metaphor of abyss occurs in Ruusbroec’s Opera Omnia around 40 times. These metaphors express that the ground of the human person is open and infinite, precisely because the infinite Godhead dwells in the soul.


51) As pointed out earlier, De Vooijs indicated that there were strong theological similarities between Eckhart and the AMS. The use of abyss (afgrunt) hints, according to him, at such a correspondence. See Vooys, ‘Meister Eckhart en de Nederlandse mystiek’ (see above, n. 14), p. 56.
AMS. The AMS state that one “lives more in God than he did before” (18) and that “he feels broader and stronger in virtues than when he was resting in the likeness before.” (19) Whereas Ruusbroec emphasises more the value of resting, the AMS connect the resting in God more explicitly with a Christ-like virtuous life. Thus, the focus is more on the Christ-like life in the AMS. This is related to the general emphasis on Christ which is more explicitly mentioned in the AMS (18). The fourth difference is the aforementioned shift from Ruusbroec’s “to be God-like” (1580) to the AMS’ “to become Christ-like” (19), indicating a greater awareness about the process of growing in likeness.

3.3. The Third Gift: Knowledge and Discernment

_Espousals_, lines 1581–1595

[1581] And if he exercises himself well here, with great zeal and with single inten-
[1582] tion, striving against whatever is opposed to virtues, then he obtains the
[1583] third gift, which is knowledge and discernment. Thus he becomes reasonable,
[1584] and he knows what he has to do or omit, and when he ought to give or take.

_AMS_, Sermon 111, lines 20–24

[20] If a person exercises himself well in this gift and opposes all sin strongly
[21] with a single intention, immediately we deserve to receive the third gift,
[22] which is holy knowledge, competence, and discernment. [21] With this, a
[23] person is nourished by Christ, the light of truth, in such a way that he
[24] becomes so enlightened and discrete in his reason, that he can know in the light
[25] of truth what he has to reject or receive. [22] And just as the gift of understanding
directs the person towards the inner and uppermost things, so this gift teaches us to
note distinctively all manners of virtuous outgoing.

[1591] A person will thus exercise himself with great zeal, and [1592] follow his
single intention with discernment. And he must guard himself [1593] against
everything contrary to virtues, and always sit down in humility at the feet [1594] of
Christ; thus he increases in virtues and in likeness at every moment. And if he [1595]
conducts himself in this way, he cannot err.

[23] With this third bread of this third blessed gift Christ nourishes us very
blissfully, if at least we possess in us the will to die to sin and to experience the
virtues, and to pursue with all diligence the willingness to always understand the
virtues more clearly and perfectly, and, if we obtain them, to constantly persevere in
them.

[24] In this, a person shall not spare himself, but he shall diligently try to remain
connected to it [i.e. gift of knowledge] without cease, with reasonableness and
discretion, for the virtue is worth all effort.
The editing pattern of gift three is representative for the way in which Ruusbroec’s gifts three, four, five, and six are incorporated into the *AMS*. The structure of the texts shows that the editor has added, changed, and especially left out much from Ruusbroec’s original text, so that the texts became comparatively shorter. The structure shows us three different modifications. First, two passages in gift three correspond: the *AMS*, line 20–21 corresponds with the *Espousals* lines 1581–1584, and *AMS* line 23 corresponds to the *Espousals* lines 1591–1595. Second, the *AMS* lines 22 and 24 are typical of the author’s own spirituality: there are no parallels in the *Espousals*. Third, two passages from the *Espousals* have been left out completely: the lines 1585–1591 and 1595–1601.

The first editing process identified is the parallel yet modified passages. The *AMS* have again explicitly added the Christology by stating that the gift comes from Christ. (20–21). Second, Ruusbroec’s “to give or take” (1585) has been changed into “reject or receive.” The *AMS* seem to accentuate a more modest attitude toward God; a person cannot take, but he can only receive or reject what God bestows on him/her. The person should focus on living a virtuous life (22). Third, personal nouns are sometimes communalised. This is seen in the added passages, for example line 22 speaks about “this gift teaches us.” The *AMS* are more explicitly hortatory.

Fourth, the *AMS* lines 22 and 24 that replace two passages of 1585–1591 and 1595–1604 testify to the *AMS*’ very different emphasis. Ruusbroec’s passage concluding with “And he rests in God through love and the singleness of his intention. And the entire active life consists in this,” (1589–1591) seems to have emphasised resting in God too much and undervalued the active virtuous life according to the *AMS*, as it replaces this phrase by stating that the gift “teaches us to note distinctively all manners of virtuous outgoing” (22). The same pattern becomes even clearer when we see what has been left out by not integrating the lines 1595–1604. There Ruusbroec speaks about people who though they are good because of their virtuous life, nevertheless remain solely outward persons who do not enter the inner life:

And if, in his practices, […] he remains outward more than in the reality and the truth that are thereby signified, then he always remains an outward person, though by single intention in his good works he is saved. And therefore, if a person would approach God and elevate his practice and his life, then he must go in from the activities to their ultimate reason, and from the signs to the truth. Thus he becomes master over his works, (and he comes to) know the truth, and he enters an inner life.52

52) *Espousals* b1598–1605.
In contrast to Ruusbroec’s admonishment that a outward virtuous life should not be the only ultimate aim for one who wants to approach God inwardly, the AMS prefer to emphasise that “In this, a person shall not spare himself, […] for the virtue is worthy of all work.” (24). This highlighting of virtues testifies to a slightly different accent in spirituality. Again, the process-nature of gaining virtues is depicted more intensely and with verbs that have a more ascetic connotation. Where Ruusbroec writes that one should guard oneself against “everything contrary to virtues” in line 1593, the AMS point out that one should have the “will to die to sin” and to “persevere” (23).

Fifth, in the lines 1586–1589, Ruusbroec elaborates on the likeness of the human person to God. According to him, the human person bears “the likeness to the Holy Trinity” (1589) when “he is obedient and submissive to the Father, and reasonable and discerning with respect to the Son, and generous and merciful with respect to the Holy Spirit.” (1587–1589) The AMS have left out this Trinitarian passage. Instead, the sermons have inserted that Christ nourishes the person with His gift (23). The Trinity is of course an important theme for the AMS; many sermons refer to the experience of being one with the Trinity, of offering oneself with the Son to the Father, and experiencing the love of the Father in the Son in their mutual Love.

What seems to be at stake here is that the likeness to God is more closely connected to becoming Christ-like than like the Trinity. The imitation of virtues is coupled more with the imitation of Christ’s divinity and humanity. This would fit the general pattern of the AMS in which Christ’s humanity is emphasised.

Sixth, it is striking that line 22 of the AMS refers already to the sixth gift, not with a quotation but with an autonomous summary of the gift. This shows that the author of the AMS has mastered the content of the Espousals so well that s/he is able to make cross-references. In the same way, line 49 and 50 in the seventh gift are a paraphrase of another part of the Espousals where Ruusbroec

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53) The Trinitarian mysticism is for example elaborated on in the sermons for Christmas’ mass: “There she [Mary] realises that the Father begets his Son and the Holy Spirit goes out from them both, and that she herself is, in silent passiveness, the true hidden work of God, and that she is engendered by the Father in the Son, and returns again with the Son into the Father, and she is their mutual love, through the Holy Spirit.” (AMS, Sermon 9, fol. 15ª). This translation will be published in a special issue of Ons Geestelijk Erf on the AMS, which will appear in 2010.
elaborates on the gifts in general, namely the lines 2134–2137. The author is a sovereign master of the text, adept in excerpting, and s/he manages to integrate these excerpts into a coherent new text.

Seventh, some words have undergone a one-to-one change. Ruusbroec’s single (eenvuldigher) has been changed every time to simple (also meaning “single”) throughout the AMS, not only in the third gift. In the same way, Ruusbroec’s love (minne) has often, though not always, been changed into love (liefte). These changes could spring from the updating of fourteenth-century language to a more standard version of sixteenth-century language, as happened quite often with medieval sermons. The development of the Dutch language has to be further researched into before conclusions can be drawn from these changes.

3.4. Gift Six: Understanding

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<th>Espousals, lines 1675–1807</th>
<th>AMS, Sermon 111, lines 34–43</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[1675] If a person remains in this forsakenness without other preference, just as one [1676] who neither wills nor knows anything else, then he has the spirit of counsel in [1677] double (measure), for he satisfies the will and the counsel of God in working and [1678] in suffering and in self-forsakenness and</td>
<td>[34] If this person remains in this negation of himself, without any revocation, neither willing nor desiring anything else, then he has the double spirit of counsel in him, which means doing great things with careful work, and suffering severe things because of his own dying and mortification of himself.</td>
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54) The AMS text is: “[49] Welckegodlicke geruerandersnyetenisdandat die vruchtbaer eenheitdergodheidvanonseystdiegelijcheitdermynnenendederdoechden.[50] Hierom werden wij geruert in elcke ogenblick mit een nye maeninge, om dat wij altijd mit meerre gelichkeit moegen vernijet werden.” This is very similar to the Middle Dutch version of the Espousals, b2134–2137: “Want die vruchtbaer eenicheit gods houdet hare boven die eeninge onser crachte, ende eyschet ons altoes ghelijcheit in minnen ende in doechden. Ende hier omme werde wij alle uren van nuwes gherenen, op dat wij alle uren nuwer ende ghelijcker werden in doechden.”

55) One example is the fourteenth-century Middle English sermon of the preaching at Paul’s Cross, to be dated in 1387 or 1388. The sixteenth-century editor of the 1540s and 1550s printed versions mentions in his prologue that the sermon is published here in the original version “save tholde and rude Englysh ther of mended here and there.” See, Alexandra Walsham, ‘Inventing the Lollard Past: The Afterlife of a Medieval Sermon in Early Modern England,’ Journal of Ecclesiastical History 58, no. 4 (2007): 628–655, there 628–629 and 642, n. 53. Further research needs to explore the history of these mystical terms so as to prove a linguistic development.
in submissive obedience. And nature is 1679 enriched to the highest (degree), and he is capable of being enlightened as to 1680 the spirit. And therefore, God gives him the sixth gift, that is, the spirit of 1681 understanding. This gift we have previously likened to a fountain with three 1682 streams, for it established our spirit in unity, and it reveals the truth, and it 1683 creates a broad love in commonness.

[35] Then nature is enriched with the highest beauty and is apt to be enlightened as to the spirit, and deserves to be nourished with the sixth bread, which means to be enlightened with the gift of understanding, which unites and fortifies our spirit in unity and reveals the brightest truth.

[36] This is a supernatural light that seeks to enlighten our understanding, if we want to encounter it interiorly.

[1753] [...] If, by divine love we are dead to ourselves in God, and live and walk in the spirit [...].

[37] It demands a dying of nature and a living in the Spirit.

[38] Thus, if the inner person is separated from the outer person, then one immediately finds the light and we receive it in our understanding.

[39] For dying of nature we receive this gift of understanding, and when we receive her, we die as to our nature.

[1767] For those 1768 who are most simple are the most quiet and the most totally peaceful in them- 1769 selves, and they are the most deeply sunken away in God, and they are the most 1770 utterly enlightened in understanding, and the most utterly manifold in good 1771 works, and the most utterly common in outflowing love. And they are the least 1772 hindered, for they are the most God-like. For He is simplicity in His being, 1773 clarity in understanding, and an outflowing common love in His working. And 1774 the more God-like we are in these three, the more we are united with Him.

[40] And whoever receives this gift is richer in inner simplicity, meeker and more at peace in his heart, deeper in the flood of the Godhead, enlightened in understanding, fertile in good works, and more common in the flowing out of love.

[41] And, because they are the most like God—Who is the most simple in being, the clarity in understanding, and the most outflowing and most common in love—in the flood of their works, therefore, they are [only] hindered by little intermediaries; and the more God-like they are in these three, the more they are united with and the closer to God.
We shall always remain with God in unity, and eternally flow forth, with God and with all the saints, in common love, and always turn inwards again with thanks and with praise, and with enjoyable love sink away from ourselves into essential rest. This is the richest life that I know, and hereby we possess the gift of understanding.

Therefore, let us preserve the simplicity of our mind, climbing over all images and likenesses, and note all things with enlightened reason, and cover all things with a unifying love, always remaining in unity with God, in order to flow out constantly in a common love with God and all the saints, and return with the flood of love into the same without delay, with praise and thanks, and without intermediaries, and to drown with the weight of love in the noble rest of enjoyment.

This structure shows us three different kinds of modifications. First, four passages in this gift correspond: the AMS, line 34–35 corresponds to the Espousals lines 1675–1683, AMS line 37 corresponds to the Espousals line 1753, AMS lines 40–41 correspond to Espousals line 1767–1774 and finally, AMS lines 42–43 correspond to Espousals lines 1803–1807. Second, the author has inserted several passages into the sermon: the lines 36 and 38–39 have no parallel in the Espousals. Third, much has been left out in three passages: the lines 1683–1752, 1754–1766, and 1774–1803.

A first change is a stronger accent on the self-mortification in the AMS. In line 34, the AMS exhort a person to “dying and mortification” instead of Ruusbroec’s “self-forsakenness and submissive obedience” and to “suffer severe things” instead of “in suffering.” In the lines 38–39, which are not found in the Espousals, the AMS again stress the dying of nature as a condition to receive the gift. A second adaptation is the application of a more hortatory style. In line 37, the AMS explains that “it demands a dying of nature.” In the same manner, line 42 admonishes in a more conditional way to “let us preserve, […] always remaining in unity” in contrast to Ruusbroec’s “we shall always remain.” The accent on the exhortation towards a growing in likeness with God is also noticeable in AMS line 41. Where Ruusbroec states that “they are the least hindered,” the AMS amend this to “they are prevented by little intermediaries.” Although the AMS still articulate that being God-like and resting in God are dynamically interwoven, and this do not exclude the concept of mystical union

560 Cf. 1 Pt. 4, 8: “love covers a multitude of sins.”
with God, the AMS seem to put a slight difference by accentuating the likeness to God more than Ruusbroec does.

Third, the passages that have been left out are of a more metaphorical character. The image of the “fountain with the three streams” of the Espousals lines 1681–1682 has disappeared in line 35. In the same way, the big passage of the lines 1683–1752 explains the sixth gift with the metaphor of the sun shining, which has simple brightness and its warmth as “common for the whole world” (1686). This is interpreted as the simplicity of the spirit. The third passage, 1774–1803, explains what it means to be useful for the whole world, for example praying for all sinners. This metaphorical language, as well as the mention of the usefulness for the entire world, is less present in this sermon.

Synthesis and Conclusion

Within the internal dynamics of the St. Agnes community that testified to a strikingly vibrant spiritual life amidst the external crisis wherein the Church sought to revitalise its faith, the writer of the AMS incorporated Ruusbroec’s treatise on the seven gifts of the Spirit into the cycle of the liturgical year with many modifications in a way s/he thought most appropriate to that time. The differences between the AMS and Ruusbroec are clearly visible on the level of the structure. First, by integrating Ruusbroec’s treatise into the Cycle of the Liturgical Year, the AMS explicitly propagate the interconnection between mystical life and liturgy and can therefore be characterised as a liturgical-mystical work, which is less the case with Ruusbroec. The AMS share this characteristic together with their contemporaries like the Temple and the Pearl. Second, the AMS opt for the edifying and instructing tool of a sermon, thereby combining their mystical theology with the hortatory function of appealing to an audience.

On the micro-level of the gifts, three strategies were analysed: passages that were left out, modified, and added. Several passages from Ruusbroec have been left out, namely the more Trinitarian passages related to the likeness of the human person, the descriptions with the metaphors from nature, the awareness of being useful to the whole world and Ruusbroec’s description of people who are indeed good and virtuous but do not enter into an inner life. Instead, the AMS added passages that testify to a distinct spirituality. First, with regard to Christology, Christ’s divine and human nature are both overtly present in the sermon. The imitation of Christ’s virtues and suffering is accentuated and depicted as an integral part of the mystical life. Second, the value of a virtuous life as such is more accentuated. This is connected to a third difference,
stronger emphasis on the *imitatio Christi*, which connects with a more ascetic appeal to put more effort in reaching a likeness to Christ. In general, the AMS focus more on likeness to Christ than mystical unity.

The modified passages showed that the sermon is more hortatory and admonishing. First, the accent is put on the person’s effort of striving for the likeness, whereas Ruusbroec accentuates that one possesses the likeness and union with God. Second, the personal nouns tend to be the more communal we rather than the individual I or the indication of “a person.” Third, the sermon uses Ruusbroec in a very independent manner, freely paraphrasing and modifying. This indicates a process in which the original text is excerpted and dealt with in a very independent way. Fourth, some mystical terms are consistently changed into different terms, probably to modernise the language.

Several of these adaptations are related to the genre of the sermon: the more explicit hortatory function, the use of the communal we, etc. Moreover, contemporary works such as the *Pearl* and the *Temple* show a similar pattern in theological themes. All pay much attention to the imitation of Christ in general and his suffering in particular. The *Temple* elaborates in chapter 6 on the imitation of Christ, which is “to mirror ourselves to that loving image of our Lord Jesus Christ,”⁵⁷ which is explicitly linked to both his human and divine nature.⁵⁸ The *Pearl* as well refers to the imitation of Christ, when the soul is admonished for “unlikeness to the image of Jesus Christ crucified.”⁵⁹ Many chapters of the *Pearl* refer to Christ already in the title.⁶⁰ The focus on Christ leads to an emphasis on depicting the good person as a Christ-like person rather than God-like or someone in whom the image of the Trinity is realised.

The emphasis on the virtuous imitation of Christ’s humanity, combined with adjectives reminiscent of the asceticism of self-detachment, is also clearly visible in the *Temple*, for example, where the soul is exhorted to “cast off all self-love and all that is creaturely, and stands completely naked and empty of all multiplicity. […] Therefore, when the human person is disposed in such a

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⁵⁸) Ibid., pp. 259, and 262.
⁶⁰) See for example the following titles: Chapter 13 (How the soul should bathe herself in the precious blood of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, and how she should climb up, by three rungs, through Christ Jesus); Chapter 14 (First, how one should ascend by means of Christ’s wounded body), et cetera. Especially striking are the subtiles of Chapter 45: “How the devout soul should always dwell in the cross and in the passion of her Bridgroom,” and thereafter several titles pointing to the several stages of the Crucifixion, for example: “How, at the hour of Sext, she is crucified.” (Ibid., pp. 239, 240, 288, and 291).
pure way that his heart and soul are anxious about nothing but God, and what
his own physical needs demand (which he in a rightly ordered way can take by
God and have it with God) [...]”.61 In the same way, the *Pearl* admonishes but
to “be annihilated ourselves and to die to our nature so that God should live
in us.” 62 The *AMS* put comparatively more value on the *imitatio Christi* and
to a certain extent they emphasise the *unio mystica* less.

The similarities between the accents of the *AMS* and the *Temple* and the
*Pearl* indicate that these kinds of theological ideas were seen as the most appro-
priate reaction to the changes revitalising the Catholic Church and sustaining
the deep spiritual life of the St. Agnes community. The identified theological
accents in the *AMS*, such as the turn towards a more explicit liturgical-mystical
spirituality, testified to in the, until that moment, rare genre of sermons as
a mystical commentary alongside the liturgical year, and the emphasising of
Christ’s humanity the *imitatio Christi*, were believed crucial to emphasise in
the sixteenth-century crisis and were part of a revival of the Catholic identity
and spirituality.

The observed characteristics of the *AMS* and of the contemporaneous texts
of the *Pearl* and the *Temple* need to be integrated into the ongoing research into
sixteenth-century theology, spirituality, and mysticism in the Low Countries.
Further research needs to be done in order to show more parallel and/or
different spiritual and theological changes in the region of the Low Countries
and beyond. This will cast more light on both the uniqueness of the *AMS* and
its being rooted in that context.

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Appendix. *Arnhem Mystical Sermons*, Sermon 111 (fol. 249v–254bis)\(^{63}\)

**Opten sovenden sondach**\(^{64}\)

249\(^{vb}\) **My ontfermt der scharen, want siet, sy blijven drie dagen by my ende en hebben nyet dat si eten mochten.**\(^{65}\)

[1] Eya, alre liefsten, laet ons nu mercken welcke schaeren dit nu in ons sijn die by Christum drie dagen blijven, die hi ontfermt want si nyet en hebben te eten.\\n
[2] Die schaer was zeer groet die mit Jhesu was.\(^{66}\) [3] En is daerom die schaer onser uutterlicker synnen, onser zeeden ende leden, onser ynliecker synnen ende cracht ende affectien, mit dat gemoede, die mynne ende verstandenisse ons geestes niet wael een zeer groete schaer, die soe voel te onvertellicker sijn als sy ye meer in hem gehadt hebben, ende noch in hem hebben dat | [dat] god nyet en is? [4] Siet, dese zeer groete schaeren moeten drie dagen als mit enen grondeloesen, weselicken rouwe ende mit een grondeloes, ewich ontsyncken alles dat se sijn ende hebben geweest, ende dan daer toe ten derden mit een onwetelick, ewilick verliesen hem selven te mael offeren in gode alre liefste, onbekende wil, ende blijven aldus sonder eten, dat hem selven nyet gebruckende, by gode in Jhesum, dat licht der waerheit, dan sal inden derden dach—als in dat onwetelick, ewige verliesen ende offeren in gode—Christum.\\n
250\(^{vb}\) **Jhesum, dat licht der waer-heit, sich aver onse ontellickie schaeren ontfermen.**\\n

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\(^{63}\) The transcription of this sermon has been prepared by Professor Kees Schepers, who is preparing a critical edition of the *Arnhem Mystical Sermons*. I am grateful for his permission to publish this transcription.

\(^{64}\) Occasion: Dominica 7 post trinitatem (T\(^{48}\)). Readings: Epistle Rm 6:19–23; Gospel: Mc 8:1–9.

\(^{65}\) Mc 8:2: *Misereor super turbam: quia ecce iam triduo sustinent me, nec habent quod manducent.*

\(^{66}\) Mc 8:1.
alre heiliciteit naeder zielen ende godliciciteit naeden geest int wesen. [9] Hi leert onser scharen hoe si sullen leven, lijden ende volgen sijn volmaecte, mynlicke beelt.


II


[20] Ist dat zich een mensche in deser gaven mit vlyt oeffent ende hem mit een sympel meyninge sterckelick set tegen alle sunden, terstont verdy nen wij te ontfangen die derde gave, als die helige wetentheid, const of bescheydenheit.

[21] Hier mede wort een mensche van Christo, dat | licht der waerheit, alsoe gespijst, dat hi inder reden alsoe verlicht ende discreet wort dat hi weten can int licht der waerheit wat hi versmaden of ontfangen sal. [22] Ende gelick die gave des verstants den mensche schickt tot die inwendige ende averste dingen, alsoe leert onse dese gave onderscheylediek te mercken alle manieren der doechtlicker uutganck. [23] Mit dit derde broet deser derder gebenedider gaven spijst Christo ons sellichlick, wanneer wij ten mynsten in ons hebben die sunden te willen sterven ende | die doechden te willen beleven, ende daer nae mit alre neerstichet te staen om altoes die doechden noch claerre ende volmaeceter te willen verstaen, ende als wij se vercregen hebben, stadelick daer in te willen volherden. [24] Hier in en sal sich die mensche nyet sparen, mer mit vlytigen arbeyt nae redelichet ende discretie sonder aflaten daer in te blijven hangen, want die doechde is alles arbeyts weerdich.

[25] Daer nae wort die mensche gespijst ende aengedient dat vierde broet, als die gave der stercheit. [26] Daer mede verwnyt hi alle passien der zielen ende versmaet sonder myddel alle dingen ende ver-[drijeft mandelick alle verstroeytheit. [27] Ende nae dien dat hi aldus van allen vrye geworden is, soe ontvallen hem alle creatueren, ende sonder arbeyt can hi zich selven vergaderen in hem selven, ende wort mit brandiger mynnen ontsteken ende te mael mit ynniger devotien vervult, ende keert hem stadelick mit een sympel meyninge, mit groeter begeer, mit lof ende danckaerheit tot God.

[28] Wanneer wij dan mit seligen arbeyt alle becommernisse ende verstroeynge ende alle ongeordenyerde affectien avergegaen sijn, ende wij verschuwen hebben ende ledich staen alle godliche troestinge ende | gaven gods om die mynne des gemynede, om alleen puerlick in hem te rusten, soe verdy nen wij gevoedt ende gespijst te werden van dat vijfte broet, als die gave des raets. [29] Dese gave ontfangen wij wanneer wij geens syns van enich creatuer of van die godlicke gaven gehyndert connen werden, mer in verworpenheit ons selfes connen volherden, ende mit een sympel meyninge god sueke<n>, lance<n> ende meynen, ende altoes gaelende te staen nae enen hoegeren graet. [30] Dese gave des raets is een inwendich rueren des heiligen geeste die onse mynnen cracht van bynnen ruert, ende eyst | ons te schouwen alle becommernisse ende gerucht deser werlt ende alle uutwendichet, ende leert ons mynnen de eenheit des geestes. [31] Soe wie disen raet gehoersan is, in hem sterft alle mennichvoldichet ende hi criget een mynlick innegyen in die eenheit. [32] Die uut die cracht der mynnen sijnen eygenen wil verwnty, die is den raet
gods gehoersam volcoemelick. [33] In desen raet wort die natuer opt hoogste verdruckt, mer god wort groetelicst verheven. [34] Blijft die mensche in dese versakinge sijns selves sonder enich wederroepinge, niet anders willende noch begerens, soe heeft hi in hem | den dubbelden geest des raets, als te doen groete dingen mit froemen arbeyt, ende herden dingen te lijen doer eygen sterven ende doedinge sijns selves.

[35] Dan is die natuer veryert mit die hoogste schoenheit ende is bequaem van god verlicht te werden naeden geest, ende verdient gespijt te werden van dat seste broet, als verlicht te werden mit die gave des verstants, die onse geest enicht ende vesticht in die eenheit ende apenbaert die alre luchtichtste waerheit. [36] Dit is een avernatuerlick licht dat onse verstant begeert te verlichten, ist dat wij dit van bynnlen willen ontmooten. [37] Het eyst | een sterven der natueren ende een leven inden geest. [38] Alsoe, wort die inwendige mensche ges hemen vanden uutwendigen mensche, dan soe vijntmen terstont dat licht ende ontfange[n]t in onse verstant. [39] Want stervende die natuer ontfangen wij die gave des verstants, ende hoer ontfangende, soo sterven wij die natuer. [40] Ende soe wie dese gave ontfanget, die is inder inwendiger sympeleheit rijcker, van herten sachmoediger ende gevreden, inden vloet der godheit dieper, inden verstant claere, in guede werken vruchtbare ende in die uutvloeyende liefte gemeynre. [41] Ende want si gode—die die alre sympel- ste in wesen, die claerheit in der verstandenisse ende die uutvloeyenste ende gemeynste in mynnen is—die alre gelijckste sijn inden vloet hoerre werken, daerom werden si mit cleynen myddelen voercoemen; ende soo voel te meer sy gode in desen drien gelijcker sijn, soo voel te eniger ende te naerre sijn se gode. [42] Hier om, laet ons bewaeren die sympeleheit ons gedancks, averclymmende alle beelden ende gelickenissen, ende aenmercken alle dingen mit verlichter reden, ende bedecken alle dingen mit een gemeyne liefte, blijvende altijt mit gode in enicheit om stadelick mit gode ende alle heiligen uut te vloeyen in een gemeyne liefte, ende sonder merren mit die vloet der mynnen weder te keren mit lof ende dancaerheit in dat selve, ende mit dat gewicht der mynnen sonder myddel te verdreucken in die edel rust der gebruckinge. [43] Dit is dat rickste leven dat wij bekennen, daer mede een mensche volcoemelick besit die gave des verstants. [44] Mer in die wedervloet der gebruckinge, dats in die opdraginge of offerhande des geestes, heeft hoer die eenheit als een onbegripelicked duysternisse, welcks wijs ende ongemetenheit is onbekent. [45] Want die geest mit mynnten ende sympelre meyninge werckelick offert alle doechden ende | sich selven baven alle doechden.

[46] Onder dese mynlickge offerhande soe wort des mynnende menschen geest gespijt mit dat sovende broet, als mit die gave der wijsheit. [47] Dese gave
is een godlick geruer in die eenheit ons geestes ende een fonteynlick uutvloet alre gaven, gratien ende alle doechden. \[48\] In deser gaven smaeckt een yegelick sijn oeffeninge nae cracht des godlicken geruers ende nae maete sijnre mynnyn. \[49\] Welcke godlicke geruer anders nyet en is dan dat die vruchtbaer eenheit der godheit van ons eyst die gelijcheit der mynnyn ende der doechden. \[50\]

Hierom werden wy \[4b\] geruert in elcke ogenblick mit een nye maeninge, om dat wij altijt mit meerre gelicheit moegen vernijet werden. \[51\] Dit rueren is dat leste myddel tusschen ons ende gode, tusschen werckende ende rusten, tusschen wijs ende beroevinge der wijsen, welck god in ons voer alle gaven werckt.

III

\[52\] Mer nae dien dat wij in onser oeffeninge mit die ondersuekinge of vermoeginge onser mynnyn god gesocht hebben hent in dat ynestes ons geestes—tot dat wij inden gedanck sympel, rustich, bloet van beelden, onbewegelick ende vrije geworden sijn, ons selven gestorven ende gode \[4a\] levente—, dan gevoelen wij daer nae dat alle gratien ende alle gaven gevallen sijn in die eenheit der auster crachten, baven reden nochtans nyet sonder die reden. \[53\] Want wij vernemen ons geruert te werden, hoe wel die merckinge des geruers, die reden ende alle geschapen gemerck ontbreeckt ende voer nyet is, om dat dat schijnsel des onbegrypelicken lichts sich selven in die eenheit der auster crachten soo groetelick offert, soe dat die geschapen werckende mit die bescheyden merckinge moeten vallen ende opholden, ende onse werck wort gedwongen alleen te lijden dat \[4b\] godlice werck.

\[54\] Eya alre liefsten, och of wij aldus drie dagen vastende, dats ons selven in ghenen dingen gebruckende, den here Christum Jhesum, dat licht der waerheit, hier om mochten volgen, dat wij nae een stadich, weselick berouwe ende afgaen alre myddelen ende gebroken, mit een onwetelick, ewich verliesen ende offerens ons selven in gode mochten verdijen aldus gesprijst ende verzaeedet te werden mit des alre costelicste broeden der sovenvoldiger gaven des heiligen geestes, op dat die godlicke ende menschelick natur Christi Jhesu een wederantwoerdinge van ons hebben mocht in gelicheit der doechden, \[4a\] in eenheit der heilicheit, in weselicheit der volmaectheit ende in gebruckinge der ewiger selicheit, daerom wij geschapen sijn. \[55\] Dat verleen ons god allen. \[56\] Amen.