AOSIS

The Trinitarian and Christological *Minnemystik* of the Flemish beguine Hadewijch of Antwerp (fl. 1240)

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This article provides an original reappraisal of the notion of *Minnemystik* in the work of the 13th-century Flemish beguine Hadewijch of Antwerp (fl. 1240), with specific reference to its Trinitarian and Christological orientations. After an introduction to the nature and origins of Hadewijch's work, relating to the discovery of four extant manuscripts (MS.A [2879–2880], MS.B [2877–2878], BS.C and the incomplete MS.D [385 II]) in Belgium in 1838, followed by an elucidation of the experience-driven epistemology of the Victorians Richard of St Victor (d. 1173) and Hugo of St Victor (1079–1141) as her key early scholastic influences, Hadewijch's *Minnemystik* is distinguished from *Wesenmystik*, as encountered in the mystical work of her French contemporary and beguine counterpart, Marguerite Porete (1250–1310). From this discursive basis, Hadewijch's *Minnemystik* is reassessed and represented as pertinently Trinitarian and Christological in orientation, and therefore as a theological (and not merely an enticing 'mystical-sexual') presentation from the 13th century.

Keywords: beguine spirituality; experience-driven epistemology; Hadewijch of Antwerp (fl. 1240); Hugo of St Victor (1079–1141); Koninklijke Bibliotheek België; manuscripts MS.A (2879–2880), MS.B (2877–2878); BS.C; MS.D (385 II); Marguerite Porete (1250–1310); Minnemystik; Richard of St Victor (d. 1173); Wesenmystik.

Beguine Hadewijch: The first proponent of a Medieval *Minnemystik*

The objective of this article is to articulate the *Minnemystik* of the Flemish beguine Hadewijch of Antwerp (fl.1240) as Trinitarian and Christological in orientation, and therefore as a pertinent theological presentation from the 13th century. This objective is broadly achieved by presenting an introduction to the Victorian (experience-driven) epistemology of *Minnemystik* and distinguishing it from *Wesenmystik*, whereby it becomes possible to substantiate Hadewijch's erotic mysticism theologically. More specifically, the article logically and systematically disseminates the most recent outputs in Hadewijch-research, with specific reference to the philosophical-theological exegesis of the relevant and extant primary texts. The article is descriptive analytical in its presentation of an accessible overview of the contextual intellectual history and synthetical in its aim to coherently integrate an independent reading of the primary texts and the most recent secondary texts.[1]

Hadewijch can indeed be regarded as the first and most prominent exponent of what has over the past decades in the niche research been branded as Medieval *Minnemystik*. She forms part of only a small group of female philosophers in the Middle Ages, alongside Héloïse d'Argenteuil (ca.1100–1164; Beukes 2019c), Hildegard,[2] Mechtild von Magdeburg (ca. 1207–1282; Beukes 2019b), Marguerite Porete (1250–1310; Beukes 2020c) and Catherine of Siena (1347–1380; Beukes 2020b). As was the case with her female counterparts, the combination of intense love for God and mystical ecstasy played a decisive role in her work; however, in Hadewijch's oeuvre, this combination is expanded specifically from within the parameters of *Minnemystik*. Whilst the notion of Ciceronian love was paramount in the works of Héloïse and Hildegard and an ethics of 'love for the Other' fundamental in the works of Mechtild and Catherine, Hadewijch found herself in the close company of Marguerite in her development of *Minnemystik*

1. Note that Hadewijch is also known as 'Hadewych of Brabant': for crucial orientation, see the primary texts of Hadewijch (1980:47–121), as well as the commentaries and introductions of Dickens (2009:55–70); Dronke (1984:202–228); Fraeters and De Gier (2014:1–16); Eckenstein (2010:328–353); Eliass (1995:54–64); Hart (1980:1–42); McGinn (2001:1–16); Mommaers (1980:xiii–xxiv); Murk-Jansen (2001:17–30) and Vanneste (1959:9–95).

2. Hadewijch's most direct thematic predecessor was the non-beguine, yet free-spirited Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179), with regard to aspects of their exploration of the relation between eroticism and mysticism (Beukes 2019a:70–75).

(as opposed to Marguerite's *Wesenmystik*[3]): Hadewijch hereby developed a thematic mystics of love, where the relation between God and the human subject acquires a complete, if not startling, erotic character.

The beguines were religious groups in the high Middle Ages, who organised themselves strictly according to gender, structurally akin to the established monastery formations of the 13th century. However, members of a beguine order were not obliged to take formal and binding vows with regard to celibacy or had to relinquish their private property to the order's joint estate (which, precisely, was the primary source of income for the majority of the conventional orders, formally sanctioned by the church; Eckenstein 2010:328–353). Beguines were free to come and go as they pleased but had to stay loyal to the particular order. They were free to leave their order without penalty temporarily but could not return to the specific order once the order was abandoned permanently (Lewis 1989:24). Technically, the beguines did not beg but were dependent on the charity of the particular community they were involved in for their daily provisions. In exchange, they served the community on many levels, including taking care of the ill, the disabled, the elderly and orphans. Indeed, towards the middle of the 13th century, the majority of nurses in France and Germany were beguines.

However, the beguine orders were socially exposed (Neel 1989:322): because the beguines were independent and did not function under the supervision of local monasteries and the provincial bishop, they could not rely on the same sort of protection ordained monks and nuns received in the standard orders. Their characteristic free-spiritedness exposed them to unending accusations of heresy (especially in terms of what was regarded as an anthropocentric theology and an overall humanism), debauchery (which occasionally occurred within same-sex contexts, but was never common amongst the beguines) and public hawking or soliciting (which occurred sporadically but only when a local community renounced their resident beguines; McDonnell 1954:45). In 1311, a year after Marguerite's infamous execution at the stake in Paris, the beguine movement was formally condemned by Pope Clement V (1305–1314) at the council of Vienne, after which the movement was officially banned (Bynum 1984:175). Marguerite's condemnation and execution in 1310 played a decisive role in the eventual outlawing of the beguine movement (Marin 2010:92; Scarborough 2017:315).

Minnemystik[4] can be described as an overtly feminine phenomenon, where the verb *love* [*minne*] is employed to describe the (indeed worldly) unification between God and (wo)man as an (erotic) love relationship: God allows God[5]

to be experienced as Love (*Minne*) by the (female) subject in search of God's love (*minne*). The exceptional feature of the *Minnemystik* as presented in Hadewijch's work is the profound emotional ecstatic nature thereof: the union of God's Love and the subject's love affects the mind and the senses of the human being involved to such an extent that it results in various psychosomatic effects. These effects include intense visionary experiences with a deep-rooted sexual character (as was the case with Hildegard's 'Hildegardisms'; Beukes 2019a:70) and the eradication of human subjectivity (as in Marguerite's 'annihilation of the soul'; Beukes 2020c:2): the experience of the union with God and God's Love leads to a concurrent psychological departure from the Self as well as an expansion of the Self's self-understanding and interpretation of the world.

The central theme of *Minne/minne* took hold of Hadewijch's mind and heart since she was 10 years old (Hart 1980:8). The word 'love' appears on almost every page she wrote since, either with reference to the Middle Dutch word *karitate* (which goes back to the Latin word *caritas*, which can be translated as 'caring love' and implies an authentic beguine 'care for the Other' – Beukes 2020c:2), or *lief* (which Hadewijch employs both as a verb and noun, however, reserved only for Christ ['he is my *lief*'] with the mystical, psychosomatic reaction ['I *lief* my Beloved with my heart and soul and limbs']), or this word she uses most frequently and consistently, *minne* (borrowed from romantic love terminology in early Medieval royal courts and which Hadewijch employs to indicate the *experience* of the Trinity's Love [capitalised, *Minne*] and her answer [love, uncapitalised, *minne*]) to the Trinity's Love. *Minne* thus refers to the *experience* of God or experiencing divine Love: '[...] *minne* is an experience where the soul experiences her relation to God from the dynamics of a relationship' (De Paepe 1967:331). Hadewijch nevertheless bears in mind that this experienced reality refers to an objective actuality, which itself can only be understood relationally (*Spaapen en Mommaers*, in Hart 1980:8 [fn. 28]; 360 [fn. 28]).

Consider this astounding (yet rather typical) example of *Minnemystik* in Hadewijch's poetry: (Vision 7, see the beginning of Visions 1 and 14 as well; Hadewijch in Mommaers 1980; cf. Wolfskeel 1989):

> On a certain Pentecost Sunday, I had a vision at dawn. Matins were being sung in the church, and I was present. My heart and my veins and all my limbs trembled and quivered with eager desire [...] a madness and fear beset my mind that it seemed to me that if I do not content my Beloved, and my Beloved did not fulfil my desire, I will die going mad and I will be so mad that I must die. On that day my mind was beset so fearfully and so painfully by wanting love that all my separate limbs threatened to break, and all my separate veins were in travail. (p. xiv, 150)

This and similar descriptions of her in-God experiences must count as some of the most daring and sexually provocative passages in the extensive corpus of Medieval mystical literature: with good reason De Paepe (1967), in his authoritative work *Hadewijch Strofische Gedichten – Een studie*

3.For a clarification of *Wesenmystik* as distinguished from *Minnemystik*, see the section entitled '*Minnemystik vis-à-vis Wesenmystik*'.

4.In order to maintain equivalence in the international research register, I will be employing the German terms *Minnemystik* and *Wesenmystik*, as customary in the Medieval research index and not present somewhat awkward English translations such as 'love mystics' or 'mystics of being'.

5.Although gender-references to God in the author's work are avoided as far as possible, it is not consistently possible in the realm of *Minnemystik*, where God is experienced and presented as the 'Highest Man'.

van de minne in het kader der 12e en 13e eeuwse mystiek en profane minnelyriek, repeatedly refers to Hadewijch's visions as 'profane love poetry'.

God in Hadewijch's work is thus characterised as so radically accessible and unshielded that God allows Godself to be possessed in this unthinkable and unfathomable way. Compare a few other similar phrases in Hadewijch's subtle yet alluring correspondence, prose and poetry (Hadewijch 1980:43–358): 'May God allow you to really know Him, who He is and how He deals with his maidens, and may He be deeply in you' (pp. 9, 66, line 4):

> The desire for God is often so sweet that it cannot be reconciled with God, because the desire stems from the experience of the senses, rather than from grace, and the experience of nature, rather than the spiritual. (pp. 10, 66–67, line 7)

'Whatever the highest bodily pleasure may be, outside of God, is gluttony' (Hadewijch 1980:79, line 79):

> The measure for love is sweetness. St Bernard (of Clairvaux) therefore noted: 'Jesus is sweet in your mouth'. To speak of the Beloved is the ultimate sweetness, it arouses in my mouth an immeasurable Love. (p. 79, line 111)

> When two become one, nothing may stand between them safe that who made them one in the first place. That is Love, by which God and his beloved becomes [*sic*] one. (p. 80, line 28)

'That is the unity of the purest love with Him, the love in union with God, which includes His commitment, His manliness, His virility' (Hadewijch 1980:83, line 57); 'This morning the Son kissed me [...] and I became one with Him. The Father made me one with Him and Him one with me' (Hadewijch 1980:84, line 104):

> Words alone and my language alone are adequate for all worldly things [...] but no words and no language can express what I experience as my highest goal with Him. (p. 84, line 121)

Refined and subtle as this *Minnemystik* may be, it is clearly erotically charged. However, Hadewijch's *Minnemystik* does not have the objective so serve an eroticism but stands in the service of transcendence: every erotic passage in Hadewijch's *Minnemystik* is followed by a profound reflection on God's Otherness as Wholly Other. This Beloved who opens himself up in this unthinkable way, presenting himself without reserve, goes beyond every woman and every man: he is the 'Highest Man', who reveals the mystery of his Love by confirming the female beloved's humanity precisely in his Otherness – and progressively grounds her deeper into her human existence. Out of the divine Other, she becomes herself.

It is also crucial to bear in mind that whilst *Minnemystik* employs metaphors that can be associated with erotic love and sexual intimacy, an ontological distinction between the lovers is maintained: it is indeed an intense and passionate love, yet does not pretend to present more than the love of two divergent and always-distinguished subjects (Kocher 2008:3–6). So, the subject who becomes herself out of the divine Other still is and always will be a different subject

than the Other. The mystical union between beloved and Beloved does not compromise God's Otherness and always-differentiated being.

One of Hadewijch's preferred terms for the way God addresses her in this *minne* poetry is '*soete lieve kint*' ['sweet dear child'] (in Middle Dutch a younger woman or girl was addressed in this intimate way typically only by an older woman; Wolfskeel 1989:162[fn. 23]). The erotic experience of God's Love is a spontaneous analogy from the most intimate unification between two human beings – sexual intercourse – and is projected onto God's profound Love for and *caritas* for humanity. Although she terms God's Love as *Minne*, a feminine noun, it is clear that the epitome of this overriding Love is a Man – unquestionably the incarnated God in the totality and reality of his flesh, namely in Jesus Christ. The presence of this Man eventually determines Hadewijch's *Minnemystik* as both Trinitarian and Christological, as will be indicated *infra*.

The discovery of Hadewijch's texts in 1838

A 13th-century beguine contemplating such an acute erotic mysticism would have encountered only silence from her contemporaries, if not outright antagonism. She would have for all practical purposes be silenced and her voice terminated. That was indeed the case with Hadewijch: no reference to her poetry and correspondence is to be found in any of the otherwise hyper-inclusive Medieval commentaries from the middle of the 13th century onward – after all, one of Medieval philosophy's most distinguishing features is the consistent way the rich and acknowledged history of commentary on a particular text is referenced. Medieval authors were committed to these references in glossaries and footnotes, to the point of obsessiveness with forensic-precise citations and quotations. Yet in Hadewijch's case, there is no reference to her as a person or her works in any extant literature after 1240, the time her work is supposed to have flourished.

Something quite remarkable happened in 1838 however: three Belgian Medieval specialists published their findings, based on their discovery of two volumes of text, comprising four books (two of which were poetry-based) and hitherto wholly unknown, from the old document archive in the Royal Library of Belgium.[6] J.F. Willems, F.J. Mone and F.A. Snellaert showed that the two volumes, archived in that shadowy part of the library, were written in Middle Dutch and manually copied in 14th-century handwriting (Hart 1980:1). The two manuscripts, catalogued as MS.A (2879–2880) and MS.B (2877–2878), were previously stored in the Rooklooster of Gemeente Windesheim, whilst both volumes' point of origin could be traced to Brussels itself.

A third and somewhat older manuscript, catalogued as BS.C. and originally archived in Bethlehem near Louvain, containing a cover sheet on which the words *De Beata*

6. Koninklijke Bibliotheek België (KBR).

Hadewycha de Antwerpia: sic cognominatur in catalogo variarum bibliothecarum Belgii circa annum 1487 appear, was utilised by the three researchers in a delicate system of cross-references to undisputedly identify the author of MS.A and MS.B as said 'Hadewycha de Antwerpia'. A fourth and incomplete manuscript, MS.D (385 II), dating from the early 1500s and only edited in 1977 by J. Alaerts, was eventually added to MS.A-C to establish Hadewijch's complete extant oeuvre.

It therefore took almost six centuries to establish Hadewijch of Antwerp as a significant Medieval thinker based on her textual legacy and in terms of which she could finally step forward biographically within the broader discipline of the history of ideas. The four books brought into the spotlight in 1838 were nevertheless unified, edited and translated only in 1980 by a Benedictine nun of Connecticut, Columba Hart, and a Latin philologist from the Ruusbroec Genootschap in Antwerp, Paul Mommaers. This late development of the translation and editing of her works is one of the reasons that Hadewijch's profile is still absent in even very recent introductions to and readers in Medieval philosophy. For instance, not even the extraordinarily inclusive introduction of Gracia and Noone's *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Blackwell, Oxford (2006) nor the massive compilation of Lagerlund's (ed. 2011) *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy, Philosophy between 500 and 1500* contain any sections on Hadewijch. Beukes' (2020a:4.30) 'extensive introduction, *Middeleeuse Filosofie* is an exception to the rule in that it provides a concise overview of the essential aspects of Hadewijch's life and work, based on the most recent specialised research.

However, the relative late discovery of Hadewijch's texts and the even later editing and translation of those texts are not the only reasons for the absence of Hadewijch in mainstream introductions to Medieval philosophy. Her absence from the 'canon of Medieval philosophy' (Beukes 2019e:3) corresponds to all other female thinkers from the period between 410 CE and 1464 CE in mainstream introductions (if Beukes' [2020a:1.1] dating and internal periodisation[7] of Medieval philosophy is accepted). Are these women excluded from mainstream introductions because they were without exception mystical thinkers, because they were women or because at least some of them wrote in Middle Dutch or the Middle High German vernacular and not in Latin?

7.(1) The *post-Roman* period (5–7th centuries [410 {Alaric I and the first successful barbaric invasion of Rome} to 668 {d. Constans II}], with Augustine [354–430] and Boethius [480–524] as the leading philosophical exponents).
(2) The *Carolingian* period (8th and 9th centuries [742 {b. Charles I} to 877 {d. Eriugena}], with Alcuin [730–804] and Eriugena [815–877] as the leading Latin-West exponents of the Carolingian Renaissance, *vis-à-vis* the rise of Arabic philosophy in Baghdad and Andalusia Spain). (3) The *post-Carolingian* period (9th–11th centuries [877 {d. Eriugena} to 1088 {onset of the crusades and the rise of the first universities}], with Anselm [1033–1109] and Abelard [1079–1142] as the most influential amongst the Latin-West thinkers who eventually profited by the rehabilitation of antiquity in the Carolingian Renaissance). (4) The *early-scholastic period* (12–13th centuries [1088 {founding of the University of Bologna, the first European university} to 1225 {b. Aquinas}]). (5) The *high-scholastic period* (13–14th centuries [1225 {b. Aquinas} to 1349 {d. Ockham}, with Aquinas, Duns Scotus and Ockham as the most influential amongst the high-scholastics]). (6) The *post-scholastic period* (14–15th centuries [1349 {d. Ockham} to 1464 {d. Cusa}]).

The author maintains that it is the case in all three of these considerations. Firstly, mystical thinkers (including by far the majority of male mystics like Jan van Ruusbroec [Beukes 2020d] and Denys de Leeuwis ['the Carthusian', Beukes 2020a:6.35]) are notoriously absent in mainstream introductions to Medieval philosophy. This is amply clear in the case of female mystics like Hadewijch as well: because she is a 'mystical thinker', she was (and is) by her historical (and contemporary) male audience considered not to have contributed to the outputs of (the exclusively male) scholastic achievements properly and therefore does not deserve a place in the front rows – or even in the back rows – of the old, established author's index in mainstream Medieval philosophy.

Secondly, the fact that she was a woman undisputedly plays a role in Hadewijch's marginalised position in the index of Medieval philosophy: for that very reason, it has been argued (Beukes 2020b, 2020c) that research in Medieval philosophy should employ more of the current feminist readings of female thinkers like Mechtild and Marguerite (and male thinkers with remarkable 'feminine features', like Bernard of Clairvaux [Beukes 2020a:4.1]), with all the ideological (notably anachronistic) risks involved in feminist receptions. Feminist scholarship has, in my opinion, over the past three decades proven to be essential in bringing these women thinkers of the Middle Ages out from the shadows of Medieval misogynistic obscurity. As long as there is a fundamental lack of parity between the reception of the male and female thinkers of the period, women philosophers of the Middle Ages are dependent on their contemporary counterparts to extend them their legitimate voice (even if those 'contemporary counterparts' are not necessarily 'female' themselves, as is the case here).

Thirdly, Medieval authors who preferred to write in the vernacular (especially with reference to Middle Dutch, French and Middle High German) and not in Latin (as is apparent in the established yet artificial and controversial distinction between a 'Latin scholastic Meister Eckhart' and a 'German mystic Eckhart' [Beukes 2020a:5.26]; or consistently circumventing Dutch authors like Marsilius of Inghen [Beukes 2020e] and the aforementioned Ruusbroec) very often are interpreted with a perplexing suspicion (as is the case still today, where scholars who prefer to present their research outputs in any language other than English are frowned upon and even penalised in terms of research-based income). This linguistic prejudice undeniably plays a role in Hadewijch's absence from mainstream introductions to Medieval philosophy also. Indeed, whether it is because she was a mystic, or because she was a woman, or because she wrote in Middle Dutch rather than Latin, or because of a combination of the three, the fact is that Hadewijch is still unknown (and therefore unloved) outside the parameters of her specialised niche research. This article has for that very reason as its sub-text the intention to contribute to a broader reception and appreciation of this enthralling, yet still sidelined beguine.

An experience-driven epistemology: Hadewijch's sources and influences

Hadewijch entered a beguinage in Antwerp at a young age and was promoted relatively quickly to the position of prioress or abbess (although the beguines distinguished themselves from the institutional monasteries and abbeys by referring to their prioress as 'mistress'). The initial authority and high profile she held amongst the beguines in Antwerp were progressively undermined by the intensity of her *Minnemystik*: apart from the fact that its unconcealed erotic nature gave rise to a resistance to it in and beyond the particular beguinage, a rather simple resentment took hold of Hadewijch's beguine sisters, as well as of ordained nuns in nearby monasteries and abbeys: she was accused that she (sexually) 'took' God (and Christ himself) as her 'Beloved' and left no doubt that God 'fulfilled' her as God's 'beloved'. This 'taking of God' and being (sexually) 'fulfilled by God' indicated for her contemporaries an utter and sacrilegious folly. Hadewijch was therefore eventually expelled from the beguinage and the order in Antwerp itself. Without any prospect of being able to return to her order and with little possibility that any other beguinage in the Low Countries would take her in, Hadewijch most likely worked as a nurse in a leprosarium, until she died poor and ailing on an unknown date in an unfamiliar place (Hart 1980:4). Because her work does not show any influence whatsoever of Aristotelian scholasticism, which started to flourish only from the middle of the 13th century, Hadewijch died probably before 1250 (Wolfskeel 1989:144).

Given her selective use of language, whether in Latin, Dutch or Flemish, and the scope of her academic register, Hadewijch (like Hildegard [Beukes 2019a:65] and Mechtild [Beukes 2019b:2]) was in high probability a descendant of high North European nobility. Like Mechtild, Hadewijch preferred beguine life above ordinary monastery life because of the beguines' libertarian system of values and their promotion of a far more improvising theological discourse than what would have been allowed in the institutionalised orders. As Mechtild, once again, it was her sense of freedom which brought her to the beguinage in Antwerp in the first place. There, from the open and free spaces of authentic beguine life, where one could suppose she expected a high amount of tolerance, Hadewijch composed her *Minnemystik* in the form of prose, poetry and 31 long letters (translated as 'Letters' in Hadewijch 1980:43–122), primarily addressed to a female audience. However, that expectation of at least a degree of tolerance from the local beguines was seriously misdirected: it would precisely be the accusations of her beguine counterparts that led to Hadewijch's undoing.

In her extant, thus much later edited and translated corpus (Hadewijch 1980), only a bare minimum of additional biographical information is specified: Hadewijch was namely educated in Latin and was able to read the Latin Psalter at a young age, attended a grammar school where she was for a year educated in the fundamentals of the seven liberal arts, after which she entered a convent (probably the Cistercian abbey of Florival in Belgium), where she received a far more extensive and specialised education in the theoretical arts (the *trivium*, comprising logic, grammatic and rhetoric) and the practical arts (the *quadrivium*, consisting of mathematics, geometry, astronomy and music). In her poetry, she often refers to this curriculum and the *magistri* who educated her in these characteristic Medieval disciplines. A thorough knowledge of Latin, the basic rules of logic and algebra, musical theory, verse technique, correspondence technique (the crucial *ars dictaminis*, because detailed and extensive letters were the only means of distant communication) and a fluency in Flemish, Middle Dutch and French, wrapped a quality academic upbringing, to which relatively few young women in the 13th century, even from the high nobility, had access.

In terms of sources, the Biblical texts were predictably Hadewijch's most important starting place, on which she reflected systematically in terms of the philosophical and patristic-theological backgrounds thereof, before incorporating her exegesis and own comments into her texts: this applies to texts both from the Old Testament and New Testament, with particular accent on Old Testament wisdom literature and the synoptic gospels' homiletic surveys on the life and preaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

These commentaries and applications of the Biblical texts are embedded in an extended and erudite academic register. Notably, Hadewijch's preferred scholastic source of reference is the legacy of two Victorians, Richard of St Victor (d. 1173) and, to a lesser extent, his forerunner, Hugo of St Victor (1079–1141; Beukes 2020f.). Richard[8] of St Victor's scholarly influence on Hadewijch in terms of an experience-driven epistemology[9] was profound: this Victorian monk was a Scotsman who entered the abbey at Saint Victor in the middle of the 1140s, after Hugo's death in 1141.[10] Given the extensive and discursive content of his six-part *De Trinitate* (St Victor 1958) and also in terms of his legacy as an early-scholastic philosopher, who accentuated the contemplative life (especially in two of his works, *Benjamin maior* [initially titled *The Mystical Ark*] and *Benjamin minor* [initially *The Twelve Patriarchs*]; both in St Victor 1979), Richard was a respected intellectual figure in the first half of the

8. See Richard of St Victor (1855, 1958, 1979); Andres (1921:189–200); Aris (1996:3–24); Colker (1962:181–227); Copleston (1993:175–182); DiLorenzo (1982:77–96); Grabmann (1957:309–318); Palmén (2014:1–12) and Zinn (1977:190–214).

9. Note that both Richard and Hadewijch had something else in mind than the claims of empiricism regarding knowledge based on the senses: for both of them, experience provides the impetus for the possibility of knowledge even *beyond* the senses (which is what 'mystical knowledge' for both of them is about; in other words, experience without the compulsory aid of the senses), including the possibility of pure speculative knowledge based on experience. That is why, apart from the term *empiricist* being anachronistic in 12th and 13th century terms, the term *experience-driven epistemology* is prioritised here over a term such as *empiricist epistemology*.

10. Richard became prior of the abbey at Saint Victor in 1158 and abbot in 1162. He was committed to being Hugo's intellectual successor to such an extent that his monk-sobriquet simply refers to him as 'St Victoris' (consequently, in Medieval research Hugo of St Victor is normally simply referred to as 'Hugo', and Richard of St Victor as 'St Victor', or in clear contexts, by his first name). His sobriquet indicates to what extent Richard was able to cherish and expand Hugo's legacy: in particular, he employed Hugo's three hermeneutical keys for Scriptural exegesis ('literally' [that is, 'historically'], allegorical and tropological; Beukes 2020f:3) and expanded these keys into a systematic Christian philosophy, where speculative philosophy was still considered crucial, yet in explicit contradistinction with theology (a peculiar characteristic of early scholasticism; see Beukes 2020a:4.1).

13th century, influencing a number of speculative and mystical thinkers from the period, *inter alia,* Hadewijch (Beukes 2020f.:7). Richard's rational[11] enquiry into the Trinity had a significant impact on the high scholasticism of the 13th and 14th centuries, especially with regard to the philosophical consequences of his proofs for the existence of God, trailing Anselm's famous ontological argument.

These proofs are rational in orientation but *driven by experience* (St Victor 1855):

> We should start with the class of those things over which no doubt exists; that is, precisely the class of things we know by experience, from which we can deduce rationally what things transcend experience. (p. 894)

These 'objects of experience' are contingent, that is, things that come into existence, exist and stop existing. They can only be known by experience, because that which come into existence and stop existing are not necessary and cannot be necessary, from which follows that the existence thereof cannot be proven or demonstrated *a priori*, but has only experience as its epistemological basis (cf. St Victor 1855:892).

The epistemological premise for the initial argument regarding this Victorian proof for the existence of God thus comprises contingent objects of experience; however, to pose a compelling and unambiguous argument, it is mandatory to start from a 'clear, comprehensible and unmoveable foundation of truth' (St Victor 1855:893). In other words, the argument must be established in a true and certain principle in which its coherence and validity are grounded. That principle, according to Richard (St Victor 1855:893), is the one of *contradiction*, which allows us to work with a quadruple division of being: the principle of contradiction, namely, dictates that everything that exists or can exist is either being from-itself [*a se*] or being not-from-itself [*ens a se*]; and that everything that exists or can exist has being that began to exist in time or has being that did not begin existing in time, in other words, eternal being. Any existing thing thus must be existing (1) either

11.In *De Trinitate,* Richard addresses preparations for a profound contemplative life, while engaging the structure and contents of such a life in the two later 'Benjamin'-texts, *The Mystical Ark* and *The Twelve Patriarchs*, arguing for an 'experience of intensity lived from gratitude' (St Victor 1855:893BC; note that all translations from Latin are the author's own, with semantic orientation). As his predecessor Hugo, Richard initially accentuates rational enquiry into truth and justice: 'I have read repeatedly that there is only one God and that this God is eternal, uncreated, omnipotent and Lord over all [...] I have read that this God is one yet three, one in being, three in person; I have read it all, but I cannot remember that I have read alongside it how these notions could be rationally proven' (St Victor 1855:893BC). Elsewhere (St Victor 1855:892C), he postulates, rather direct for an early-scholastic monk: 'In all these things an authority is established, yet without argument; in all these things it is only *experimenta desunt*, rarely by deduction [...] I think I can contribute by doing precisely that'. St Anselm's (1033–1109; Beukes 2020a:3.6) philosophical disposition is clearly visible in these statements: *credo ut intelligam*. Flanking Anselm, Richard then directs his efforts to the interpretation and proof of basic Christian-dogmatical positions as available in the middle of the 12th century: just as Anselm in the 11th century focused on an ontological proof for the Trinity on the basis of 'necessary reasons', Richard states in the opening lines of *De Trinitate* (St Victor 1855:892C) that his intention is not merely to deduce the possibility of what is believed, but to prove argumentatively the *necessity* of what is believed. He argues that there must be necessary reasons for that which exists necessarily: if God is necessarily Three in One, there must be a necessary reason for it. Of course, it cannot necessarily follow that if God is necessarily Three in One, this necessity can be perceived or be verified. It is precisely on this point that Richard holds to the mysteries of the contents of faith, particularly concerning the nature and attributes of the Trinity. However, this inherent human inability does not suspend a rational attempt to understand the multiple Persons in the Godhead as precisely being deduced from the attributes of this Being (eternity, independency, truth, love, justice, beauty and so on) and the equally rational attempt to demonstrate the Trinitarian quality of this Being in terms of considerations such as 'persons' and 'nature' (St Victor 1855:72A).

eternal and from-itself (and is, therefore, self-existing), (2) or not-eternal and not-from-itself, (3) or eternal but not-from-itself and (4) or not-eternal but from itself.

This logical quadruple division immediately makes possible a further triple division, because something which exists not-eternal but from-itself constitutes an impossibility – given the logical deduction that something which started to exist could not have begun to exist from-itself and could therefore not be self-existing. Beginning to exist in-time and completely from-itself are incommensurable and must be referred back to the objects of experience and the principle of contradiction. The objects of experience as they are perceived in the human, animalistic and vegetative spheres – that is, 'nature' and everything that started to exist – are decaying, temporary and contingent. If all in nature began to exist, nothing in nature is eternal or from eternity. However, that which is not from eternity cannot be from-itself either: it necessarily must be not-from-itself. Logically and eventually, there must be some being which is from-itself, in other words, necessary being, because in the absence of such necessary being from-itself, there is no fundamental cause for anything that exists. Nothing would exist or would have existed: yet from experience, we know clearly and are certain that something *does* exist. Richard anticipates the probable critique that if indeed there must be necessary being from-itself, it could well be the world itself: he addresses this objection by arguing that he has excluded this possibility already because he has indicated that we only experience the contingent nature of those things that make up the world itself. This Victorian, experience-driven argument for eternal necessary being from-itself is a significant expansion of Anselm's basic ontological argument.

Yet Richard (St Victor 1855:896) goes even further with his experience-driven argument, namely, that it is a given from experience that multiple degrees of 'the good' or 'completion' exist: the rational, for instance, constitutes a different, distinguishable and indeed 'higher' degree of rationality than the irrational. From this experience-deduced fundamental, Richard argues that there must eventually be a *highest* degree, which cannot be further transcended. Because the rational is superior to the irrational, this highest being must necessarily hold an intellectual capacity which is not concluded from a lower being or subordinate: this highest being must possess *potentiality*, as well as being and existence-from-itself. It is thus necessary that the highest being is eternal: there must be something eternal and *a se* from itself because nothing else [*ens a se*] could exist in the absence of it, whilst experience dictates that something else *does* exist. If the highest *a se* does not have to derive anything from the lower *ens a se* for the possibility of its being and potentiality, it is indeed the highest substance which possesses eternal, necessary being.

There is a last notion in Richard of St Victor's experience driven-epistemology that should be noted in terms of its influence on Hadewijch's *Minnemystik*: he (St Victor 1855:896) finally postulates a proof of the existence of God from the

premise of precisely *potentiality* (or 'possibility'). Nothing that exists could exist if it did not possess a potentiality to-existence in the first place, whether from-itself *a se* or not-from-itself *ens a se*. Anything that lacks this potentiality is necessarily an impossibility or *no*-thing. For to exist, anything that exists possessed the possibility to exist [*posse esse*]. This foundation in potentiality, which is the source for both the possibility of existence and existence itself, must be self-dependent and absolute: every essence, every potency, every thought, is dependent on this foundation. There is a potential essence-source for all essences, a potential potency-source for all potencies and a potential thought-source for all thoughts because it is necessarily impossible for the source to provide something more and bigger than the source itself. What is derived from the source is necessarily subordinate to the source. Thus, no potentiality can exist independent of the rational substance in which the potentiality was present from the outset. The final ground for all possibility or potentiality is therefore once again the highest being. Of course, Richard's arguments, in his own words (St Victor 1855:66CD, 72C, 110D), are exercises of the rational, discursive mind, *oculus rationis*, which goes beyond the *oculus imaginationis*, which can only contemplate material reality; however, both are subordinate to *oculus intelligentiae*, wherein God contemplates Godself. In *oculus imaginationis*, the objects of experience become present in an immediate and unmediated way; in *oculus rationis*, the mind reflects on the mediated yet not-immediately visible (e.g. by contemplating the move from cause to effect or vice versa), whilst in *oculus intelligentiae*, the complete invisible – God – is being contemplated as immediate present.

Hadewijch was thoroughly studied in this Victorian, experience-driven epistemology.[12] From the quoted passages in the first section of this article, it is clear that she departs from the 'class of those things over which no doubt exists', that is, from experience. That is why the *experience* of the female body's reaction to God's Love, in the profound emotional ecstatic nature thereof, as stated in those quoted passages, is for Hadewijch so crucial: the union of God's Love for her and her love for God affects her senses and mind to such an extent that they result in various effects, which she experiences as fact and for her are tangible (the feeling of blood pumping through the veins, trembling limbs, sexual desire, a body in revolt, the body and mind being possessed ['deeply in you'], 'the desire stems from the experience of the senses, rather than from

grace, and from the experience of nature, rather than the spiritual', her confession that the 'highest bodily pleasure, outside of God, is gluttony'; 'sweetness in the mouth', God's experienced 'manliness' and virility, 'kisses from the Son', to mention but a few). When Hadewijch's perceived eroticism is interpreted as being pertinently experience-driven in its epistemological self-presentation, it is not profane in any sense of the word: instead it is an experience-driven search for knowledge of the transcendent.

Furthermore, Hadewijch is profoundly interested in the contingency of existence, that is, the experienced reality that things come into existence, exist and stop existing. Reality makes itself known in the experience of contingency, of which the (human, female) body in all its temporality and constant state of decay is for her the most unambiguous marker. This could be called the basis of Hadewijch's anthropology: it is at the end not her experience of God as inexplicable outside of her mysticism that determines what humankind is, but her rational conviction that God is a non-determined *a se* being whilst the human condition points towards *ens a se*, a radically determined being. However, this human being, in spite of all her bodily definiteness and physical-temporal limitations, can become 'one' with a never to be comprehended Beloved and represents in that sense from herself an openness and unlimited dynamic (cf. Mommaers 1980:xv).

From this opened-up, dynamic anthropology follows an enlightenment of human understanding: this enlightenment is not established in the fact that it is filled with some new insights, such as a new understanding of the contents of faith, beauty or justice. It is thus not about a newly found ability to assess more morally and impartially, but rather enlightenment from the unified experience with God: in the union with the Beloved, his incomparable Other, his beloved, may now be rationally known. Reason, as Richard insisted, therefore plays a part in this highest mystical experience of the highest being because it illuminates the lasting transcendence of God. Through the intervention of unification, the mystic can learn how to love God in God's independence and wholly Otherness.

The bodily experience of God in Hadewijch's *Minnemystik* points towards Richard's *oculus imaginationis*, which can only contemplate material reality because it is 'body' and materiality itself. The applications of the rational, discursive mind, *oculus rationis*, however, lead to enlightenment and understanding beyond *oculus imaginationis*. Yet both are subordinate to *oculus intelligentiae*, wherein God contemplates Godself and the unification between Beloved and beloved gives in the end access to precisely that divine Self-contemplation: wherein *oculus imaginationis* objects of experience (such as the body and functions of the body) become present in an immediate and unmediated way, in *oculus rationis* the mind reflects on a mediated yet not-immediate reality, which is God. In the end, and that is the highest function of *Minnemystik*, based on *oculus intelligentiae* as the complete invisible – God – is, finally, being contemplated as an *immediate present*.

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12. Apart from Richard and his Victorian predecessor, Hugo, Hadewijch maintained a close thematic relation with St Augustine (354–430). The importance of Augustinian themes will be shown *infra*. Amongst her other influences count Origen (184–253), Gregory (335–395), Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636, Beukes 2020a:1.5), Peter Abelard (1079–1142; Beukes 2020a:3.10) and Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153; Beukes 2020a:4.1), all to which there are subtle references in her prose and poetry. Characteristically, but not unexpectedly, there is as much Oriental as Latin–Western theology present in Hadewijch's work: for example, she refers back to the Greek fathers in terms of an understanding of the Trinity where the Father is the source, yet himself without source, of the divine Self-revelation (in terms of which both the Son and the Spirit go out from the Father), which, of course, were treated later much more reservedly by the Latin fathers in their use of the concept *filioque* (in terms of which the Spirit goes out from both the Father and the Son). Wherever Hadewijch refers to the 'Father' in her prose and poetry, it consistently goes back to the first (Greek and for her the more authentic) notion of the 'fertile' Father. A second prominent Oriental sentiment in Hadewijch's work is the idea of eternal progression, which was a dominant feature in Gregory's theology. She also has a *penchant* for subtle paradoxes, which in turn goes back to Isidore, but more precisely to Abelard, who can be understood as the first proponent of the dialectical method in the Middle Ages.

Minnemystik vis-à-vis Wesenmystik

The last consideration before we finally move towards the Trinitarian and Christological orientation of Hadewijch's *Minnemystik* is to differentiate it from Medieval *Wesenmystik*. Although Hadewijch's somewhat later French contemporary and beguine counterpart, the aforementioned Marguerite Porete (1250–1310; Beukes 2019c:3), preferred not to use the concepts *mystic* and *mysticism*, she should nevertheless be described as a *Wesenmystiker* (Robinson 2017:41), in the sense that she presented a speculative *Wesensmystik* in which a spontaneous and radical sense of identity, similarity and affinity between the human soul and God were articulated (a less drastic version of *Wesensmystik* is encountered in the work of another beguine contemporary, the German Mechtild von Magdeburg (ca. 1207–1282; Beukes 2019b:2–7; cf. Ruh 1977:265–270).

Wesenmystik, focusing on the relationship between being and essence, must, therefore, be distinguished from *Minnemystik*, of which Hadewijch was the first proponent. As indicated, *Minnemystik* employed metaphors that can be associated with erotic love and sexual intimacy, in terms of which an ontological distinction between the lovers could be maintained: it is an intense and passionate love, yet does not pretend to provide more than the love of two discrete and always-distinguished subjects. This is precisely the reason Marguerite considered the *Minnemystik* approach inadequate: her *Wesensmystik* argues for a union *without* distinction, where the human soul and God are united without the possibility of any further differentiation (Marguerite employs, e.g., the two terms *unitas indistinctiones* and *unio sine distinctione* consistently and indiscriminately; cf. Lichtmann 2001:66; 1998:223).

Wesenmystik accentuates the creation of the soul *imago Dei*, which implies for Marguerite an ontological status which makes possible the *reditus* or return of the soul to God (Robinson 2001:35, 51, 60, 64, 67, 74, 97). She as a result of this reworked several traditional metaphors which effectively symbolised concepts like *union without difference* and *returning reditus*: amongst others, a menopausal woman, iron in fire, gifts between lovers, sexual frenzy, alcoholic intoxication and public nudity.

Another interesting difference between *Minnemystik* and *Wesenmystik* is hereby highlighted: where *Minnemystik* is overtly erotic in its presentation of a *relation*, it is nevertheless subtle and restrained – *Wesenmystik*, on the other hand, is at first glance preoccupied with philosophical *ontology*; yet in the end, it uses much more robust imagery and provocative metaphors than *Minnemystik*. *Wesenmystik* is possibly more daring in its erotic lucidity than even Hildegard's pre-*Minnemystik* sexual imagery (Beukes 2019a:83–87) ever was.

The Trinitarian and Christological nature of Hadewijch's *Minnemystik*

Against the backdrop of the introduction to the Victorian, experience-driven epistemology of *Minnemystik* and the crucial distinction we have made between *Minnemystik* and *Wesenmystik*, it is now possible to indicate Hadewijch's mysticism as Trinitarian and Christological in its final orientation, and therefore as an articulated theological presentation from the 13th century, which transcends the provocative mysticism that underlies it.

The Trinitarian element in *Minnemystik* is at first glance upfront in its Augustinianism: the human rational soul is hereby understood to be created in the image of God, with the three Augustinian (*De Trinitate* X, 11 and 14) faculties of the soul which Hadewijch maintained, namely, memory (including consciousness), intelligence (or 'understanding') and will. These faculties, of course, correspond in Augustinian frame analogically to the three Persons of the Trinity. However, Hadewijch specifically reworked this analogy with a Victorian content, whereby Augustine's concept of *understanding* is broadened with the concept of *reason*: now it becomes possible to dynamically expand Augustine's analogy, with reason now becoming part of the tripartite soul (next to memory and will) and a participant within the Trinitarian and threefold existence of God. Hadewijch's Victorian augmentation of the Augustinian analogy to the Trinity was preceded possibly by only William of Thierry (1095–1148), a Belgian Benedictine, however with a far less acknowledged version than that of Richard of St Victor (cf. Thierry 1855:382).[13]

In Letter 22 (line 137), Hadewijch (1980) formulates her theological position as follows:

> God granted us His nature in the soul, with three faculties on the basis of which the three Persons can be loved: with an enlightened reason, the Father; with memory, the wise Son of God; and with a flaming will, the Holy Spirit. (p. 97)

Hadewijch did not argue that reason is the image of the Father and memory the image of the Son: she argued dialectically that we love the Father with or *through* the Son, thus by the mediation of the Son. Yet, vice versa, the reason attributed to the Father enables us to love the wise Son, and the memory assigned to the Son permits us to remember the Father – and from that remembrance, we love the Father (Vanneste 1959:84). There clearly is a theological progression present in Hadewijch's *Minnemystik*: first and above all, God must be loved as God himself Loves (in terms of *Minne*/*minne*), followed by the human subject contemplating herself by an experience-driven yet rationally answered impetus in-God, on the basis of which she comes to the knowledge of who God authentically is, namely the Trinity.

This theological progression is followed by an 'ethics of love from God's Love' (herein Hadewijch follows Mechtild's 'ethics of care out of love for the Other'; Beukes 2019b:5): we no longer only love the Father, but now live the life of the Father, when the Father's love comes into fruition in an otherwise shattered world; we now live the life of the Son, when we are illuminated by the radiating wisdom and truth

....
13.The author is not aware of any other similar augmentations of intelligence/understanding preceding Hadewijch.

of the Son and we now live the life of the Holy Spirit, when the Spirit's holy will becomes our will (cf. Hart 1980:10). In this understanding of the Trinity, we encounter an original re-articulation of Augustine's notion that the human soul which, once it has come into fulfilment, should strive to pursue a virtuous life and engage the world in a contemplative fashion.

From this ethical position and original reappraisal of the Trinity, the Christological moment in Hadewijch's *Minnemystik* follows: the personification of God's prevailing Love is a Man – indubitably the incarnated God in the entirety and experience of his corporeality, namely in Jesus Christ. The experienced presence of this Man brings Hadewijch's *Minnemystik* to a Christological conclusion. Her premise again is that the human subject first and foremost must love as this subject was Loved first: by this Love the subject's humanity is reformed, for to be finally transformed through Christ's divinity. That is why Hadewijch, in the end, put so much emphasis on the virtues: the beloved subject who is first Loved by Christ and is herself transformed by the Loving Christ must pursue the virtues because Christ himself is the highest personification of the intention of all virtues, namely the good. In his worldly existence, Christ himself practised the virtues out of a free will and Christ will in that sense always be humanity's highest moral perfection.

The pursue of the virtues is nevertheless in the first place not merely an ethical consideration, but an existential abandonment of all that stands between beloved and Beloved, namely to first and foremost love Christ ardently and to do as Christ has done. For Hadewijch, that is the highest calling for the human subject: to move from the experience of Christ's Love to the pursue of the virtues and to deliver oneself to the mystery that Christ is. Christ must be lived in experience and practised in the virtues to participate in the mysteries of Christ, of which the incarnation is the epitome and the sacrament of Holy Communion is the most profound signifier. This participation includes sharing the passion of Christ, of which the incarnation itself was the first manifestation. To be human is to endure misery as Christ endured suffering.

To love Christ implies to endure with Christ 'all His pain, poverty, humiliation and to maintain fearless solidarity with Christ in the face of injustice [...] those who love Christ, thus love poverty, misery and rejection' (Hadewijch 1980:61, line 249; 264, line 60). In the end, the love for the Beloved means to die with the Beloved, 'after the cross the Christ carried in exile on earth, was brought to completion on Golgotha', so that the subject who loves the Beloved, 'will live on no other terms than by the desire to die through fulfilled exposure' (Hadewijch 1980:100, line 285). Erotic as *Minnemystik* might have been, it was never sentimental – and it is precisely when the erotic nature of *Minnemystik* is tempered by actual theological discourse, that it can present itself as an intellectual demonstration from the 13th century which surpasses the suggestive kind of sensual mysticism that inspired it in the first place.

When the theological features of Hadewijch's *Minnemystik* are taken into account, she unquestionably deserves a place in the corridor of outstanding Dutch and Flemish authors from the Middle Ages. She contributed to the literary and philosophical development of Dutch and Flemish at a time when Latin was the official academic language as well as the preferred language of cultivated individuals outside of academe. Not only did she possess an extraordinary intellect, but a passion for God, which she articulated like no Dutch woman preceding her and only a few female voices in other languages could equal since. The profound experience-driven and theological contents of her *Minnemystik* position Hadewijch in the midst of us as one of the most essential female thinkers from the High Middle Ages.

Acknowledgements

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