“Von treostliche lerer”—“pious, consoling teachers” is how Luther described Johannes Nider (ca. 1380–1438) and Jean Charlier de Gerson (1363–1429) in 1533. Gerson, conferred with the title of *doctor consolationis* as early as the fifteenth century, is for Luther a prime example of a *vir conscientia*—in distinction from the scholastic *viri speculativi*—the model for a theologian who reads, prays and consoles. According to Luther, the chancellor of Paris University was the first who adequately refuted *pusillanimitas*. In this vein, Johannes Nider can also be regarded a *vir conscientiae* in Luther’s sense. If we consider the circulation of Nider’s most important work on the question of conscience, the *Consolatorium timoratae conscientiae*, its reception by famous authors (amongst others

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1 Martin Luther: *Kleine Antwort*, 1533 in *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Abteilung Schriften* (Weimar, 1883–, reprint Graz, 1964–) 38: 160,12f. Although the sole remark about Nider by Luther which has reached us—for Gerson there are at least 87!—, it is nevertheless notable because there are “not many medieval theologians about whom Luther had anything positive to say” (Friedemann Pannen, “Luther über Johannes Gerson. Eine Untersuchung der Aussagen Luthers über den ‘Doktor des Trostes’", in: *Luther 71* (2000), 117).


5 Appel notes that Nider’s *Consolatorium* was published more often as Inkubalausgabe (Hain 11806–12) than the corresponding works of Gerson and Johannes von Dambach (*Anfechtung und Trost*, 45). In the following we shall quote from the edition: Johannes Nider, *Consolatorium timoratae conscientiae*, ed. Anton Sorg (Hain 11807) (Augsburg,
Anthony of Florence [1389–1459]), and smaller collections with quotations from his German sermons on this theme, then we can see that Luther here is far from alone in this judgment. Indeed it would seem that, especially in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Johannes Nider was an authority in the area of questions concerning conscience, in particular that of the errant and scrupulous conscience.

2. The Genre of Consolation

The essential thrust of Nider’s aim is already clearly discernible from the external form of the Consolatorium. His book is merely a book of consolation in terms of its content, leaving behind the actual formal framework. Although utilizing the genre of consolation, Nider converts the original form of a dialogue into a tract. Scholarly research has generally branded this shift as a sign of the decadence befalling the consolation genre, but

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6 Antonin had probably paraphrased Nider’s Consolatorium. Except for the theoretical sections (cap. IX, cap. X, § 1f) in which he follows Thomas Aquinas, almost everything that he says on the subject of the conscience is essentially in accord with what Nider says”. Grosse then furnishes evidence for this claim (Heilsungewißheit und Scrupulositas 16ff).


8 “Not much remains of the usual consolationary book, there is no switch of metre and prose, no dialogue, the sufferer is not called to open their heart... The tractat is a Consolatorium in an inauthentic sense” See Albert Auer, Johannes von Dambach und die Trostbücher vom n. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters 27, 1–2) (Münster, 1928), 299.

9 The literature genre of the Consolatorium in its authentic sense designates works which present, in terms of their content, reasons for finding solace in suffering... whose form is that of the dialogue, which must be prepared for at least in a proem, even though it may recede in the course of the discussions: but always a comforter must speak, and the person in need of solace, while the person requiring comfort must be conceivable as present at all times” (Auer, Johannes von Dambach, 26ff).

10 “Overall, despite all the affiliation Nider vis-à-vis Gerson [often quoted in the Consolatorium] means a sharp decline into case-by-case scenarios, the technical-psychological, in the blandness of distinctions and definitions, serving more to sharpen the theological intellectual than as providing solace for timid consciences” (Appel, Anfechtung und Trost, 49). This harsh judgment does not do justice to Nider. Proceeding from Luther’s ideal, Appel fails to recognize that the roots of the Dominican lie in scholastic theology and ignores the goal Nider pursues with this work, which differs considerably from the character of other works by this author.

The Consolatorium genre finally dies out at the end of the Middle Ages; the problem of the scrupulous conscience will be dealt within moral theology already in the work of the transcriber of Nider’s Consolatorium, Anthony of Florence (Grosse, Heilsungewißheit und...