
Scholars of medieval literature and culture will know Bange’s book-length inventory of speculum literature *Spiegels der christenen: zelfreflectie en ideaalbeeld in laat-middeleeuwse moralistisch-didactische traktaten* (1986) and her edition of the *Spieghel ofte regbel der kersten ghelove* (Valkhof Pers, Nijmegen 2000). In the present volume, she continues her work on moral-didactic treatises and aims at a more general synthesis of the contents and functions of this long neglected literary genre.

Working on the corpus she has gathered during her research activities in the last twenty-five years, Bange concentrates on sketching a more general religious and moral discourse in order to contribute to a reconstruction of medieval mentalities. As a matter of fact the systematic study of moral-didactic treatises, written to ‘form’ and to educate readers and listeners, could play a role in the description of the essential elements for the formation of late medieval identities. Bange wonders in the introductory chapter whether these texts can be defined as ‘lay ethics’, written with the clear intention of offering a valid alternative to the Christian ethical discourse by drawing, for example, from classical sources. She concludes that late medieval Dutch ethical discourse should not be considered as an alternative set of values to Christian ethics but as an adaptation of the message of the gospel to a new lay public by laying new accents and touching on new subjects, such as the importance of daily work and the justification of well-earned wealth.

In the second chapter, *Ken U zelf* [= Know yourself], the author elaborates on the theme of the formation of the individual and his relationship with the groups in which he is participating (church, urban environment, confraternities and family). Touching on the question of the models to be followed proposed to the individual readers, Bange stresses the importance of the *imitatio Christi* and of the care for the hereafter as general line of conduct. Daily practices, even the most basic actions, were relevant and meaningful because they were elements in a complex series of signs, mind-sets and attitudes revealing the morality of each individual Christian. As readers of speculum literature were approaching texts mirroring their own strengths and weaknesses, each individual believer was supposed to be a mirror of goodness and integrity to other individuals sharing the same living space.

Chapter three *Waarschuwen en vermanen* [= To warn and to admonish] sets the stage for Bange’s analysis of the contents of the treatises and concentrates
on the adaptation of the discussion on the seven capital vices and the Ten Commandments. While the seven capital vices are objects of lengthy discussion in nearly every Middle Dutch moral-didactic treatise, the Ten Commandments seem to play a less central role and their description is often sketchy. The reason for this discrepancy can be found in the fact that the authors presupposed that their readers would already be familiar with Commandments, as part of a basic biblical knowledge. The seven capital sins were on the other hand not explicitly mentioned in the Bible and could not be considered as an element of the medieval religious baggage. A more detailed explanation to the readers was therefore needed.

Chapter four, *Mensen onder elkaar* [= The individual and the community] deals with the description of moral instructions concerning situations where the individual engages a relationship with another individual or with a group. Bange distinguishes eight situations: 1) men and women, 2) parents and children, 3) religious and lay, 4) human beings and animals, 5) Christians and other religions, 6) the present and the past, 7) professions and jobs, 8) etiquette and good manners. The analysis of these aspects of daily life results in a colorful description of late medieval life, where stereotypes and *topoi* are intermingled with acute observations and practical solutions to everyday problems.

The combination of religious and practical instructions characterizing the late medieval didactic discourse is further discussed in the last chapter, *Een wenkend perspectief* [= A changing perspective]. In this chapter one of the most important peculiarities of late medieval moral and didactic texts is discussed: the need to combine earthly life (the here) with the preoccupation for the hereafter and the care for the body with that for the soul. The ‘bipolarity’ of the late medieval individual, who is fully aware of the importance of his daily and practical activities as well as of the upcoming final judgment implies that moral-didactic authors are continuously searching for a compromise in which both aspects are harmonically combined. The five chapters are followed by three appendices: a description of the most relevant (authors of) moral-didactic treatises (among others Dirk van Delft, Dirk Potter, Jacob van Maerlant and Jan van Boendale); a list of chapters from the *Spiegel der sonden*, the Middle Dutch translation of William Perrault’s *Speculum*; and a list of proverbs and sayings in modern Dutch translation.

Throughout, Bange tries to present common features and general elements from the large and heterogeneous corpus of treatises she has studied and she links the results of her research with the changing world of the late Middle Ages: urbanization, a higher level of literacy, the appearance of new religious orders (in particular the Mendicants), and a new relationship between the lay