
Rudolf van Dijk (born 1935), one of the most important scholars of the late-medieval religious movement of the Modern Devotion, brings together twelve previously published but updated articles in this four-part collection: (1) *Geert Grote*: letter to a Carthusian novice; letter to a wavering Carthusian; and the critical edition project; (2) *Windesheim*: chronicle of Agnietenberg; Salome Sticklen and female Windesheim; and life of a regular canoness in Soeterbeeck; (3) *Spirituality*: devout spirituality; imagery guided meditation; and spirituality of the devout canon regular; and (4) *Reception*: the *Imitatio Christi*; reform under Johannes Busch; and nineteenth and twentieth century. One is reminded here immediately of the four parts of Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitatio Christi*. Indeed, together with the book’s equivocal title (“Twelve Chapters …”), its introductory chapter on the “devout” author and “Lady’s friar” (*vrouwebroeder*) Rudolf van Dijk o.carm., and the comprehensive bibliography of Van Dijk’s work (pp. 489–519), this is an intelligent reference by the book’s two editors to the author’s deep connection to his subject.

The strength of the collection is its combination of historical and theological insights: Van Dijk always puts religious houses, devout men and women, and key texts in their proper context while dealing with spiritual processes extensively. His starting point is the story of the Devotio Moderna in five phases: birth of the movement of Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life and the Chapter of Windesheim (1375–1400); churchly recognition and spread into German areas (1400–1425); prosperity and foundation of the Chapters of Neuss, Zepperen, and Cologne (1425–1450); regularization of semi-religious houses according to the model of Windesheim and foundation of the Chapter of Venlo (1450–1500); and flourishing of the mystical tradition in the context of the Contra-Reformation (1500–1550). Against this background, Van Dijk includes short biographies of important men such as Geert Grote and Thomas à Kempis, local histories such as those of the Cistercian monasteries at the Lüneburg Heath reformed by Johannes Busch (pp. 377–382), an extensive account of the reception of the *Imitatio Christi* in the nineteenth and twentieth century (pp. 427–450), and an historical sketch of the *editio critica* project of the writings of Geert Grote (pp. 85–126). At the same time, he explains the origins and main developments of the spiritual program of the Devotio Moderna, including the spiritual function of books, the impact of the main writings, and the contents of crucial spiritual texts. This is “church history and religious culture” at its best.
Van Dijk’s explanation of historical and spiritual processes is characterized by many twofold schemes, a striking fact that seems to reflect his adoption of the devout mode of dual and schematic thinking even more than actual crises or developmental stages in the history of devout spirituality. But these distinctions are rather helpful in explaining key issues: the house that Geert Grote gave to the city of Deventer was intended for a community of poor women as well as for a semi-religious community (p. 158); the brothers of the Salland area sought legal recognition of the semi-religious status on the basis of constitutions without a rule, while the brothers of the Holland area sought a mild form of regular life (p. 253); Grote sees in the Church a double unity: inner and outer (p. 263); the devout culture of books is accompanied by a devout culture of songs, creating a symbiosis of “word and sound” (p. 284); there is a shift from interiority to exteriority, from a spirit of reform to a model of reform, and from devotion (devotie) to zealotry (zelotie) (p. 288); devout contemplation concerns image as well as imagelessness (p. 291); the spiritual program emphasizes both the inner way initiated by God and the outer practice of self-judgement and self-renewal (p. 410); human action (I) and divine grace (Thou) co-operate (p. 410); and man becomes like the image of God that he already is (p. 410).

The theory that Van Dijk employs to explain devout spirituality is another important feature of this collection. It is based on a model developed at the Titus Brandsma Institute (Nijmegen) under the direction of Kees Waaijman, which defines spirituality, viewed from the perspective of a “transformation process,” as the dynamics of a “divine-human relationship.” This is an appropriate model as it penetrates to the core of devout spirituality as the growth process of deeply inspired human selves, while covering many inner and outer aspects of the devout way. The model becomes obtrusive, however, where Van Dijk presents the rather pragmatic words in a letter of Grote to a wavering monk as a “spirituality of encouragement” (p. 64), or where he sees a monk’s career as consisting of three stages of spiritual formation: “noviciate, profession, advanced transformation” (p. 171). A problem related to this is Van Dijk’s translation of devotio moderna as ‘renewed interiority’ (vernieuwe innigheid/nuwen innicheit, p. 252). This term fortunately stresses an historical or a conversional moment of renewal as well as the continuous inner focus of the devout, but still lacks two important dimensions: the historical implication of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century perception of a new (“modern”) phenomenon, and the systematic (ascetic, pragmatic, programmatic) character of devout devotion. Van Dijk’s translation is inadequate—innigheid implying too much of an inner state—as well as inconsistent with his further interpretation, in which the dynamics of the practice of the spiritual process seems to be essential. Van Dijk’s innicheit (interiority) therefore lacks verinnering (interiorization).

In other places, Van Dijk’s originality is his greatest asset. Two things in particular deserve to be noted: his rich vocabulary, and his exceptional treatment of