

**The Movement of  
the Free Spirit**

**Raoul Vaneigem**

**General Considerations and Firsthand Testimony  
Concerning Some Brief Flowerings of  
Life in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and,  
Incidentally, Our Own Time**

Translated by Randall Cherry and Ian Patterson

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## PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

The decline and fall of totalitarian regimes has pointed up the underlying totalitarianism of ideologies that only yesterday were able to buttress their credibility with vocabularies of emancipation. With the crumbling of the old dichotomy between Eastern bureaucratic despotism and Western democratic bureaucracy, one thing has become perfectly clear: all ideologies are totalitarian. Cut off from the very life they are supposed to represent in the spectacle, they invariably take over a repressive power that has been in place for thousands of years: the power of heaven over earth, of the spirit over the body, of lucrative labor over creative pleasure.

Arising from a philosophy in rebellion against theology's hermetic and pervasive vision of the world, ideologies were assured victory in their relentless undermining of the religious edifice when the agrarian mode of production gave way to industrial capitalism. The French Revolution rendered obsolete the long-held conviction that God was the arbiter of well-being and misfortune.

Paradoxically, however, though they smashed the yoke of the Church and the priests, ideologies preserved the

essence of religion over everyday existence by exercising control that, as secular as it might claim to be, perpetuated traditional Judeo-Christian forms of behavior: guilt, self-hatred, fear of pleasure, the hope for a future heaven on earth, and, above all, the contempt for the body and for the earth that gives our upside-down world its intolerable reality.

The present-day collapse of mass ideologies – of nationalism, liberalism, socialism, fascism, communism – encourages the increasingly widespread turning away from the political sphere per se. This reaction also reflects the confusion of people ill-prepared for independence and poorly schooled in the art of deciding their own fate.

The inability of the most diverse governments to resolve the present economic crisis has produced contradictory and fluctuating tendencies: on the one hand, a regression toward the archaisms of religion; on the other, a new consciousness, that of the individual who banks on the will to live in order to rebuild the environment so horribly abused by traditional rulers.

So brutal has the exploitation of nature been that its resources – the very nature of its profitability – are threatened with exhaustion; there is thus no choice but to develop ecological markets in order to get the economy out of its present morass. People have already been aroused, then hoodwinked, by the imperatives of consumption at any cost. There is a good chance that people moved by real desire will easily discern tenderness and creativity among the dividends of this “renaturalization,” and that, for the sake of their own happiness, they will treat this process as an incitement to transcend the venal co-optation of life.

It is not, however, inconceivable that the religious spirit,

wearied of Churches but not of itself, may find a niche in ecology; that Gaia may be conscripted to lend a semblance of life to those mortal relics of God that still dictate so many actions governed by fear, submission, dependency and repression alternating with temporary release.

It is worth recalling, therefore, that religion has never been anything but the relational mode employed by the State as a replacement for the former osmosis between human and earthly nature. More than any other religious cult Catholicism and its dissenting offshoots have maintained their power through constant ecclesiastical control, using the spatial grid of parishes and the calendar’s ritual marking off of time to track down indifference or resistance to the inculcation of the faith.

By labeling as heresy all views of which it disapproved the Church successfully passed its orthodoxy off as a unique scale for weighing the true meanings of words, beings and things. It nevertheless felt inadequate and disarmed in the face of certain attitudes that it deemed “meaningless and demented.” With some unease the Inquisition attached the words “free spirit” and “madness” to men and women who renounced all spiritual and temporal authority, seeking no more than to live in accordance with their own desires.

As this book attempts to show, the partisans of the Free Spirit were divided on one fundamental issue. Driven by their will to follow nature, some identified with God and the ordinariness of his tyranny, using force, violence, constraint and seduction to secure the right to gratify their whims and passions. Others refused to countenance such a union between a despotic God and a denatured nature, a union whose exploitation found perfect expression in the myth of a divinity at once pitiful and pitiless. Instead they

saw the refinement of their desires and the quest for a ubiquitous and sovereign amorous pleasure as a way for replacing the spiritualized animal and its labor of adaptation with an authentic human species capable of creating the conditions favorable to its own harmonious development.

Historians for the most part have ignored or misapprehended the struggle waged through the ages against religion's impregnation of consciousness and behavior. The disappearance of dictatorships calls for an end to further tolerance of religion's arrogant attempt to regulate the thoughts and actions of human beings by an infantilizing subjection that is no longer acceptable even in raising children. Emerging from beneath the rubble of lies and fraud the present is beginning to re-experience some plain truths of the distant past. The Middle Ages were no more Christian than the late Eastern bloc was communist. The heaviest burdens imposed by barbarism have never completely smothered the ever-present yearning for true humanity. That the commitment to life which is increasingly evident today should once have dared manifest itself in the sinister light of the burning stake is a lesson that, I venture to hope, will not be lost in the United States, where the gulf between technological modernity and an archaic agrarian mentality still nourishes the spirit of Calvinism and the morbid teachings of the Bible.

Raoul Vaneigem

March 1993

Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith

## INTRODUCTION: THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MARKET AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF LIFE

Everything that is said, written and thought today is increasingly irrelevant, and dangerously so, to life. Yet life, though threatened from all sides, manifests its presence ever more strongly as artifice loses its hold.

Over several millennia the pleasure of life was totally disregarded while a seemingly more profitable discourse on survival was being carefully woven; but, in the past decade, almost nothing could be said that did not demonstrate just how threadbare this discourse had become, as its very fabric seemed on the verge of unraveling.

After fighting for capital in the name of progress, against capital in the name of the proletariat, for bureaucracy in the name of revolution, and – without fail – for survival in the name of life, those who remain to keep fighting the good fight into the twentieth century seem to have gained nothing on the traditional battlefields except a tremendous sense of weariness and resignation.

The absurdity of the situation hardly incites us to wear ourselves out in the name of what must surely seem entirely futile. Only inertia still drives a few politicized sheep and power-hungry dogs into the crumbling arenas of the

spectacle. Nonetheless I am willing to wager that we might some day emerge from the ambiguities of this general apathy; we might find the will to create ourselves anew so that society and our personal hopes of fulfillment are better reconciled. There is, of course, no guarantee that this will ever come about, but with every passing moment, I hold on and refuse to abandon hope.

This stubborn determination not to let anything take precedence over the will to live, to reject at whatever cost even the most imperative calls of survival, first took shape in my books *The Revolution of Everyday Life* and *The Book of Pleasures*. The latter was needed to clarify and correct the former, to remove the intellectual cast that won it high esteem from people incapable of putting its lessons into practice but who, instead, used them as a consoling alibi for their own premature aging.

If it is true that the test of a book's intelligence is what it can offer toward the pleasure of living better, let me say, right from the start, that there is no such intention in my study of the movement of the Free Spirit. Not until that glad hour when we are at last rid of our delusions about the science of the experts, and are content simply to choose among pleasures, can we face the unknown with a lucid, passionate gaze. Until then I have chosen, in these uncomfortable and precarious times, to do no more than satisfy a personal curiosity. I want to challenge the view of those who dehumanize history, seeing it as fated and fatal: hence my wish to pay homage to those who refused to give in to the idea that history moves toward some inevitable outcome. I want also to seek out signs of life, behind the edifices of religious and ideological obscurantism, and in so doing I hope to dispense once and for all

with the cherished but no less dubious notion of a Christian Middle Ages.

Perhaps a lighter hand, with a touch of the *gai savoir*, is called for here; but I do not have the real freedom or luxury which that would require. I am not so much offering an excuse as giving an honest assessment of the obstacles society sets up against itself every time it infringes upon the slightest space set aside for creative expression – hemming it in with the petty and cumbersome demands of work or of turning a profit.

The sheer number of texts that had to be uncovered and translated added to the cursory character of this project. And if this contributed to its lack of completeness I must reserve myself that right – just as I also claim the right to the biases that can be found in this book. For these are the biases of anyone who undertakes subjective investigations, whether he does so under the pretense of objectivity or not; and I prefer to own up to the influence of those personal desires that move in accordance with the unfolding of one's own tangled destiny.

Historians will lose their way in this book just as they do in their everyday lives, for they no more see the life underlying events than they see the life in their own bodies. The specialist will discover nothing here that he does not already know: alienated thought is always sufficient unto itself.

But readers who take pleasure in paying history the same undivided attention they pay the struggles of their own passions will discover a naive but valuable confirmation in this book: lies serve their own purposes, their own ends; while the love of pleasure has none.

I

FROM THE TWILIGHT OF THE  
BUREAUCRATS TO THE DAWN OF  
DIVINE ECONOMICS

*Economic Totalitarianism and Its Self-Destruction*

- 1 No one looks back any farther than his or her present. No previous era, however clouded by its unavoidable confusions, has more successfully propagated the idea that everything rides on the present moment.

What can be learned from the past which is not already implicit in the very act of contemplating it? Those who set off, trying to escape past fears and anxieties over wealth or poverty, will only find constant reminders of their present state of exile. What one looks for in the past is precisely what one has already found.

When the body limps, thoughts also hobble; but one's gait becomes the most unsteady as one loses pace with, and falls behind, one's very self, becoming conspicuous by one's absence. Does it not make more sense, then, if only in the interest of one's health and spiritual well-being, to remain true to one's desires, whatever the outcome? Why straggle back and forth into undertakings that, from the very outset, stray from what one really feels and desires at the moment? What needs to be sought out is

the kind of fulfillment that comes when the heart learns to extract from the uncertain or the unknown a quintessence of love that allows these circumstances to seem somehow favorable.

- 2 There was a time when everything seemed gray and uniform and the whole range of human concerns appeared to be dictated by daily routine and economic reality; but a sudden openness to life has begun to shine through, like a ray of light illuminating a horizon beyond the bleakness of everyday life.

Since the upheavals of 1968 the forces of life have gradually become more distinguishable from what had once corrupted them. All that was needed was for a few individuals to begin wondering why they were in such a hurry to reach a place they could never get to. Before long, large numbers of people began to question their tendency to sacrifice the pleasure of being themselves for the paltry rewards of wealth and power.

The more we seemed locked into the mechanical gestures imposed on us since childhood, the more we became convinced of some indescribable, barely fathomable, luxuriance that can only be called life – to distinguish it from survival, its economic, and economized, form.

Many observations that were considered ludicrous in 1967 have now become commonplace. For it is obvious today that “surviving” has so far prevented us from “living”; that man’s insistence on making himself useful in his work is actually of little use to him in his own life, and even kills him. It is clear, too, that life usually ends precisely because it has never begun (which most people realize only in their last moments); and that the price of

representation is paid for in terms of world-weariness and self-contempt. These ideas are already so deeply entrenched that, in the absence of any real lived experience to dispel them, they still nourish not only nostalgic theorizing but even the most fashionably glib talk.

This vicious cycle continues out of an old inertia: the need to work in order to survive compensates for the life lost in wage labor (an even costlier form of survival). The effect on consciousness is fatal, with two sets of prejudices contributing to the mortification: in the first, survival takes precedence over living; and in the second, the exercise of the intellect – through critical analysis of society, of political issues, of cultural decay, of the future of humanity – takes the place of existence, while the body is left to express its discontent through sickness and malaise. And one need not get very close to these ideas to detect a whiff of the cassock.

- 3 The economy is everywhere that life is not: but however intertwined the two may become, they simply do not meld, and one can never be confused with the other. Most people do not really live: their overly precise calculations about money, work, exchange, guilt and power govern their lives so thoroughly and irremediably that the only thing to escape this bloodlessly cold calculus is the warm pathos of sweat and tears – which is all that is left to take on the aspects of human reality.

How can one help but feel ever lost and rootless in an upside-down world where the energy of unused passions has turned self-destructive? Yet the anguish of constantly having to deal with setbacks, failure, poverty and death is not the result of some eternal curse, nor of some in-



curable illness indistinguishable from existence itself.

Only an exercise in self-mutilation could have given rise to the idea that the human condition is *essentially* miserable. Not so long ago many held that spirit dominated the material world; and yet, even while they proclaimed their aversion to the body and to all sordid, material interests, they were merely affecting outrage at talk of economic determinism, as they secretly engaged in the ordinary traffic of survival.

Today the modernist spirit prophesies its own glorious annihilation, followed by a state of ultimate lucidity, when it will continue to dominate the relics of the material world. Even as the proponents of this idea buy into the latest offerings of survivalist thinking they try to wash themselves clean of their daily compromise, scrubbing their soiled garments in whatever detergent promises the whiter-than-white gleam of revolutionary virtue.

Nothing better expresses the omnipresence of the economy than the separation between thought and life. Mental and manual labor take part in the same ignominy. Ideology, be it that of the *salon*, the pub, the family, or philosophical circles, refers to life only insofar as it confirms its absence.

- 4 Economics has been the most durable lie of the approximately ten millennia mistakenly accepted as history. From it stem all those eternal truths and sacred causes that have governed master and slave alike, truths and causes to which generations, born simply to live, have been wantonly sacrificed.

The time has come when the economic machine has begun to expose the cynical nakedness of its component

parts. A long and bloody striptease has deprived it of myth and ideology. First the priestly robes were tossed into the dustbin, followed by the reversible coat of “democratic” states. Now the machine has been stripped down completely, exposing what in each of us has served as the cogs of its fundamental inhumanity. It no longer uses – nor needs – illusions and subterfuge to parody what it is and always has been: a system designed to ensure the survival of human beings at the expense of *living*.

Ironically, at the very moment that consciousness is awakening, the flood waters of the economic tidal wave have poured in, and the survival of the species can be assured only at a growing rate of devaluation and degradation. The end of ideology coincides with the bankruptcy of the welfare state and the collapse of systems of administrative supervision.

It is precisely at the historical moment least conducive to belief in any certainty – God, Devil, State, Revolution, Supreme Savior, Left and Right – that religion tightens its net. The absolute dogma, according to which the existing world assumes reality only to the degree that it is governed by market forces, is based on a universal superstition instilled in us from infancy: the belief in the irreparable powerlessness of human beings.

- 5 The apocalypse has been announced so many times that it cannot occur. And even if it did it would be hard to distinguish it from the everyday fate already reserved for individual and community alike.

Is it hard to imagine a more sinister dance of death than war, torture, tyranny, disaster, sickness, boredom, guilty pleasures, and the kind of gratification that prefers self-

torture to self-enlightenment? Is not survival cut from the very same cloth of apocalypse?

At worst the fall of the market empire will bring about the same descent into inhumanity that was seen at its start. What is at the end is also at the beginning.

One calamity conceals another: behind the wreckage of the capitalism of monopolies and the State lies the whole of mercantile civilization that is disappearing, as was long prophesied. Age-old fables foretelling the death of the gods in a universal annihilation are now echoed in the visions of the Nuclear Dawn, or the carnage and unrelenting suffering of the Final Hour – all of which take their place in the pantheon dedicated to whatever lies on the other side of life.

- 6 The end of the reign of the economy is not the end of the world – merely the end of the economy’s totalitarian hold over the world. But as we well know, a dead tyranny continues to kill. The first response to the signs of beneficial change is neither *joie de vivre* nor creative release, but fear – a fear so intense that a moribund economy can exploit it to keep a certain market active and well-supplied: it is the insecurity market, in which consumers, reduced to a basic state of frailty and decrepitude, must beg for strong-armed protection as they rush through the well-lit, clearly displayed aisles of consumable hedonism.

To what can one attribute this terror, which strikes the proletarianized anthill, wears away old insurrectional reflexes and replaces them with a morose, bad-tempered apathy? Is it fear of breaking with patriarchal power, whose bureaucratic senility can be traced from the heads of state to the heads of families? Or does it stem from the alarm-

ing rumors that are exaggerated according to the fashion of the moment, under such horrifying names as terrorism, unemployment, bankruptcy, famine, crime, cancer, AIDS, pollution?

No: there is only one terror, from which all others derive. For most people it is the fear of losing the last illusion separating them from themselves, the panic of having to create their own lives. An age-old fear, certainly, but one that did not trouble early humanity – though it may originally have arisen from animal-like fear. What we are hearing today is the echo of the old divine curse whose baying has long terrified human beings. It has expropriated their lives and condemned them to produce its inhumanity for the sake of profit.

- 7 Many people blithely proclaim that God is dead, yet they continue to genuflect. Once it was shown that the economy’s promise of “salvation” for all humanity could be achieved only after mankind had been forced to wade through its own blood and filth, economics seemed, henceforth, to assure us of nothing except future ruin; and so one might have supposed that a great shift of opinion would have led the exhausted and those excluded from the hopes placed in communitarianism, to place their faith only in themselves, their creativity and their will to live. Alas, even the economy’s opponents continue to seek a little last warmth in the dying embers of the very fire that consumes our great civilization, as though they had no other choice than to celebrate its long-awaited demise by perishing along with it.

Religion’s skin is tougher than its bones. There is no corpse that it cannot dress up in new clothes. The

Enlightenment was still busy rooting out Catholic obscurantism when the authority of the Church reemerged in the guise of the self-proclaimed authority of the State and set loose swarms of preachers of atheist morality in cities and throughout the countryside – like so many traveling salesmen hawking their wares in the name of the Apostolic and Roman enterprise.

Even among those who once lambasted social activism and its ritual worship at the altar of the proletariat, there are those who have since donned a sacristan's cap. What started as a revolution against misery turned into a miserably failed revolution, all because of a reluctance to be anything *for oneself*; and this failure still condemns even the most vociferous seekers of emancipation and happiness to the gall of an impotence in which they acquiesce. Anyone who has the intelligence to comprehend the world but not enough to learn how to live, or who takes his self-hatred out on others, blaming and judging so as not to be blamed and judged himself, is, deep inside, no different from the priest. And even though he does not want to know himself he caws as loudly as all the other crows of living death.

- 8 The gods die twice: once in the thoughts of the men who conceived them, and once again in the body reduced by economics to a mere instrument of labor. No sooner had industrial capitalism shattered the old agrarian structure under the pressure of its inexorable advance than it got rid of all the gods and kings. But then it resuscitated them, for the purposes of its ideological spectacle, like so many characters in an operetta.

When it discovered the omnipresence of the market system, like some great landfall across the waters, nine-

teenth-century consciousness was no longer burdened by divine transcendence. After all, was it not this new omnipresence that promised to organize the new world in accordance with the tangible mechanisms of exchange, profit and competition? It brought the gods down to earth and became a universal spirit sufficient unto itself. The materiality of capitalism revealed, in fact, the human origin of the laws that had governed society since the appearance of commodities. It reduced the entity God to the “nature” of things; and it was in man's “nature” to make it productive, and profitable.

But this version of nature separated the world from life and reduced the world to the market system. With God thus brought into conformity with nature, he was sold off at a discount to a religion that was now just one ideology among others; and so he became the last shoddy remnant of the *heavenly order* under which had first emerged the system of survival that humanity imposed on itself at some specific point in its development.

God is dead as a sovereign entity, as master of the world, but he lives on in the religious form that gave birth to him by submitting mankind to economic alienation: thought separated from life; or the body weakened or broken in the name of labor.

As he analyzed the reproduction and self-destruction of commodities Marx never asked himself how far his personal behavior obeyed economic reflexes. His critique is the product of an intellectualism that reproduces the power of the mind over the body; it is the work of a lasting influence of God on the material world. However liberating its intentions it can only effect changes in a world where commodities are everywhere and humanity is nowhere; it is a

world where abstraction, being the ultimate and initial form of the divine, empties individuals of their vital substance, before crushing them under the weight of forces they are too weak to withstand. The hordes of bureaucrats, now in their twilight, wrestle to save an economy that can do no more than reinvest its successive failures into even greater losses, proving that the age of sacrifice is at an end. But the form that binds individuals to a society hostile to life can be broken only by the emancipation of life.

- 9 While constantly changing, man's exploitation of man has remained essentially the same. Economic necessity, which directly exiles us from life, perpetuates the decree of the gods who expelled our ancestors from the domain of pleasure. Immutable frontiers delimit the closed universe of exchange in which the commodity evolves.

Form, whose contours always shape a supposedly unique reality, was depicted as a divine sphere even before it took on the simultaneously concrete and abstract character of a bureaucratic organization, turning on its own axis, and drawing everyone into its gravitational field. The heavenly economy has given way to the earthly one, economic thought to economic materiality, spiritual alienation to bodily alienation, collective sacrifice to individual sacrifice. The separations remain as sharp as they have always been, but today the wound is plain to see.

Just as bath water spirals faster and faster as the last of it is drawn down the drain, the whirlpool of life empties at its fastest as the economy uses up the final resources of libidinal energy. The only ones not to hear its final gurglings are the statisticians and computer scientists who hear only the din of their own calculating. Although all

commodity-based civilizations, without exception, have placed a prohibition on pleasure and sexual enjoyment, the most urgent appeals of profitability now invite us to plunge into hedonism, to consume pleasure piecemeal and pay for it in installments.

The last unopened market verges on the free play of desire. So the last die is about to be cast on the same table where the first was thrown, so long ago, under the eye of the gods.

- 10 The economy has given birth to a two-headed monster: religion and the State. It originated in the first agricultural settlements (in the Neolithic period, circa 7000 B.C.), when Paleolithic civilizations based on hunting, gathering and fishing were replaced by a communitarian organization founded on agriculture and trade.

It was at this point in human development that the fall from life into survival occurred. In place of a unitary mode of existence, slowly disengaging from nature without ever breaking with it, a society arose in which human beings, having become both their own enemy and the enemy of their fellow humans, saw the object of their actions turned against them.

Instead of moving toward a *human* transcendence of the contradiction between a free life and the fight for survival that characterizes the animal kingdom, market civilization socialized both. The freedom of nature was sacrificed to a competitive struggle whose aim was no longer the brutal satisfaction of drives (which would now be satisfied in the form of a secret, shameful tribute to repressed animality) but rather the maintenance of a parasitic system offering the social collectivity an abstract guarantee of survival: the

exploitation of nature through man's exploitation of man.

The earliest legends, indelibly marked by nostalgia for a golden age and by hatred of women, admirably demonstrate what portion of real life the worshipers of the ithyphallic stone renounced and so fiercely repressed beneath the weight of the mind and the gods.

- 11 With the advent of cultivation the use of tools came to be associated with an exchange value – a price – that was both an abstraction and a concrete reality.<sup>1</sup>

To what may be properly called from this point on “our society,” labor and exchange lent a stability-in-turbulence marked by the predominance of abstraction and by the inversion of life.

To possess, use or enjoy anything, even one's own life, meant that one was obliged henceforward not only to produce goods but also, and simultaneously, the prices and the social power that their possession implied. Hence the concrete was assigned an abstract equivalence. By a reversal of perspective, the life force of the body was transformed into labor power; the body was now shadowed by its double, an intangible soul that existed in a universe unconcerned with earthly survival, a universe accessible only through death.

We make our way forward in an upside-down world that many still persist in taking for reality – for the only reality. And the driving force behind this inversion is fueled by the very thing that recognizes only those who accept their own abjection, namely *work*.

- 12 The institution of collective labor enforced by agriculture and trade forced all human beings to redistribute their space and time. It put an end to nomadism and to the free-

dom of night and day. The hours devoted to production relegated the natural drives to a state of restorative repose, confining them to time intervals or spaces not dominated by productivity: night, holidays, secret places, imagination and dreams.

This is the fundamental division: necessary labor places a prohibition on desires, which know no law but pleasure, and condemns them to seek satisfaction in a shameful, clandestine world of uselessness and obscurity – a world diametrically opposed to the life that originally nourished them.

With the intrusion of work the body loses its sensual wholeness. It splits into two principles: the head, the controlling element, whose thought regulates and represses libidinal energy; and the body, the element that is controlled, reduced to a money-making musculature and menial hand.<sup>2</sup>

I use the term *inverted perspective*, or *market perspective*, to describe the state in which pleasure is repressed because it is seen as a force hostile to work and to the civilization of work. It is a state in which life degenerates into survival; and pleasures, carefully proscribed, appear only as mortal wounds. It is a civilization in which the freedom and openness of life are considered absolute evils, forced back into the night of negativity, burdened with anguish and guilt and driven to forms of release that pay tribute only to death.

Ten thousand years ago the necessity of sacrificing the quest for gratuitous pleasure to the social obligation of labor imposed a global inversion on the evolution of human life, just as this life was slowly disengaging itself from nature, like a child developing in the womb. We are made

even more acutely aware of this today, when every birth exposes the distortion that inevitably affects each child, and condemns it to a life that is the negation of human existence.

No heavenly or earthly illusion can hide it any longer: the path artificially laid down for humanity is that of life separated from self. And life – which in its essence cannot exist anywhere without asserting its will to be everywhere – is condemned to be an object in a world of things, to the point where it becomes a perfectly inert object, a corpse – the ultimate social model of humanity, finally indistinguishable from the commodities that it produces.

Desire is under an eternal, unremitting curse to punish itself for not being profitable – a curse never to be lifted so long as individuals remain in this state of alienation that makes them strangers to themselves, and so long as they construct the image of a God of terror<sup>3</sup> and of consolation, a God of retribution who must be paid and who pays in return.

There is no god whose power is not based on the negation of life, on the inversion of pleasures and on the ignoble and exhausting work of imposing repression and then lifting it, if only temporarily.

- 13 Work existed from the moment one part of life was devoted to the service of the economy while the other was denied and repressed. Placed at odds with themselves by the transformation of the life force into a force of production, people were also alienated from each other by the demands of making a profit.

The physical tasks of ensuring that the land was tilled and sown, the crops harvested and the tools made, were

matched by a corresponding concern for the division of these tasks, for assessing property lines and establishing norms of exchange. The split between manual and intellectual labor corresponded in the social body to class antagonism, and in the individual body to the opposition between the mind and muscles, giving the hand priority over other biological or instinctual functions.

Thus the mutilation of life entailed a chronic fragmentation that could be repaired and made into a meaningful whole only if the pieces were seen from the vantage of a god. A cynical, hypocritical god allowed survival to supply an artificial unity: disjointedness replaced the concrete unity of natural life; and a mythical unity was founded on the universality of exchange value. It was this god who had shifted the blame for all the disintegration, divergences of interests and antagonisms onto human beings, as in the story of the Tower of Babel. For trying to recapture heaven and bring the gods back to earth, the builders of the tower were struck by a divine malediction that forced them into mutual incomprehension and individual and collective self-destruction. Somewhat later the same god, addressing human beings from atop the scaffold from which he had just hung his son, generously advised them to love one another.

- 14 Civilization was identified with obedience to a universal and eternal market relationship. Thought, derived from an allegedly higher organization, with a mandate from heaven to transcend the material practice of men, denied the designation of “human” to those who had lived before the birth of the exchange economy.

The so-called Paleolithic era, with its hunting, gather-

ing and fishing nomadism, engendered the monster-ridden universe of the old mythologies. The Garden of Eden lay in ruins, having been destroyed by a God who had not been heeded there. But it was eventually overtaken by memories of fascinating and disturbing creatures – fallen angels, elves, fairies, gnomes, ghouls and dragons.

Even modern historians are condescending in their accounts of the peoples who wandered through luxuriant nature without the need to violate or exploit it. Instead of looking for traces of a distinct Aurignacian or Magdalenian culture they usually try to find in these civilizations only the faltering beginnings of our era. It does not occur to them that the unity from which the diverse mineral, vegetable, animal and human elements originated may have undergone a radically different development from the social orientation imposed on it since Neolithic times. One day we must analyze the cave paintings and artifacts – with their frequent feminine symbols, their fusion of male and female principles, and their graceful depiction of humans and animals. We may expect to discover traces of a milieu that actually favored life. Perhaps we shall discover a society careful not to disavow its connection with nature, a civilization that, through its analogical mode of understanding, was moving toward a living science that could take whatever the natural forces blindly offered, whether harmful or beneficial, and turn it to the advantage of the living.

- 15 The exploitation of man by man and the brutal exploitation of nature are, in fact, one and the same practice. From the moment the market system minimizes the fruits of the earth by seeing them only in terms of the fruits of labor the market system treats nature as its slave. Today the global

disintegration of ecological equilibrium is completely tied up with the logic of an economy founded on dehumanization: as life expires beneath the growing exploitation that negates and turns it into survival, the preconditions of survival itself are threatened with destruction by the profit mechanism. The commodity is the original form of pollution.

As economic thought imposed its superiority on both the social and individual body, there also emerged the will to domesticate human nature and transform its energy into intellectual life and manual labor.

The prohibitions placed on life's pleasures and the restrictions placed on lives lived in pursuit of pleasure were such that satisfactions were allowed, but only if pleasure could be repressed, and sporadically unleashed, but in certain forms. Sensual pleasure was restricted to blind indulgence: rape, debauchery, drunkenness, gluttony, the art of torturing oneself and others. (However extravagantly and sumptuously they may seem to enjoy their pleasures, hedonists cannot indulge themselves without experiencing an aftertaste of death.)

Once expelled from the body, the animality of passion reenters through the head. Market civilization does not transcend bestiality, it socializes it. It polices and urbanizes it in the rivalry of competition, greed for profit, legal and illegal appropriation, the survival of the fittest. The most destructive animality is exercised in the name of the spirit that denies it. Used in market wars and social struggles, animality resurfaces, in the guise of civilization, to exacerbate the brutality inherent in business relations and power rivalries. From Sumerian conquests to concentration camps the ferocity of the animal world seems minor

in comparison with the iron fist of power that lies inside the velvet glove of solidarity, justice, equality and love.

- 16 Treating nature as a thing in itself – whether nature in general or human nature in particular – is a concession to this prevailing abstraction, this intellectualism imposed on us by the dissociative effect of the economy. The human environment and the natural environment do not exist outside the relationship that establishes them as part of the same evolution of life, since each follows the same progressive mutations, retrograding plateaus and dead ends.<sup>4</sup>

From the perspective of the market nature plays an unpredictable role in the system of exploitation. For, while nature is capable of being exploited, it can itself play a part in exploitation, in association with the lowest and most turbulent social group: the laboring masses, whose function is, precisely, to open up nature's entrails, extract stones and ore, and to plant seeds. Like this blind mass (which always seems to need an enlightened master) nature has unpredictable fits of anger, sudden jolts that threaten the edifice of civilization. And the moment it refuses to produce, nature, like workers in revolt, is deemed stupid, pitiless and cruel.

True to the history of the commodity, the glorification of a denatured nature has come soon after the glorification of the denatured man of the proletariat. The celebration of the body (which is now open to a whole new market based on pleasure) and the ascendancy of a new science of bodily well-being are supplanting the sense of shame that was long perpetuated by a great fiction: From its supposed position of superiority the divine economy looked on materiality with shame and hence scorned the

material economy from which it itself had sprung. But the same division is still in place. Nature cannot be liberated from the economy until the economy has been driven out of human life.

### *The Gods*

- 17 The gods are the mythic form of the exchange economy, the abstract and absolute guarantee of a kind of survival to which the social collectivity sacrifices the lives of the individuals who compose it. The gods alone oversee the prohibitions that heaven imposes on earth – as the mind imposes them on the body. They are the supreme expression of the domination of use value by exchange value.

The blood in which they are born is the blood of a sacrifice at once real and symbolic. The slaughtered victim, paying the price of the survival granted to all, perfectly epitomizes the sacrifice of life force to labor power – the sacrifice that pays for the right to the benefits of the market system.

The heavenly masters were cast in the mold of the ruling class and require similar sacrifices. Because the rulers are conceived through alienated thought their power is itself a mutilated one: as mere intellectual workers, they act as sheepdogs to a herdlike society, and they have distinct duties toward that community. The tribute the rulers are paid for providing protection is offset, in spiritual terms, by the obedience they pay to the gods.

What are we to make of these gods, supposedly robed in omnipotence yet beholden to humans like masters answerable to their slaves? Are they the sum of absent life? No, not even that. They are merely the gaping void that swal-



lows up all the impotence that we call the power of the strong, all the despair that we call the hope of the weak. They are merely the totalitarian projection of the economics of exchange and survival – nothing more than the false illusion of life.

- 18 If men die as they lend life to the gods, the gods die in turn from the economy that gives birth to them and finally devours them. The deeper into human behavior economic imperialism penetrates, the clearer its purely terrestrial origin becomes. God disappears when the vanishing point of the perspective of profit becomes the starting point of the economics of exchange. Marx, with his discovery of the laws of the social economy, and Freud, with his discovery of the laws of the libidinal economy, marked two stages in the progress of the market. With the advent of capitalism the material reality of the omnipresence of economics inevitably penetrates consciousness.

The nineteenth century saw the end of the ancient struggle between the two Hydra heads of Church and State. Temporal power defeated spiritual power; the earthly economy displaced the heavenly economy; the social contract secularized the divine pact; and spectacle rescued and restored the desacralized fragments of myth, while its ideologies heavily discounted any spiritual values that remained after the religious enterprise had gone into liquidation.

The commodity thus comes back to earth, which it never should have left. Draped in a humanity stolen from its slaves, it sets up shop on a site seized from God and tries to cash in on the idea of an economic paradise; but no amount of marketing can stave off the impending bankruptcy. After all, according to the logic of exchange, the

ultimate price is paid in hell. Life is sacrificed in the name of survival, and survival is sacrificed in the name of an annihilated economy, all of which suggests nothing so much as a slightly cheerier version of the Last Judgment that once so preoccupied the pious.

### *History*

- 19 What has been called “History” is nothing but the history of commodities and of human beings who dehumanize themselves to produce them. The triumph of a bloodless humanism shows today that economic expansion has been not a victory but, rather, the final blow delivered to the expansion of human life, for which it has parasitically substituted itself.

To argue either that the world progresses or that nothing ever really changes is to confuse two opposite movements – the continuing struggle for survival and the emergence of life. The former grew out of market processes, whereas the latter does not follow the regular course of history: survival only erupts into life at unpredictable intervals. The only change that might influence it is the increased debility threatened by the accelerated burden of work; and the dialectic of death must be factored into all human activities as they become more and more mechanized in accordance with economic imperatives.

As for the rest it is safe to assume that the overwhelming intensity of lovemaking, rare as true love may be, is no different today from the pleasure felt by the lovers we see coupling face to face in a Paleolithic sculpture on display at British Museum.

History acts as a catalyst between the dialectic of death,

which underlies the integration of humans into the market, and the dialectic of life, which is always present but never acknowledged. As the economy's hold weakens, life is more able to clear a path for itself.

Periods of violent destruction mark the eruption of the will to live and the amount of repressive force needed to hold it in check. When they are frustrated, life lets out a howl of fury against savage wars, barbarous tyrannies, the brutality of everyday mores – and the great fallout of epidemics (plague, tuberculosis, cancer, AIDS and suicide).

Most of the time these give way to a period of either economic upturn or economic turmoil, at which time a new phase is announced. It is as if spring had suddenly broken through where there had never before been seasons. All thoughts turn to love: patriarchy's vulgarity is ridiculed and martial virility is seen for the absurdity that it is. Laughter rings out, children are about – and woman appears, clothed for pleasure, magisterial in her certainty that she is entirely useless, indeed harmful, to the economy the priests invented when they sacrificed love to power.

### *Kings and Priests*

- 20 As it organized itself according to the dictates of the market the universe was perceived as an emanation of the divine. When theology interpreted what it claimed was the speech of the gods, the meaning given to these inaudible words was naturally liable to reflect the interests of the priests – the real masters of the community posing as its servants.

The attribution of earthly effects to heavenly causes depended on the inversion and separation caused by labor, which represses pleasure and sets up a division between

the intellectual and the manual. The essence of all things, eternal truth and life after death, thus belonged to the kingdom of heaven, while the earth and those who tarried on it experienced nothing but lies, deceptions, and fleeting and furtive pleasures in the shadow of death. Even today all claims to liberated attitudes notwithstanding, this mentality is rife among all creatures, great and small, who inhabit this social aquarium.

There has only ever been one genuine historical regression, and that was the transition to the rule of the economy, under which life was prematurely sequestered and sheltered, as living came to be considered more a matter of surviving. Priests have interpreted this as just punishment for an error: for them, humanity deserves its misery for having had the temerity to insult the gods. Conversely temporal power, which is firmly rooted in the worldly economy, has deconsecrated theology and turned it into philosophy, replacing a divine curse with an ontological one: the claim that it is inherent in man's condition to be dispossessed of his own life.

- 21 History as the history of survival is completely circumscribed by the contradictory relationship that underlies it – that between the immutable structure of agriculture and the conquering spirit of commerce. The East long remained largely entrenched in agrarian immobility: the irrigation required by the policies of maximizing the land's productivity created a tentacular bureaucracy whose inertia rapidly paralyzed the potential progress of any commodity market. In the West, however, the primitive agrarian structure offered scant resistance to conquest first by Greek, then by Roman, mercantile imperialism.

The agrarian economy reasserted its dominance after the fall of the Roman Empire, but the legal, political and cultural structures created by Greco-Roman mercantilism never completely disappeared. As early as the eleventh century these structures reappeared, inspiring the growth of towns and providing the great commercial undertakings, known as the Crusades, with the justifications they needed: pragmatically underwriting mercenary freedoms, the rationality of free trade and the all-conquering profit motive. These structures ultimately opened the road to industrial society – a road along which the year 1789 would signal, not the end of agrarian production, but certainly the end of its hegemony.

- 22 Myth expresses the immobility of the agrarian mode of production; philosophy expresses the mobility of craftsmanship. Priests are the guardians of myth. Their attempts to treat philosophy as theology's handmaiden could not succeed, because philosophy was ever the insolent, argumentative offspring of mercantile activity, of reality as modeled after the reign of the producer.

While priests made sure that society respected the law of exchange, which was the foundation of civilization, kings, whose ministry was strictly earthly, were responsible for manipulating state power in order to control the precarious market equilibrium and conquer new markets.

The conflicted unity of temporal and spiritual power, the stormy marriage of sword and censer, represented the attempt to integrate earthly and heavenly economies as given concrete form by the masters who ruled production and the masters who claimed authority over the soul – the two halves of the Supreme Being.

So long as agriculture effectively restrained the rise of the commodity, myth remained the paramount mode of communication and comprehension, painting everything in the colors of eternity – from the progressive forces that negated it, to the Promethean virtues of justice and equality, which were destined ultimately to smash and fragment it.

- 23 If the abstract standard of money made different sorts of objects comparable, at least on the basis of price, how could the first owners and organizers of labor possibly refuse the chance, indeed the privilege, of setting themselves up as masters of exchange? Enclosing their basic economic practice within the reliquary of transcendence they placed the universal measure of things and beings securely in the hands of the gods, out of reach of an ephemeral earthly destiny. If there was one ambition that motivated this flesh-eating elite – these elite servants of a spirit that was beyond human understanding, and holders of such high-sounding titles (high priest, pharaoh, Living God, Sun King, Holy Father of the People and of All Poor Bastards) – it was, quite simply, to be compensated like gods while here on earth.

At first the priests of the immutable possessed knowledge that they claimed came from the gods. It was not that they had invented some technique for burnishing or tempering, for sowing or weaving, for making arms or tools. Rather, ruling as they did over the relationship between men and the things men produced, they appropriated knowledge by virtue of their position as human mediums of exchange – a position that enabled them to collect taxes at the frontier between the gods and human society.

Just as their mission was to freeze the turbulence of market expansionism into myth, so their science was directed less toward technical progress – which would sooner or later spell their disappearance – than toward reinforcing their own power and holiness.

If indeed they arranged megaliths into a calendar of rural labor, or into an astronomical clock, their primary goal, amid stones erected to celestial progenitors, was to usurp the mantle of divine authority. For this the gods were paid in blood, the blood of a victim chosen by the peasant community as a way of ensuring a good harvest.

Ritual sacrifice marked every phase of seasonal labor. Blood sealed time's passing, as the never-ending cycle of renewal returned time after time to altar or temple. And with every advance in the conditions of survival the priestly caste exacted not only greater obedience but more and more of the community's own flesh.

Fortunately once science was wrested from the priests, it totally extirpated the barbarity of religion; except, however, that "science" today endorses the claim that all progress has its drawbacks, that boredom is the price of comfort, that nuclear power is well worth the risk of cancer, and that a good wage is adequate compensation for a failed, wasted life.

### *Language*

- 24 What form molds the essence of the economy? Surely, in the broadest sense, it is language – the combination of signs "exchanged" by the members of a social community governed by a single principle.

The language of the masters contains the language of their negation: the dominant language always serves eventually as a weapon of revolt and subversion. The language of the masters, like that of revolt, is expressed in the most abstract and detached terms; yet both belong to an identical process. Just as a dying power gives birth to a new power, just as society mutates, and one mode of production replaces another, so language, in its infinite variety, obeys that constant law of the economy's rule according to which all change, however radical it may appear, is still a form of exchange.<sup>5</sup>

Work, appropriation, profit, exchange and money – the abstract measure of all things – have ordered the diversity of the universe according to the perspective of the market. The mind, separated from concrete or practical concerns, has risen above the body and the earth, exactly as foretold in the Judeo-Christian fable of Genesis.

Language likewise is elevated above human beings, binding them together in a network of abstractions, woven together into a web of myth. Once transformed into the language of the gods, it is so pure that no one can speak it or hear it unless it falls to a register low enough that humans can understand it (since they are a little hard of hearing).

Priests were the first to be given language's symbols to decipher. It provided them with encrypted mysteries – incantations, which sometimes seemed to work, if one were to judge by the hysteria of possession that overtook the body of the magus as he was caught up in a great surge of energy. Later, language shed its sacred inspiration to become the vehicle of the thought of the masters, of the intellectual workers who managed, governed and gave

orders. And finally, in its lowest role, it became the voice of the laborer, adapting itself to the wily stratagems of the slaves: it became practical enough to cut as sharply as the craftsman's cutting tool; it could be used to haggle with the horsetrader; it could be kept to a murmur, as when repression held it back, or it could be used to cry out at a moment of release. And it was of course from this point, when it could sink no lower, that language really began to develop. As long as the power of myth endured, theological and religious language sought to impose its law, to control the meaning of signs and words.

The legend of the Tower of Babel is a warning to priests. It reveals the incoherence that threatens to undermine the language of temporal power (the profane communication between master and slave). From the moment that the materiality of the worldly language challenges the universal language of the gods the message of the heavenly economy is confronted by the crude and servile earthly language that emanated from it.

- 25 The sacred, which the priestly function excretes as its *raison d'être*, confers on the words of the dominant language the force and value of acts. The oath, the giving of one's word, the vow, the promise – all such legal formalities obey a ritual that seems guided by a divine hand (that is: they guarantee payment). Thus form prevailed over content, just as the market value of persons and objects continues to prevail over their true worth and quality.

Once words received divine approval, the priests ruled over language as judges and wise men. Whereas kings tried to disentangle the complexity of earthly affairs, priests (sometimes combining the functions of priest and king)

claimed that the extent of their jurisdiction had been codified and was under the aegis of the heavenly kingdom. For them proclamation was superior to investigation: Galen and biblical astronomy were truer than anatomical observation or Galileo's experiments. A village priest could blithely lift the skirts of his female parishioners so long as he declared his obedience to Church and dogma. But woe unto the most devout of Christians should they decide to stray from some aspect of holy writ.

Those who were put to death for changing so much as a comma in the scriptures did not perish as a result of some strange plot. Their pitiful end served the greater glory not of a bloodthirsty god but of a system for which, even today, the slaves of labor docilely sacrifice their lives. We still die for the economy and for what seems most economical.

Beyond the political and social rationales they embody, theological duels represent the struggle between the sacred and the secular. This is a struggle, however, in which the vanquished must live on in the victor, in which the site of the encounter is ultimately more important than the confrontation itself. Just as the most merciless war between two capitalist countries is never intended to put an end to capitalism itself, so the priests were charged with the impossible mission of preventing the purity of the heavenly order from degrading into a material, worldly order, even though they were quite aware that the shadow of the gods would perpetuate itself and merge with the show of their evictors – so long as labor continued to pass for a source of enlightenment.

It would take an extraordinary perspicuity to unravel these complexities without falling into one or another of

the many ridiculous or convoluted discourses of the twentieth century.

- 26 While the agrarian mode of production controlled the development of the commodity, myth prevailed over the secular; religion treated philosophy as its servant; the wrath of the gods subdued ideologies; cyclical time suppressed linear time; and so the key words of religious language drew all forms of expression into their vortex. By trying to explain everything, these words ended up meaning almost anything. In the dominant mythology of the Middle Ages religion was most vulnerable when words such as “God,” “salvation,” “divine love,” “paradise,” “hell,” “sin,” “perfection,” “apostolate” and “charity” suddenly acquired unexpected meanings. The scandal attached to such new meanings was so clear that the Church did all in its power to ignore them. Papal decrees and catalogs of heresies served as permanent lexicons, constantly updating and clarifying correct meanings and denouncing as “diabolical” or “perverted” the panoply of definitions that competed with the ecclesiastical definitions. The Church chose its enemies because its enemies were part of itself. The heresies were religions that had failed – or had not yet succeeded. Philosophy shattered theology only to perpetuate it in a different form. However, once it was clear that Rome could not silence the mounting calls for natural freedom and openness to life, the Church conceded, albeit reluctantly, to this burgeoning movement of the “free spirit,” giving its blessing to the advocates of this new heresy. This strategy has succeeded, to a certain degree, since, to this day, the same silence and the same co-optation hold their sway even over the most erudite.

- 27 With the end of agrarian society came the end of myths, which were dispersed, spread out among myriad ideologies. Industrialization transformed the kingdom of divine transcendence into a people’s republic; it cut the loop of cyclical time and recreated it as a linear time that could be tracked, accounted for and made profitable. Human freedom became identified with freedom of exchange, taking the words of the “*in pace*” and recasting them to fit the vocabulary of the Revolution.

Theology (the language of the gods) and philosophy (the language of men) are both moments in a single progression. They are both nothing more than ways of abstracting life. Thus spiritual and temporal power vie with one another in order to carry out one goal: to perpetuate slavery.

In spectacles honoring fanciful ideologies there have been vain attempts to revive this lost unity, a unity that once bonded ceremony and now-abolished myths. Having achieved its freedom from the sclerosis of feudalism, however, philosophy says nothing that is not already expressed by economic practice. All would-be universal ideologies – such as nationalism, socialism, fascism, communism – wear the withering skin of religion until they, too, begin to shrivel up, turning cancerous at the same uncontrollable rate at which capital proliferates.

Words have not ceased to lose their appearance in losing their power. Even though discourse is still, mistakenly, substituted for experience, who now would agree to die for their country, the revolution, honor, the family, the common good or an endangered economy?

- 28 Derision has become so much a part of language that, finally, it is all that will remain. We have learned to dis-

trust words, not because they so easily mislead, but because the world they belong to is one that does not really concern us. Beneath the pathetic speeches that have disturbed the lives of millions of people, the grimace of repressed life has finally been revealed. The man of power, worried about maintaining his reputation or bestowing advice and wielding authority, is so cramped in his sound-proof shell that his calls for freedom and happiness only leave him hoarse, as his words grate ineffectually against the hardness of his body and his spirit. Whatever he may want to proclaim he can only convey in terms of commodities, since he is one himself.

The misappropriation of language that surrounds life has made society more sensitive to the tide of pleasures and vexations. The irksome buzzing of alienated thought is perceived as a pointless annoyance, as something to be avoided. Words only have importance in life where they are forgotten and only have charm at the moment when they give way to the eloquent silence of the gestures of love.

### *Christian Syncretism*

- 29 Christianity was credited with closing the wounds opened by the fall of the Roman Empire. And in homage to the great healer who was most skilled at repairing wounds, Christianity made its great contribution – in fact, its only true contribution – which consisted in adapting itself to the homeostatic mechanisms of the economy; that is, it had discovered how to mend the two contradictory principles that had defined economics until the end of the eighteenth century. The Church was the rigid yet flexible bridge that, although constantly set asway by struggles,

could unite the austerity of the divine economy with the mercantilism of the earthly economy.

Failing to surrender to the demands of the modernizing market Rome surrendered instead to invading barbarians. Bureaucracy faltered and crumbled, having been an outgrowth of agrarianism and the archaism of its slave society. And this failure cut off in mid-growth the flourishing economic imperialism that, at the point of a sword, had civilized much of Europe and North Africa.

Christianity triumphed by drawing on the spoils of the first commercial empire to have international pretensions. Its booty was a considerable albeit odd mixture: devalued myths, a changing society in which slaves had the ambitions of proletarians, a system of exchange based on the rationality of Greek philosophy, and the quintessence of Latin culture – mercantile pragmatism and a cult of efficiency.

For a long time religion had aroused more amused skepticism than fervor. The polytheism of the Roman state easily assimilated the gods of its conquered or colonized peoples. Such ecumenism corresponds to a commercial reality in which all religions are valid the moment they have something to sell.<sup>6</sup> Neither myth nor the various forms of religion had anything to sustain them except a multitude of soulless divinities, statuettes hurriedly assembled for display in a prototype of an ethnological museum.

Born in the lands of Jericho, where the economy first emerged, the Hebraic religion tempered this doctrine – attributed to an Essene agitator – in the fires of millenarian revolts. At the most opportune moment it was therefore able consciously to take up the movement to emancipate the slaves, where Spartacus had left off, and this with the implicit consent of an emerging modern economy.

Greek philosophy's lively critique of the sacred established the Logos as the rational medium of exchange that everyone could understand, providing a weapon that could be used to dismember the gods. Christianity swallowed Greek thought whole without fully digesting it, which explains the Church's interminable case of indigestion.

Christianized Rome finally assumed the bureaucratic apparatus that had made and unmade emperors. Its inertia and the efficiency of its policing, as much as its spirit of conquest, enabled it to erect the beacon of sovereign obscurantism that would stand for thousands of years, and be seen throughout the world, as the universal lantern of extinguished life and of voluntary death.

30 In order to restore myth and resacralize the economy, Christianity borrowed spare parts from Greek thought and drew on the idea of the Great Becoming in order to topple the gods. In the hands of the bureaucratic Roman and Apostolic Church, Hebraic monotheism created a God-Logos that expressed the unity that fused market value with the three powers that ensure its immanence: the Father, or spiritual power; the Son, or temporal power; and the Holy Spirit, or Church, which governs relations between God and men.

Teams of industrious men, who felt that all forms of life were odious, manipulated legendary stories, oral traditions and fragments of Aristotle, Plato and Plotinus. All material served their purpose, which was to cut and shape the dogmatic stones on which an institution could be erected that professed to embody at once fixity and flux, stability and change, linear time and cyclical time.

To what do these compilers and concept-shapers, hon-

ored as the Founding Fathers of the Church, owe their sanctification if not their keen sense of smell? For this, after all, was how they were able to follow the shifting scent of profit. Origen and Pelagius had no less talent than Matthew, Augustine, Jerome and the rest; but the former were no different from members of the board of directors who urged their company to cut off its main source of profit. It was pointless for the Church to condemn sin and carnal temptation if, at the same time, it was going to allow Origen to guarantee chastity by castrating himself or to allow Pelagius to refute the idea of original sin. Their acts amounted to "cutting the purse strings" of all the money that flowed into the Church for penitence and redemption.

Once Roman decadence had shifted into recession and a return to an agrarian society, Christian theocracy proliferated, only to find itself at the crossroads – of retreat and momentum, regression and nostalgia for conquest, immobility and progress. While the myth of the all-providing Father restored the magnificence of the divine economy and set up the earthly economy according to the model of the sacrificed Son, a certain humanist rationalism prevailed during the Church's first millennium, giving the Church an air of enlightenment<sup>7</sup> and an exemplary progressive outlook: in the hereafter at least, master and slave alike could attain the democracy of salvation.

Through Christianity, economic imperialism lived on in the spiritual heritage of myth. In the romanized world, where civilizing and commercializing went hand in hand, the commercial zones set up by Rome were soon invaded by the cruciform symbol of the economy, a symbol that stood for something that never disappeared but simply remanifested itself in various changing, earthly forms.



There is certainly an inverted logic to the way ideologies of love, peace, serenity and the idyllic life flourished around churches, abbeys and monasteries – like so many cankers gnawing away at the living and dead alike.

The Church was built on slowly accumulating and hardening layers of sedimentary rock: there was the permanence of Roman law, Latin as the sacred language, and the cross that was passed off as marking the holiest of sites in much the same way that the habitats of rural deities were marked by springs, pools, forests, hillocks, dolmens and free-standing stones. Above all else there was Rome, which, like a great spider, drew into the web of the celestial bureaucracy everything that moved.

At the heart of this civilization, whose heartlessness had become Christianity's most noticeable trait, lay Rome, out of which swarmed the traveling salesmen of angelic purity. In Rome the pope incarnated God while wearing garbs more suited to a charlatan or a banker; and as one side of his Janus-face looked toward the mythical Jerusalem the other remained fixed on the whore of Babylon. Even today, with Rome no more than a caricature of itself, it has remained an object of ridicule thanks to the stunts of the Polish clown and the escapades behind the Ambrosian bank scandal; and it continues to revert to the same old practices – its obsession with power, envy, avarice, repression, violence, hatred and contempt – despite its superficial commitment to the purer forms of exchange: self-sacrifice, selflessness, forgiveness, free will, justice, altruistic love and charity.

31 By embracing the mercantile imperialism of ancient Rome, and allowing it to penetrate and then seep into theocracy,

the Church took the same poison that had infiltrated Rome and led to its decline and fall. The Church was impregnated by the very thing that would condemn it to death, just as Herod had tried to kill the rival savior in his infancy, after baptizing him with the name of the Antichrist.

During the first millennium Christianity had become the obedient servant of economic omnipresence. With the Christocentric calendar it seized possession of time as well as space and made it possible for the Church to look back on the agrarian period as a stable point of reference from which it could measure its own progress. Instead of the stagnation of archaic peasant beliefs (which were called "pagan," implying all the same condescension and contempt that the city dweller held for the countryman), the Church seemed to be fertile with ideas for a more progressive faith. It replaced the cruelty of fertility rites with the more humane notion of sacrifice, where blood was no longer shed except through the symbolic mediation of Christ.

This balance was destroyed when agrarian predominance began to be threatened by the rise of towns, the development of commerce, the renewed mercantile expansion and the appearance of a bourgeoisie that sought its right to freedom in the freedom of exchange. Christianity had scarcely triumphed over paganism before it was forced to confront the very spirit of economic modernity. Christianity was no longer its sole spokesman, as it had been when society was locked into the agrarian system.

The communalist insurrections of the eleventh century revived progressive ideology; the Church was consumed from within by the materialism that had penetrated it. Concrete reasoning mocked the abstruse assertions of

dogma, which seemed to be expounded by leisured commentators who concocted such absurd notions as a virgin impregnated by a spirit, and a God that existed simultaneously in three forms, who could be swallowed in a hunk of bread and who, though a corpse, left his tomb and flew off into thin air. And, most confounding of all, he was a loving being yet encouraged the worst atrocities to be carried out in his name.

Once industrialization establishes a universal market that expands across the entire world, or at least a market that is large enough to fit its needs, that will be the end of Christianity. The Church, which stores old memories of eternalized exchanges, will be obliterated under the weight of the immediate reality of the economy. Modern capitalism will relegate divine transcendence to the past, tossing it off like a pathetic, worn-out skin that is shed in the final stages of metamorphosis.

- 32 Jesus Christ was more successful than Mithras and Manes because he best expressed the future of the economy. He made man the finest, matchless promoter of material goods; for the more goods and possessions a worker acquires, the more he is dispossessed of his true life.

In the same way that God was incarnate in Jesus Christ, so the commodity takes a human form. It is humanized by virtue of a sacrifice in which the producer renounces life in order to win the love of the Father, who produced humanity (and is mistakenly called the Creator in Christian mythology).

Christianity sanctioned the end of slavery by making slavery voluntary. While Mithraism and Manichaeism lay their stakes on a return to the agrarian mode of produc-

tion the spiritual and temporal imperialism of Christianity lay the ground for the ascendancy of the modern State. Christianity will endure as long as is necessary for the modern State to impose itself as the sole and supreme embodiment of the market relationship.

Unlike Manichaeism, and its revival in Catharism – neither of which could reconcile the purity of the divine order with the sordid materiality of the earthly economy – the Catholic Church married heaven and hell at the altar of balance, moderation and equity. It honed down the extreme images of angels and devils, but left just the right proportion of flesh and spirit that could be sold off profitably in the divine and earthly economies.

The Catholic church followed a third path: it tried to transcend conflicting private interests the same way the State would later try to overcome class antagonisms. (Hence the massacre of the anti-Trinitarians and the fight for the archaic magic of the Trinity – three being the figure by which contradictions are overcome.)

- 33 Wherever merchandising and commercial trade came into wide use Christianity entrenched itself by renewing and adjusting theological language accordingly. Latin was used in commercial transactions, official government and military business, and slowly replaced the distinctive languages in the conquered territories, setting up a universal monopoly over communication. Likewise Christian mythology permeated all thinking, taking over the old religious symbols, marking off intellectual guideposts, while being constantly hammered into people's minds through a repetition of signs that controlled space and time, conditioned minds and governed behavior.

In Rome theologians labored to unify and standardize Latin and give it a universal exchange value. In this way it perpetuated and extended Rome's conquest, intellectually, across a huge network of meanings centered around a textual nucleus that claimed to be inspired by revelation, and interpretable only by the pontifical Pythia. But in this upside-down world entities and objects had no true nature of their own but belonged to a set of categories produced by the socioeconomic system. The power to determine and name what does or does not exist and the power to call something into existence were absolute; for whatever was not named had no official existence. Furthermore whatever is named must obey the laws of language – laws that define and specify, name, classify and hierarchize.

In the empire of alienated thought anything that involves the spirit or the mind also involves the earth. The Church wages a relentless struggle to control the spiritual market, fighting within and against a gradual movement toward change and decay. It is the struggle of a kind of death that does not want to die, unless all humanity dies with it and at the latest moment possible. And the fact that the words “No salvation without the Church” could have been so disparaged by the very people who repeated them in the name of nation, community, party or group amply demonstrated that the real meaning behind these words was “No survival without the economy.”

Yet, beneath the ridiculous and unceasing battle waged by the dominant religion against its numerous rivals (heresies) and against mercantilism (ironically mirroring its own materiality), there was another, more secret confrontation, with an enemy who struck, then dodged any blows and always remained unassailable. This was the war waged

by the gods and their slaves against the natural rights of life, against the experience of pleasure, which threatens at every moment to break the economic yoke that attempts to subdue it.

- 34 The poverty of the nineteenth century, which could only engender an impoverished conscience, also spawned a grotesque legend of a Middle Ages drenched in Christian faith like sardines in oil. The unity of myth was shattered into ideologies; individualism claimed its own share in the collective alienation; and God, after having been dismissed from the universe, was now being summoned back by imperial decree. Factory smoke blackened the idyllic picture of the rights of man, and although happiness no longer meant holding to the lie of the hereafter, there was no compensating truth to offer for the present. But these ruins were actually all that was needed to erect a glorious, nostalgic monument to the past.

Of course even this shift from *being* to *having* was bound to preserve some slimy trace of the divine. After all the religious form was the lie that artificially restored wholeness to humanity, healing what had been set at odds with itself, repairing what had been broken and alienated by the economy.

The religious form had changed, nevertheless: once desecrated, myth became spectacle. Christianity is now simply one pill in the pillbox of ideologies, and it has been still further discredited by the widespread disparagement of all kinds of medicine that are as bad as the diseases they are supposed to cure. Yet some inexpiable vileness has been transmitted from the crowds of the faithful mesmerized by a *Te Deum* or an *auto-da-fé* to crowds of citizens

cheering some political clown, from the pietist proclaiming his guilt to any modern-day person who has so low an opinion of himself that he places his fate in the hands of others.

Religiosity is survival's shroud, the death that everything seized by the economy carries within itself. But if the fabric of that shroud seems to have been spun from the very threads used by the Fates to weave their tapestry, that work is undone and unraveled, daily, by the innocence and gratuitousness of pleasure. The arsenal of prohibitions and terrors that all religions set up, without exception, in conquered territory is sufficient demonstration that their conquest is illusory, that they have never conquered anything except the power of illusion.

I am astounded that people who talk about natural religion or spontaneous faith are always in such a hurry to grab hold of children and baptize them, catechize them and subject them to their idiotic rituals. This is, quite simply, the kind of kidnapping that the so-called lay morality often resorts to. To imagine that human beings have a natural propensity for religious feeling is to identify religiosity with life and life with survival. Any such identification is a result of the economy's influence and is founded on the inversion of life into survival.

The right to sexual pleasure, which challenges survival at its very heart, is only one of the aspects of life that cannot be reconciled with the economy or the economy's religious form: survival itself rebels at the stranglehold of religions. Religions are completely powerless to render life in economic terms or to convert it into a question of gains, losses, exchanges – a failure that is exemplified in religion's inability to account for the unpredictable move-

ment, starting in childhood, that is traced by the tireless quest for love. For the only victory religion can offer is that of death, which diverts pleasure, and degrades it.

Christianity takes flight on the wings of death, which touch on everything, but disapproves of any hasty departure to the beyond. Survival's duration must be lengthened, from the horror of life to the horror of its end. Under the watchful eye of the Church, Christianized man learns to traverse the "vale of tears," to love suffering as much as he hates himself and to seek out the trail to mortification so that after death he might be worthy of – what else? – eternal survival.

Christianity tried but failed to control the licentious behavior that ran rampant in taverns, throughout the streets, in brothels, steam rooms, and at parties and wild, nightlong feasts – all places where oppressed nature was unleashed. It could never call on enough Inquisitors or clerical police to comb the parishes, or informers to lurk in confessionals – despite the fact that they all carried the official regalia of crosses, and invoked countless sermons, lectures and anathemas. These inspectors, who knew the lucrative power of vice and were well versed in purification-for-profit did not succeed in channeling into faith the excesses of epicurism, which totally discounted survival, or the excesses of asceticism, which pushed the expiation of sin to the point of the eagerly awaited annihilation of this wicked world.

To extend its conquest of space and time, Christianity drew on the most effective weapon in its arsenal: the power to standardize theological language. It set the limits of public communication, which only meant that, incessantly, the Church had to make an effort to revive sym-

bols, alter meanings, offer new connotations and prohibit free interpretation. The Middle Ages were, in short, Christian in the same way that the countries of Eastern Europe were communist.

## II THE CHURCH STRUGGLES TO EVOLVE

### *On Philosophy*

- 35 In the dialectic of the history of the market – which is the history of economized life – every moment bears the possibility of death and rebirth but builds toward an ultimate death. In this sense the Church had no better enemy than itself; for it developed and perpetuated itself within the very system of thought that would destroy it. The Church's worst enemy, however, came from without, from a dialectic of life according to which everything was transformed as life proliferated.

As the stronghold of the divine economy the Church was continually betrayed by its own materiality. In the eyes of the Church pure exchange and mercantile practice had originated in one and the same power. Its god, crowned with an impalpable halo of luminous gold, understood how to get hold of the more tangible and profit-yielding gold. And the same eye that watched over the heavens merely winked at the clergy's wheeling and dealing.

Sheep and wolves were so intermingled that being a shepherd could be risky. Although the pope had author-

ity other temporal powers actually wielded the shepherd's staff. The Church could sound the sacred horn, but philosophy resounded with the metallic jangling of coins. The Church, however, after securing its spiritual and material monopoly by claiming an exclusive monotheism, had to fight off competition across various markets: poverty, penitence and fear, not to mention death and denied life.

Rome was the frenzied seismograph that registered not only the bumpy decline of the agrarian economy but also the dramatic upsurge of the modern markets, from which Rome found itself excluded.

- 36 Philosophy was theology's necessary evil, absorbing and digesting it until the earthly economy absorbed the heavenly economy and excreted the sacred. Philosophy – the profane, evil spirit of temporal power – created criticism, negativity, insolence, rebellion, contempt for holy things, equality and freedom, according to the law of exchange. In its diversity, it encompassed the antagonistic interests of master and slave, both offspring of the same system: a market economy. And so, with the Enlightenment, Minerva's owl devoured theology's rat.

It was not, however, a concern for the sheer enjoyment of life that led philosophy to smash the ecclesiastical yoke, to dismember the lie of myth and to ridicule the gods. Rather, it was simply its malaise, which resulted when overly alienated thought grappled with the stark human misery of survival. When philosophy took the absolutely abstract and life-denying qualities of God and brought them to bear on an abstract image of man, the result was a humanized reverse-image of nature: self-alienation brought on by economic necessity. Because it had to admit its

powerlessness to improve the lot of individuals, it invented ontological suffering, a kind of suffering that was inherent to the human condition itself.

How could philosophy do otherwise, since it, too, participated in the work of commodities, separating the individual body from the social body, denying pleasure and sentencing people to the air-conditioned hell of survival?

Where philosophy falters – at the brink of the existential abyss – religion lies in wait with its panoply of consolations. If suffering is eternal, is it not better to surrender to the splendid absurdity of a god than to embrace the cheap desperation inspired by an equally absurd godless universe? It is easy enough to demonstrate the fallacy of the claim that this reasoning is a sort of anachronistic flatus still emanating solely from the mummified figure residing in the Vatican: just replace the word “God” by “Cause,” “Revolution,” “Necessity,” or “Economy.”

- 37 The historic steeplechase in which Jesus rode Prometheus ended with both horse and rider being cheered at socialism's victory circle. Yet, at the starting gate, there was a lively animosity between these two mythological heroes. Prometheus, the champion of Greek philosophy, set off in the name of human productivity, hoping to win self-determination for mankind by abolishing divine tyranny. Opposed to the obscurantism of agrarian society, he stood for the enlightened ideologies of free exchange – equality, justice, freedom and brotherhood.

Christ's lead at the end of the first leg of the race marks a retreat from the commodity system and Greek rationality back toward the archaic structures of feudalism. The salvation of humanity, now relegated to the hereafter, was

to be paid for in the coin of servility toward God, in the coin of that voluntary self-renunciation whose model and perfect form is death. The producer was obliged to relinquish any claim of ownership with respect to his product, and learn to love and produce the very things that served to dispossess him. In lieu of wages he would now receive eternal *survival*.

Later, benefiting from the rapid expansion of the economy, Prometheus was able to retake the lead, eventually claiming victory – and donning the martyr’s wreath. For in the end his rebellion against the gods had unleashed eternal torments. To be sure, the Promethean insurrection was doomed from the start. Its perpetual renewals and programmed setbacks gave it the pathetic grandeur and sacred aura to which social revolutions had consistently sacrificed themselves.

By the way they began and the way they ended the bound hero of the Caucasus is, without a doubt, frighteningly similar to the mounted figure of Golgotha. Both were born under the same convergence of economic forces, and their deaths further reinforced the belief – supported by virtue of theological faith as by virtue of philosophical reasoning – that humans are absolutely powerless.

Everyone knows how the two rival brothers were reconciled by Marxism and its political and military after-effects, in the course of spectacle where the economy was freed of the gods and men were given their freedom.

38 The materialism that was used to undo the gods borrowed its critical weaponry from Greek philosophy, that body of thought that most encouraged desacralization in antiquity. In this hymn to reason one could already detect the faint

notes that would one day sound the end of the sacred kingdom. As they took on greater resonance they all but blared out man’s call to victory, especially when reverberated in the works of the most lucid minds of the Middle Ages: John Scotus Erigena, Avicenna, Avicbron, David of Dinant and Thomas Scoto.

In certain regards their work avenged Greek speculative thought, which had been badly wounded by the unintelligible jargon of the theologians. After Christianity used certain elements of rationalism against the ancient pagan religions, the response on the part of rational criticism was to develop ways to defend itself more effectively and pointedly against both temporal and spiritual challengers.

As towns began to develop, the bourgeoisie demanded greater freedom of trade, and emperors, hoping to solidify their power, asserted the rights of the State against the spiritual bureaucracy of Rome. Within the entourage of Frederick of Hohenstaufen, emperor of Germany and forerunner of the modern head of State, an empirical philosophy began to spread in which things divine were treated in the same manner as the condemned man who was shut up in a hermetically sealed barrel so that the scholars of Palermo could see, upon opening it, whether a soul would escape.

At Frederick’s court there surfaced, if not the actual book, at least the legend of a text that everyone was talking about. Entitled *The Three Impostors* (referring, namely, to Moses, Jesus and Muhammad), Geoffroy Vallée would later refer to it in his *Fléau de la foy*. State-sanctioned atheism was no less bloodthirsty than Church-sanctioned belief. The tolerance of the philosopher-king fluctuated according to the demands of power. If there was anything to be

gained from a rapprochement with the pope, he would happily feign devoutness and pursue heretics with exemplary brutality.

The same versatility ruled in the cities. These essentially embryonic states were isolated one day and embraced the next, depending on their lucrative potential – which proved a perfect environment for ecclesiastical parasitism. For seemingly religious policies were dictated by immediate interests, also leaving the way open for a good measure of hedonism. It was on the basis of the right to these pleasures, which the rich claimed for themselves and which the poor constantly demanded, that the movement of the Free Spirit founded its project of transcendence.

### *Joachite Millenarianism*

- 39 In the twelfth century, even as mythical forms still prevailed, new social and political forces took shape, giving rise to a sense of history that belonged to the revolutionary process introduced by a new market of goods and services. In millenarianism philosophy was concerned less with wresting itself from the hold of theology than with clearing a path to the kingdom of God on earth.

Reclaiming Eden from the hereafter and imagining it in a not-too-distant future was the most precise expression of a current of social revolution linked to economic change. It was a vision that the bourgeoisie and the proletariat alike would preserve by secularizing.

It is ironic that this idea was originally developed by Joachim of Fiore, a monk who did not at all seem inclined to sow the seeds of turmoil in the ecclesiastical universe. It is true that the Joachite theories worried the Church

only when they were seized by different movements, plunging a vision built on stability into the restless agitation of the century.

In the ninth century Bishop Ratherius of Verona expressed the immobility of a society founded on the agrarian mode of production by reducing it to a perfect balance of three orders: the *armatores* (warriors), who protected collective survival against predators; the *oratores* (monks and priests), whose prayers obtained the goodwill of God; and the *laboratores* (workers), who produced indispensable goods under the protection of the temporal and the spiritual.

In the circular conception of the world each order occupied a hierarchical but complementary place, so that all three were the same distance from the center, that point of divine fusion at which the universe disappears and is reborn in a democracy of the damned and the chosen.

The growth of towns and the rise of commerce led Joachim to alter Ratherius's static and cyclical model, flattening it and stretching it into a line that was divided into three ages. Corresponding to the *armatores* was the age of the patriarchs and kings; corresponding to the *laboratores* was the age of the secular clergy, whose works fructified God's earth. The third age, that of monks and saints, of *orantes*, represented the highest form of perfection.

The first age, in which men lived by the flesh – that is, like animals – lasted from Adam to Christ; the second, in which men live between the flesh and the spirit, began with Saint Benedict and will last until the end of time.

An extract from the *Agreement of the Old and New Testaments*, written around 1180, provides an illustration of Joachim's formulations, none of which contain anything



that would arouse the Church's distrust, but whose meaning, as elicited by history, would put formidable weapons into the hands of Rome's enemies and all who scorned the hold of religion.

The first period was that of knowledge, the second that of understanding, and the third will be the period of complete intelligence.<sup>1</sup> The first was servile obedience, the second filial servitude, and the third will be freedom. The first was affliction, the second action, and the third will be contemplation. The first was fear, the second faith, and the third will be love. The first was the age of slaves, the second the age of sons, and the third will be the age of friends. The first was the age of old people, the second of young people, and the third will be an age of children. The first was spent in starlight, the second in the dawn, and the third will be in the full light of day. The first was winter, the second the beginning of spring, and the third will be summer. The first bore nettles, the second roses, and the third will bear lilies. The first gave us grass, the second spices, and the third will give us wheat. The first gave us water, the second wine, and the third will give us oil. The first relates to Septuagesima, the second to Quadragesima, and the third will be Easter. The first age therefore relates to the Father, who is the author of all things, the second to the Son, who deigned to take on our filth, and the third will be the age of the Holy Spirit, of whom the apostle said, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."<sup>2</sup>

40 The detonation of this explosive mixture of Joachite thought and history coincided with the precise date fixed by the Calabrian monk for the advent of the third age,

the reign of freedom. Joachim calculated the period from Adam to Christ as being forty-two generations of thirty years each, or 1,260 years. According to the cyclical conception, to which he was still partially committed, the same lapse of time had to intervene after Christ. The onset of the new era was thus determined to be around 1260. This then became the fateful year in which hope, love, fear and hatred would mark the beginning of a new era in history, one that would be agitated by social revolution, repression and resurgence.

Superimposed on Joachim's outmoded cyclical calculation was the modernity of a political strategy. He foresaw the importance of the mendicant orders – a veritable war machine set in motion by Catholicism soon after his death – under threat from the increasing destitution of the towns and from the progress of the Waldensian heresy. Unlike the Dominican order, whose work as inquisitorial police had done little to sensitize them to the prospect of the third age, the Franciscan order, charged with "tactfully" taking over the Waldensian doctrine of voluntary poverty, was happy to identify with the monastic movement that Joachim felt was destined to found the age of saints.

41 In the case of most revolutionaries the original virtue of militant sacrifice eventually reappears as the blood of sacrificed revolutions. The oppressed body is under a similar curse, for it too eventually takes out its revenge on its oppressors and those who have manipulated it with lies. Zealous preachings about submission and self-contempt – like the religious recluse's cant on lustful desire – may suddenly be worn down by the reverberations from one

remark that threatens to break through the carefully constructed edifice of repression.

Saint Paul writes in an Epistle to the Corinthians: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” Saint Augustine affirms: “Love, and do what you will.” Joachim declares: “The Holy Spirit produces freedom in broad daylight, which is love” and “Charity is part of the freedom of the Holy Spirit.” These expressions, intended by their authors to be in complete agreement with Catholic orthodoxy, are among the quotations most frequently seized by adherents of the movement of the Free Spirit, who would subvert their meaning and restore them to the clandestine life from which they came.

The three characteristics of the third age, as conceived by Joachim, were in complete accord with the teachings of the Church. *Perfection* implied the sinlessness of the spiritually perfect man, a state attained only in absolute obedience to dogma. In contrast to the Cathars, who declared themselves “perfect” without the support of the Church, Joachim presented a true community of official saints – exceptional beings, deemed worthy of pontifical sanctification, whose numbers would be encouraged to multiply by the example of monastic purity.

Joachim prudently reserved *contemplation* for the few who “repose in the silence of the hermitage, where flourish neither the study of letters nor the teachings of a Christian education, but only simplicity of life, honesty, sobriety and charity sprung from a pure heart and an unfeigned faith.”<sup>3</sup> The status of the contemplative hermit was not to be confused with that of “simple people” of the working class. The latter, who had abandoned work to seek divine contemplation outside the religiously consecrated days

of rest, were merely succumbing to the sin of idleness.

Ultimately, *freedom*, neatly assimilated with love, was conceived of only in terms of angelic grace, which is the effect of love emptied of its substance and purged of all flesh. As disincarnate as it may have been (though with such a degree of precision in absolute spirituality that it bordered on absolute materiality), the prospect of the reign of an earthly paradise within the scope of history exercised a tumultuous attraction to what the century had considered constrained passions, but which were, in fact, passions longing to be fulfilled.

In its ambiguous enthusiasm the third Joachite age abolished the reign of the Church. There would be neither Father, nor Son, nor rituals, sacrifices or sacraments; there would be only a single law – the *lex libertatis* – which had already been set forth in the first half of the twelfth century, in the rationalist arguments of both Peter of Bruys and Henry of Lausanne. With such a society imminent, and its paradisaical nature leased directly from God, how could the most abstract concepts have been prevented from taking shape among those who had been exiled from all pleasures by the ecclesiastical dictatorship?

Thus words desiccated by religious speculation found new life in the fertile earth from which they had first sprung. Within the notion of perfectibility germinated the rejection of all guilt; contemplation became the illumination of the god of desire that all people carried inside; charity was the art of courtly love; love expressed the effusiveness of lovers; and freedom evoked, at worst, the freedom of nature and, at best, the dissolution and transcendence of the unfortunate coupling of nature and God.

*Catharism*

42 While the Roman and apostolic conglomerate marked its advance on the market by destroying its competitors, which it called “heresies,”<sup>4</sup> the Cathar enemy took up a position midway between urban rationality and paganism, both of which the Church was having difficulty removing from rural areas in the twelfth century.<sup>5</sup> But there were numerous pockets of resistance in which fertility cults dating from Neolithic times persisted, having been transmitted through the Dionysiac religions of Asia Minor, Greece and Rome.

Even the Roman Empire, imbued as it was with its mercantile humanism, cringed with horror at mention of the Bacchic mysteries, in which orgiastic release paid its tribute directly to repressed nature, without going through the State. The discovery, in 186 A.D., of secret Dionysian celebrations in several towns in Latium aroused intense indignation in Roman society, whose cruel customs, fierce proscriptions and circus entertainments were well known.<sup>6</sup> This indignation was probably due less to cynical moralizing than to the sheer astonishment of a businessman confronted with a barter system.

Christianity inherited the same aversion to agrarian cults. It, too, initially had been accused of orgiastic practices, and, in its battles against the various forms of heretical asceticism it had learned to make good use of coalitions. More totalitarian than ancient Rome, the Church regarded the whole of nature with disfavor. It socialized and centralized the repression of instinctual drives, the animality that boiled in the devil’s cauldron – this god of lower earth who kept rearing his head – even

as the Church drew on all its powers to keep him at bay.

Yet Christianity was very careful not to encourage any virtues that might cause the source of its profits to dry up. It stood at the gateway of transgression and demanded payment from the thirsty who came to drink from the cup of sensual pleasures.

At a time when duplicitous ecclesiastics were spreading the idea of a corrupt and corrupting nature throughout the countryside, and tolerating sin as merely human weakness as long as it was redeemed, the absolute Apollinianism of the Cathars profited by harnessing the rampant despair that was casting a pall on the ancient pagan exuberance. Above the natural chaos ruled over by the Demiurge – a corrupt god, producer of an inhuman universe – shines the light of a pure God who refuses to illuminate the dark, absurd material world so as not to fade out and extinguish Himself.

The radical critique of the perfect completely rejected the existing world and invited followers to abandon life here on earth, which was doomed to failure. Scorning the mercantile compromises of Christianity, Cathar abstinence traced the shortest and most rational route out of a labyrinthine vale of tears. It is difficult not to interpret this choice – made in the context of a Languedoc civilization where life’s sweetness, for the first time in history, encouraged the idea of a society devoted to love rather than money – as a gamble in which all stakes were placed on death, as if that were preferable to the suffering caused by refusing what life had to offer.

The Cathar desire for the annihilation of the earth expressed a refusal of life degraded to mere survival, a refusal that the Cathar religiosity condemned to self-destruction

as the only remedy.<sup>7</sup> Their disgust for materiality, their revulsion at touching anything living (as if it were impure), the refusal to kill humans and animals (except fish), abstinence from lovemaking, exaltation of asceticism, the practice of suicide by *endura*, or prolonged starvation – all appear to lay the foundation for a pure economy, one that would not need people.

Catharism transformed fertility cults into sterility cults because fecundity added to the evil in the world; it based a kind of courtly love on spiritual castration, which marked both the emergence of life and a social conscience likely to acknowledge and refine it.

In short it reduced survival to a fundamental nullity; it proposed, in a condensed version, the long-term plan that the Church had drawn unconsciously from the economic model of survival on credit. Faced with this impatience to empty life of its substance, Catholicism sent out its soldiers of deferred death until confidence in its enterprise was restored. Bloodthirsty repression by the northern crusaders lay waste to a civilization that had been on the verge of finding their own approach to happiness. The victory was a matter of real profits over the rarefied abstraction of exchange; and so, paradoxically, a slow death on the installment plan took revenge on immediate, gratuitous death.

### *The Poverty Market*

- 43 Only recently has it become possible to see the similarities among the various ways in which nature, the proletariat and life itself are exploited – forms of exploitation that are the driving forces behind survival. The exploiters and

the exploited are like two arrows, both shooting off course, though steadily aimed at the same mark: the absent life. As the heavenly economy grieves over its materialism, as the spirit groans in the prison of the body, as the hand, which despises nature, is despised by the intelligence that guides it, so poverty, weighed down by private ownership, sinks deeper into the sewer in which flounder the self-important of the business world.

Christian mythology proposed to exorcise the old curse inherent in the lucrative production of inhumanity by propagating the reversible model of king–slave, warrior–capitulator and the human corpse resuscitated as God. It offered a pact to the oppressed: posthumous equality in exchange for submission to the spiritual and temporal powers (“Render unto Caesar...” is one example). Better yet, as a special incentive, it offered prime consideration for entry into the kingdom of God for those who had learned to feel real love for their enslavement and contempt for all forms of pleasure.

Whereas ceaseless propaganda was necessary to achieve temporary docility among the masses, the Church excelled at demanding similar obedience from the princes and patricians who were the chief beneficiaries of the people’s submissiveness. By bowing to the power of Rome and by improving their spiritual credit through generous donations, those who already possessed wealth and authority gained even more: they cleared their bad consciences and washed away the shit and blood that soiled their purses and their bills of exchange.

On the tightrope of death, where survival was left dangling, the Church wobbled as it tried to maintain a precarious equilibrium. That was to be its horrible fate, until

the triumphant bourgeoisie replaced the Church with the modern State, which was scarcely more stable.

Each time pauperization threatened the social order of the towns, Rome bestowed upon the underprivileged the emblem of a Christ, poorest among the poor, proud of this indignity. Occasionally, by encouraging popular agitation, Rome reminded the temporal powers – indeed, its own clerical hierarchy – that its intercession was not without cost. The Church reminded them that if it had not insured the docility of the laboring classes through the reiterated promise of socialism in the hereafter, the sword of social justice might have fallen on the heads of kings.

In Laon in 1077 the cleric Rhamirdus, who led a revolt of weavers and preached against simony (the sale of indulgences) and the corruption of the clergy, was condemned by the bishop of Cambrai and died at the stake. The pope, who was disturbed by the growing wealth and power of the dignitaries of the Church, sided with the rebels and restored Rhamirdus to favor. The frequently repeated example of popular resentment, instigated by the lower clergy against the class enemy enabled papal politics, to give full support as it so chose, to contrast the hedonism of the “haves” with the enforced asceticism of the “have-nots” and dispossessed, which Rome compared with Christ’s voluntary and salutary deprivation.

Similarly, when the Emperor Frederick railed against the Church, the pope used the mendicant orders to undermine the emperor’s credibility among Italian simple people and to foment revolt that would benefit the papal party, the Guelfs.

However, what was gained in terms of devotion was lost in terms of tactics. Throughout the emerging proletariat,

scarcely Christianized peasants now had access to cities where they could be initiated into rational criticism and individual freedom; and they could gain access to forbidden pleasures. The idea of an earthly paradise free of spiritual or temporal oppression came into clear view amid an otherwise permanent confusion.

In the place of foreign crusades a new diversion developed in towns threatened by a conflagration of pauperism. It was a defusing of social antagonisms through the creation of a movement of voluntary poverty, often within the bourgeoisie. The Church was quick to realize the importance of such a movement, and tried to control it, if necessary, by destroying any independent initiative.

- 44 The Waldensian heresy illustrates Rome’s lost opportunity in its struggle against the Cathars and against the subversive effects of urban pauperization. Founded around 1173 in Lyons by the rich merchant Peter Waldo, the voluntary poverty movement was intended to revive the Church tradition originally practiced by the apostles. At the instigation of Waldo, who had renounced all his goods and possessions, the group called the Poor Men of Lyons spread the word of Matthew’s gospel: “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor.” This appeal to the guilty conscience of the merchant was so successful that the Waldensians were a significant force before the Lateran Council of 1179. The pope, although impressed by their piety and attracted by the evangelical submissiveness they propagated, was nonetheless resistant – perhaps due to pressure from the secular clergy<sup>8</sup> who were hostile to anyone who would do charitably what they did for money. He hesitated to embrace them and

imposed the condition of absolute Church control, forbidding them to preach freely.

But either because he foresaw that he might one day be compromised or because the growing number of his disciples encouraged him to challenge the authority of Rome, Waldo refused to bow to these terms. In 1181 the pope thundered against him and ordered his excommunication. After 1184 the Waldensians were hunted down and burned as heretics.

Followed by real bounty hunters, who were later to be enrolled by Saint Dominic in the ranks of the Inquisition, the Poor Men of Lyons aroused sympathy everywhere by their gentleness and their rejection of violence, just as, by their submissiveness and their vocation of martyrdom, they inevitably attracted the attention of cowardly sadists.

From Lyons the movement spread across Provence, Languedoc and Aragon. It gained ground in Italy, where Milan, already converted to Catharism, was considered one of its spiritual strongholds. It reached Liège, Trier, Metz, Strasbourg, Mainz and the Rhine area, before extending to Bavaria and Austria.

The Lateran Council of 1215, by enjoining the bishops, under penalty of dismissal, to hunt down and punish heretics in their dioceses and to encourage spies and informers to help them, showed what little tolerance the authorities had for those people who preached the virtues of submissive poverty.

Instead of using Waldensian asceticism, or apostolic behavior motivated by charity as an effective way to oppose Cathar perfection – which was simply detachment from the world – Rome brought the two movements together in senseless persecution. Rome treated them as if they

both contributed in similar ways to the hostilities directed against the Church. Both were seen as rejecting ecclesiastical pretense; and both exhibited an anticlericalism that won the support of the laboring classes because of their hatred of tyranny, the support of the bourgeoisie because of their dislike of parasitism and the support of the nobility when it suited the rivalry between temporal and spiritual power (which would culminate in the confrontation between Rome and the emperors of Germany).

Accused of holding secret orgies the Waldensians' reputation for exemplary asceticism was recast, and they were charged with the kind of hypocrisy that was usually reserved for priests who, while feigning perfect obedience to Rome, let the left hand stray into debauchery as the right hand reached out for absolution. The alleged Waldensian orgy, which prefigures the witches' sabbath and recurs in the *barilotto*<sup>9</sup> of the Fraticelli condemned in 1449, was viewed during the inquisitorial proceedings as a sacred act harking back to the agrarian cults. The idea of such archaism created abject horror among humanists.

At the same time, the papacy tried to correct the disastrous effects of its unsuccessful encounter with voluntary poverty. A group of *pauperes catholici*, hastily assembled from converted Waldensians and charged with countering the heresy, was a complete failure. Thus Pope Innocent III was careful to miss the meeting he had been invited to have with the new Waldo – now more diplomatic, less scrupulous and acutely aware of the vacancy within the orthodoxy of a glorious calling: that of shepherd of the poor.

45 Francis of Assisi responded to the austerity of the Cathars and Waldensians with a more subtle approach to renunci-

ation. His forgiveness of human weaknesses, by legitimating the attractive power of sin, encouraged the Church to recognize the one power capable of effectively containing it. For those who did not possess the compulsive strength an apostolate of poverty required, Rome had the exclusive privilege of providing it. Given human weakness pardon was granted in return for the simony and sordid little transactions such weakness regularly led to.

The exaltation of a virtue known to be fallible created a veritable elitism of humility within the Franciscan order. By restoring sinlessness to the center of a church so armed against sin that it barricaded itself in, Francis slashed the promotional prices of Waldensian virtue, which stalled the indulgence market.

But his talent for unassuming wiliness allowed him to make the most of the situation. Outdoing both the Cathars, who neither mistreated nor killed animals, and the Waldensians, who respected life and were against the death penalty, the Poverello of service affixed the seal of the sinister cross to the concordat he established between man, nature and God. By catechizing the wolf, the lamb, the crow and the sun, he provided the appearance of sanctity for the shamanism that still lay dormant in the heart of the countryside. It was as if he had set up God's special showcases for the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms, although he had taken little notice of them before.

- 46 Too hurriedly digested, Waldo's apostolic practice continued to afflict the papacy with a headache and the order of Saint Francis with indigestion for more than a century. Two movements rapidly arose in opposition to the Franciscan observance of poverty. The "Conventuals" protested

by declaring their fidelity to a pontifical policy increasingly dictated by the slogan "Get rich!" which seemed to underlie the rise of mercantilism. The "Spirituals," to the contrary, flaunted their contempt for earthly goods, sometimes to the point that *having* resembled *being* in the life which the movement of the Free Spirit was trying to bring to light.

The elitism of the Spirituals found nourishment for its chiliastic pretensions in the theories of Joachim of Fiore. In 1254 Gerard of Borgo San Donnino, a Spiritual from Pisa, radicalized and popularized Joachite ideas in his *Introduction to the Eternal Gospel*. Laying great emphasis on the fateful year of 1260, he prophesied the disappearance of the Roman Church and the advent of a Spiritual church, which would grow out of Franciscanism. The condemnation of the book in 1255 reflected poorly on the abbot of Fiore, who was already suspected of heresy. Gerard, condemned to seclusion for life, died after eighteen years of harsh imprisonment without ever retracting his beliefs.

Joachism nevertheless continued to find defenders among the Spirituals in the Franciscan order. According to Peter John Olivi and Ubertino of Casale the reign of the Holy Spirit had already begun. The Church was "Babylon, the great whore who destroys humanity and poisons it, delivering it up to the pleasures of the flesh, and to pride and avarice." Monasticism would succeed the pope, whom they regarded as the Antichrist, and would lead to the reign of the saints. Then the virtues of poverty, chastity and humility would be worn like scapulars by revolutionary movements, old and new.

This was a purely religious attitude of two clerics rebelling against a papacy that they deemed to have devalued

Christianity. They were united in their condemnation of the body, which was the site of guilty pleasures, and the materiality of the market, as the sites of avarice and the pride of power. It is not surprising that Ubertino, later forced into exile to escape the displeasure of John XXII, was so zealous in his suppression of the movement of the Free Spirit in Tuscany, the valley of Spoleto and the area around Ancona, "which no inquisitor before him had dared to undertake."<sup>10</sup>

Such a step corresponds precisely with the need to ensure that the Spiritual movement not include the kind of suspicious Free Spirit ideas that the Church associated with Fraticelli, which stood somewhere between Franciscanism and heresy. The agenda of political and social struggle that appeared in the Italian towns had dual repercussions for the Franciscan movement. It gave rise to the revolutionary millenarianism of Gerard Segarelli and, particularly, of Dolcino of Novara, and to intellectual speculation intended to purge the Church of corruption (which, in 1491, was still on Savonarola's agenda). Both options encouraged the greatest contempt for the seductiveness that the demand for the freedom of nature held for simple people.

- 47 In the Joachite year of 1260, Segarelli, a Parma shopkeeper, gave up all his goods and possessions and founded the sect of the Apostolics, much as Waldo had done before him. This was too much for the Church. Initially encouraged by the bishop of Parma the Apostolics outdid the Franciscans by spreading their rallying cry of "*Penitencagite!*" (Do penance!) throughout the streets. They worried Pope Honorius IV, who accused them of heresy in a Bull of March 11, 1286.<sup>11</sup> One year later, the Council of Würz-

burg forbade the faithful to give food or shelter to the wandering Apostolics who wore extravagant clothing and were called "gluttons" (*leccatores, ghiottoni, scrocconi*).

Although Segarelli's doctrine was closely related to voluntary poverty it is possible that, within the idea of perfection associated with abandoning material possessions, some of the people's aspirations for the freedom of nature may have gradually been assimilated. While Angelo Clareno may have been yielding to polemic when he accused Segarelli of introducing the doctrine called "the spirit of freedom" into Italy, there is nonetheless a degree of similarity between the theses of William Cornelius of Antwerp and the ideas of Segarelli. Both assert that a life of poverty is the true life of the Apostolics because it "is free and the most perfect of lives... freedom in adoring God, freedom in the vow, freedom in the relations between man and woman."

After Segarelli was burned to death in Parma on July 18, 1300, a dissident Franciscan, Dolcino of Novara, assumed leadership of the Apostolics. Dolcino brought together the insurrectional movement of the countryside and Joachist millenarianism as radicalized by Gerard of Borgo San Donnino and Segarelli. From 1304 to 1307 Dolcino and his companion Margarita organized a rural commune in Piedmont where they planned to organize an agenda for collectivist survival along millenarian lines.<sup>12</sup>

Around this couple, the Apostolics formed the nucleus of a new world in which the goods necessary for survival were held in common, property was abolished and marriage, which reduced women to an object of ownership, was done away with. (This last tenet was deemed by the repressed inquisitors to be "collective rape.")



After the execution of Dolcino and his companion on July 2, 1307, in Vercelli, most of the Apostolics would merge with the Beghards and Beguines.

- 48 Toward the end of the twelfth century associations that were both lay and religious began to appear, usually at the initiative of magistrates or rich bourgeois. The members of these groups, known either as Beghards or Beguines, lived in communal houses called *beguinages*.

Founded in the public interest to check the rate at which the poor were fleeing to the towns, draining surplus labor from the countryside, these communities were independent of any monastic order and placed under the supervision of the bishop alone. The influx of beggars increased the size of the communities, especially in northern towns like Liège – where the first establishments date from 1180–84 (and are contemporary with Waldo's efforts in Lyons) – Tirmont (1202), Valenciennes (1212), Douai (1219), Ghent (1227) and Antwerp (1230). In 1250 there were more than 1,000 adherents in Paris and Cambrai, and 2,000 in Cologne.

In Jundt's idyllic description of the *beguinages*, there was a particular manifestation of the Free Spirit tendency, in which individual and community interests were entangled:

In France and in Germany the Beguines stayed together in fairly large numbers in a single house, whereas in Belgium their dwellings were less like a cloister than one of our modern workers' districts, composed, then as now, of a series of fairly small houses, each home to two or three Beguines, no more; in the center there was a church and a hospital for elderly or sick sisters, and nearby there was a cemetery. These

women lived in a manner that was halfway between monastic and profane life. They did not renounce the companionship of men at all, nor earthly matters and preoccupations; they took vows of chastity and obedience, but not of the absolute sort taken by nuns. They reserved the freedom to leave the association whenever they wanted and to get married. Those who were not entirely poor could leave a will accounting for a certain part of their possessions. Within their houses they busied themselves with different female tasks, devoting part of their time to prayers and pious reading. They also often visited different families in the town to care for the sick; if they received legacies, they were sure to celebrate the anniversary of their benefactors' death by attending masses for the repose of their soul and by saying prayers over their tomb. The Beguines thus enjoyed most of the benefits of convent life without having to endure the disadvantages.

Other people soon began to imitate them. Brotherhoods of artisans, usually weavers, were formed after their example in the various towns that housed Beguine establishments. Generally known as Beghards, the members of these almost entirely lay associations enjoyed the same independence as the Beguines. They devoted their lives to manual work and piety, and thereby won the support of simple people.

However, the success of these two religious societies brought them enemies, especially among the secular clergy who had grown jealous of them. Parish priests received an annual compensation for the losses they sustained as a result of the presence of a priest especially attached to each of these associations; they even lost a share of the cost of burial when some rich bourgeois, and this happened quite frequently, asked to be buried in the cemetery belonging to the estab-

ishment. As for the religious orders, they could only lose by the growing prestige of the pious foundations that were depriving them not only of the support of many of their members but also of important donations.

The Lateran Council had decreed that no new order would in the future obtain pontifical approval, a decision that was used against the Beguines and Beghards, who were accused, among other grievances, of forming an association the Church did not recognize. Already in 1240 Joan of Flanders saw fit to order her magistrates to defend them against their attackers; five years later Innocent IV expressly took them under his protection. In 1261 Urban IV wrote to the dean of Louvain "to protect them against their reckless persecutors, and to prevent them from abuse during legal proceedings, either directed against their person or their property." But in 1274 Gregory X renewed the Lateran Council's sentence, and thus began the decline of the institution of Beguines and Beghards, further hastened by the accusations of heresy that rapidly followed. Since the end of the thirteenth century these religious associations were repeatedly forced, in order to survive, to sacrifice their independence and place themselves under the protection of Franciscans or Dominicans by accepting the third rule of these orders. Their persecution and, more importantly, their gradual absorption into the regular clergy meant their eventual disappearance from France and Germany. In the middle of the fifteenth century in the Netherlands they formed the Congregation of Beghards of the Third Rule of Saint Francis, organized by an annual assembly that met at Zipperen (hence the name *Congregatio Zipperensis*). After the torments of the sixteenth century this congregation, reduced to a very small number of members, was united by

Innocent X with the tertiary Franciscans of Lombardy and was, from then on, no more than a province of the order of Saint Francis.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Penitence Market*

- 49 The Church despised all sin that was not profitable. It hated nature, that sewer of all temptations, but could not hate sinful nature, the source of its revenue. The Church's kindness, like that of psychoanalysis, was boundless because it simply absolved the offense, always repeated, by demanding payment for it.

Rather than direct its wrath at the avaricious, the dissolute, the drunkards, the torturers and the murderers, the Church reserved it for the ascetic, who felt no desire; the honest man, whose virtue required no ecclesiastical insurance; the "pure" Waldensians and Cathars, who practiced their own remission of sins; the simple people, who were ignorant of sin, and the supporters of the movement of the Free Spirit, who comforted them in the innocence of nature.

Although they condemned pleasure the ancient religions at least tolerated its occasional release. Orgiastic feasts, bloodthirsty sacrifices, warmongering, potlatch, rape and delirium of the senses governed the compensatory flux of lives sacrificed to work.

But Catholicism was so well schooled by the mercantile imperialism of Rome that it began to tax the expression of the passions. To the repression and distortion of pleasure that were already exacted as the price of the right to survival, the Church added a tax on indulgence. Release now had its cost: the vices engendered by an impossible

virtue would have to be paid for at both retail and wholesale prices.

To insure that irreproachable behavior could not be used to avoid the toll collectors in the confessionals, Christianity universalized and rationalized the ancient idea of unworthiness, stemming from the gods' usurpation of human merit, and renamed it "original sin." This spiritual cleansing enterprise plunged the whole of humanity into the mire of guilt. Because Adam and Eve challenged the prohibition of God the producer, their amorous union sullied love forever. From the moment of birth, and through later suffering, guilt tarnishes every child born of sensual coupling, which only the mother of Christ was able to escape. (It is true that the Passion of the Son born untainted is, in contrast to amorous passion, the art of learning to suffer and die: this is the essence and sole meaning of survival, as poets and philosophers have well understood.)

Armed with the privilege of taking confessions, punishing and absolving, none was so sacred for the priests – those black crows of the Last Judgment – than those of zealous collectors of taxes on natural inclinations. Historians have also often identified anticlericalism with a nostalgia for religion purged of ecclesiastical mercantilism, as seen in the Cathars, the Waldensians, the Apostolics and the adherents of other sects whose Christian morality prefigured the moralistic atheists of the nineteenth century. Simple people developed a similar instinctive repugnance for tithe collectors, indulgence sellers, confessional priests and religions in which everything – birth, death, copulation, pleasures and pains – had to be paid for. (It was only around the fifteenth century that the Church, through its monopoly on the markets of fear and death, was able to

impose itself in people's minds as a public service as natural and unavoidable as death itself.)

- 50 The Church's battle for absolute supremacy over markets in sin and penitence dominated the fourth-century polemic against Pelagius, who denied original sin and argued that a good man armed with a steadfast will could resist temptation. Although Pelagius recognized the attraction of evil and the power of triumphing over it, he did not understand that the Christian disparagement of the body and its pleasures was related to man's experience of the pull of natural drives and the pain of succumbing to them in one single, irrepressible fall. The condemnation of the Pelagian heresy condemned all seekers of moral perfection. For the innocents, who were ignorant of sin, and for the naive, who were indignant that a child could be considered guilty at birth and were therefore dismissive of baptism, the Church developed a contract of spiritual and material profitability that denied them existence.

### *The Market in Fear and Death*

- 51 The fear of death, as the logical form of the fear of living, was a terrain well disposed for conquest by the Roman Church. However dying in order to pass through to the kingdom of heaven first implied that one deserved death, which is God's gift of welcome. If future happiness is not based on present sacrifice, no power will guarantee its attainment. The clerical bureaucracy had no rationale for its existence except its control of heavenly survival within earthly survival, a control that bourgeois and proletarian millenarians merely desacralized. The end of the world,

with or without renewal, is profitable only in its anticipation. The economy prophesies the apocalyptic horror of the world's disappearance only on the condition of the horror of an already ruined life.

The famine of 1250, the plague of 1259, the bloody struggle between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, the fall of Gerard of Borgo San Donnino's radicalized Joachism – all have a connection with the appearance in Perugia, around 1260, of the Flagellant movement.

At first encouraged by the Church – the holy inquisitor Vincent Ferrer instigated the flagellant tendency in Spain – this hysterical, collective self-punishment soon began to threaten the clergy's privilege of punishing and consoling. The demand for hell on earth deprived the merchants of the hereafter of all their influence, especially as the idea was propagated among the Flagellants that voluntary injury and mortification was a way to identify with Christ, who was incapable of sin, and thus to be released from the hold of the Church.

Among other heresiarchs Mecco Sacconi (also known as Dominico Savi), who was burned to death at Ascoli in 1344 and had been the leader of a group of Fraticelli and Flagellants since 1320, preached a mode of behavior that seems to have been indirectly influenced by the movement of the Free Spirit. He taught: "Shameless fondling, even taken as far as orgasm, is not a sin; men and women praying together in the darkness of the night do not commit sin, whatever else they do at the same time; women are permitted to flagellate themselves, for their sins, naked and in public; laymen also have the ability to absolve all sins."<sup>14</sup>

Once the difficult equilibrium was upset between the interests of life and the interests of death, from which sur-

vival was monstrously formed, the Church was led toward both annihilation and hedonism. While repressing the flagellant movement the Church also founded a true devoutness on the basis of collective self-punishment and the dances of death that celebrated the interminable festival of living death in the fifteenth century. Within this devotion, the time of accepted suffering was paid for on the day of reckoning – not before and not after – by the deliverance of a consolatory death, of a mother come from the purity of the beyond to clasp to her breast the lost children of humanity. If death remained frightening, that was because it was fatally female, and only the Church had the power to lend it a maternal benevolence.

#### *On the Exorcised Woman or the Cloistered Nun*

- 52 The misogyny that haunts the economy and its representations derives from woman's role as the bearer of life: she offers life to a society that has no use for it. There has never been a market civilization that has not reduced women either to the immateriality of the virgin or to the maternal production of flesh for profit. Women must be unsullied by useless sensuality before engendering future producers in a similar sensual uselessness.

Having no acknowledged body, except as a hired-out uterus, celebrated as an object of pleasure and despised for the love it encloses – the love of life – woman sows in her path the fascination of the forbidden. The power of her gaze promises access to the secret universe of sexual pleasure, and her odor is that of the arcane, vegetal earth of all creation. Thus the somewhat confused perception that Gnostics had of her.

Each time an epoch bears the traces of feminine illumination, it is a sign that there is renewed life in the forests that have been freed from the spell cast by the wretched sorcery of the old world. But it seldom takes long for the fleeting radiance of its presence to be followed by the pestilent breath of repression, that mutilates it, and consequently, misrepresents it.

Femininity, already repudiated among the priestesses of the ancient cults, was further denied in the male wisdom of Athena and in the remorseless liberations of the maenads. The Church acted no differently when it forced women, who were useless, to regulate their behavior by marrying Christ or the devil.

The development of cloisters in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries coincided with women's increased importance in society. (Their rights were then more extensive than those granted by the famous Napoleonic Code, in which Bonaparte compensated for his amorous weaknesses with military harshness.) The mystical exaltation of "holy womanhood" provided an outlet for the spiritually sealed sensuality of the repressed. Hierogamy sacralized the erotic surplus.

As virgin, wife, mother and daughter of Christ a nun consecrated her sexual exuberance to a phantom – the incarnation of the disembodied, the symbolic flesh of the immaterial, the tree of love torn up at its roots and carved into images of death, with black stains coagulating on them instead of come. With so much incendiary passion directed at an icy corpse it is hardly surprising that, within the love given to an infinite God, there was forged an infinity of love in which God was annihilated.

The Church, which rarely saw beyond its nexus of

heaven and earth, body and spirit, angel and beast, conferred a seal of sanctity on those passionate enthusiasts who sought absolute love in the exaltation of the senses. Those whose exuberance ridiculed authority were burned as heretics or witches. Escaping the Church's hold necessarily meant serving another master. Unwittingly nuns rode broomsticks.

In the debate on love that dominated the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the movement of the Free Spirit had a natural point of entry. Because the Free Spirit radicalized courtly love, and restored the shrivelled idea of love embodied in the detumescent effigy of Christ on the Cross to its authentic lawless wholeness, the movement's greatest enemy was inevitably that primarily masculine theology which simultaneously spiritualized love and treated it as a perversion.

The mysticism of the likes of Johannes Eckhart, Henry Suso, John Tauler, Jan van Ruysbroeck and Gerhard Groote amounted to the revenge of the spirit for attempts to emancipate the body. The very designation "Free Spirit," meant to evoke natural liberty and its transmutation, reflected a wish to reduce things to spiritual terms – which is of course the essence of all religion. But the label, which placed the Free Spirit on the same shelf as heresies and pure ideas, was the despair of the ecclesiastical storekeepers: the mold did not fit, and because it bore the imprint of a reality that it could not contain, it broke.

Eckhart accused proponents of the Free Spirit of interpreting spiritual thoughts literally, while Ruysbroeck called down the wrath of the Inquisition on Heilwige Bloemardine. In the fourteenth century Groote founded the movement of Modern Devotion in order to release the

movement of the Free Spirit from the contemplative doctrine in which, under the guise of divine love, it brought God back to man. This attempt had neither beginning nor end, and was ultimately a continuum of amorous attraction. In 1380 Groote denounced Bartholomew, an Augustinian supporter of the movement of the Free Spirit in Eastern Holland, and had the corpse of Matthew of Gouda disinterred because, according to him, Matthew had “more reasons than Christ to be called God.”<sup>15</sup>

In its attempt to remain separate from life, of which it was the absolute negation, mystical theology was apt to descend to the lowest depths of the earth to glorify the executioner.

53 The quarrel over the Holy Spirit ran deeper than the scars opened by theological speculation, and opened a wound that threatened the Church’s survival. By assuming control of the spirit, pontifical Rome saw itself as civilization’s savior. It had a divine mandate to govern the individual body and the social body. It had to defend the citadel of economic order against the threat of animal instincts and the violence of the exploited. It guaranteed its sovereignty through its ceaseless work on the raw material of the passions and on that social mass, which the clerics contemptuously called “simple people.”

Simple people escaped their bestial nature thanks to the divine form granted them by the Church: through baptism they inherited a spirit that had to be sustained by scrupulous observance of the rites and sacraments. This is why simple people were usually spared the punishments meted out to the heretics. They were, after all, only beasts, to be treated in cases of sedition as one would treat rabid ani-

mals. The exemplary punishment was reserved for bad shepherds, depraved guides and heresiarchs, in whom the sin of pride encouraged the usurpation of the Church’s role of conferring holiness of spirit.<sup>16</sup> The Church had a duty to destroy all who hindered it or competed with it.

The spiritual preserve was the only terrain from which the Church could launch its assault on the temporal. By crowning both the Father’s authority and the Son’s complacent rebellion, the Holy Spirit ruled the earth without seeming to, in much the same way that the Church did not condemn people to death, did not spill blood, but hypocritically recommended clemency as it handed its victims over to lay justice.

The Holy Spirit was the antithesis of this Free Spirit. That is, it represented alienated thought dispersed in natural freedom. The Holy Spirit was the moving circle of the immobile, where possible transcendence was reversed and exchange was substituted for change.

Beneath the name Free Spirit were concealed the most unfathomable parts of life, those parts of living that could not be expressed in either economic or religious terms (the mythic form of economy). Its trail is crisscrossed with gleams of light that are inexplicable to historians – heresies, millenarianisms, social demands and ideologies – but not ones that belong to heresy or millenarianism or social movements or philosophy. Through the emancipation of sexual pleasure and the nurturing of love, it expressed a desire to transcend a life turned against itself, and to annihilate the pitiful pairing of oppressive God and oppressed nature.

That is why what has filtered down through language across time bears the seal of the immutable. The theses

of Eloi Pruystinck and Quintin of Tournai in the sixteenth century differ little from the opinions of the Amaurians in the twelfth. The spring has never dried up; it gushes from the fissures of history, bursting through the earth at the slightest shift of the mercantile terrain. If it now appears in the full light of day, in a language whose words have turned God and his fables into economics, it is because the illusions of our epoch have lost their force in a world in which the only real issue is whether to live or to survive.

### III

## THE PRINCIPAL MANIFESTATIONS OF THE MOVEMENT OF THE FREE SPIRIT FROM THE THIRTEENTH TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

### *The Amaurians*

- 54 The concern to associate behavior that evaded the Church's control with a particular heresy resulted in the disciples of Amaury of Bène being grouped together under the name of "Amaurians" or "Amalricians." They were supporters of a doctrine first condemned in Paris in 1209 and in Amiens in 1211.

Amaury was a cleric who originally came from Bène, not far from Chartres, but who taught in Paris, where he had a reputation as a subtle thinker. He first excelled in logic and literature, but later became increasingly interested in theology, in which, according to Auguste Jundt, he displayed original opinions and great independence of judgment.

The reputation he enjoyed brought him to the attention of Louis, the dauphin of France. The fundamental thesis of his theology was that all Christians were bound to believe that they were members of Christ and that they had actually suffered the punishment of the cross with him. This argument was fiercely opposed at the university, and in 1204 Amaury

was obliged to submit the debate to the pope, who pronounced against him.

Back in Paris, he was compelled by his colleagues to retract his discredited proposition, which he did, but not without protesting vehemently against the admission they had extracted from him. He was so consumed with distress at his humiliation that he fell ill and died soon after 1207. He was buried near the monastery of Saint-Martin-des-Champs. No mention was made anywhere of the books he had written.<sup>1</sup>

A truly subversive doctrine would have required a more serious punishment than the pope's disapproval and Amaury's retraction. Everything suggests that the interruption in his theological career was caused rather by the hateful kind of campaign that is so often mounted in sects and universities, inspired by those who want to ruin the posthumous reputation of a thinker sufficiently original to arouse envy. In Amaury's case this was achieved by attributing to him certain "coarse" individuals as his disciples, whom the Church regarded as concerned more with Epicurism than with metaphysics.<sup>2</sup>

Yet there is a rationality behind the pope's condemnation of the thesis that all Christians were members of Christ and had actually suffered the punishment of the cross with him. Though watered down by the context of theological speculation the thesis contains echoes of a popular opinion that resembled the doctrine of the so-called Amaurians. This belief inferred from Christ's sacrifice, from his death for the sins of humanity, that the offense had thereby been redeemed, and that men were exempt from having to pay a second time through suffering, sin and penance.

Like Johannes Eckhart, whose condemned propositions stated philosophically what the behavior of simple people expressed in a more confused way, Amaury and, more precisely, the Amaurians, were doing no more than exploiting and rationalizing the stark but banal truth: that there was already so much hell on earth that it would be better for people to stop tormenting themselves and to learn to enjoy pleasure.

55 The Amaurians arrested in the Paris region in 1209 were neither the only group nor the largest. However, their inclusion of educated men, some of whom were close to Amaury, provided an opportunity to tarnish the master's orthodoxy while meting out punishment with an exemplary effectiveness.

In his *Dialogue on Miracles* Caesarius of Heisterbach<sup>3</sup> lists the principals accused:

At the same time that the Albigensian heresies were active, diabolical thoughts seized the perverse minds of certain educated persons in Paris, source of all learning and font of divine writings. Here are their names:

- Master William of Poitiers, subdeacon. He had taught the arts in Paris, where he studied theology for three years.<sup>4</sup>
- The Subdeacon Bernard.
- William the Goldsmith, their prophet.<sup>5</sup>
- Stephen, parish priest of Vieux-Corbeil.
- Stephen, parish priest of La Celle-Saint-Cloud.
- John, parish priest of Occines.<sup>6</sup>

All these wretches except Bernard<sup>7</sup> had studied theology.

- Dudon, private clerk to Master Amaury. A priest who had studied theology for some ten years.



- Elmange, acolyte.
- Odo, deacon.
- Master Guérin [or Garin], who was taught the arts at Paris, where he had studied theology with Master Stephen, Archbishop of Canterbury.
- Ulric, parish priest of Lucri,<sup>8</sup> a sexagenarian who had long studied theology.
- Peter of Saint-Cloud, parish priest and sexagenarian, also well versed in theology.
- Stephen, deacon of Vieux-Corbeil.

It was these men who, inspired by the devil, devised great and numerous heresies, and sedulously propagated them in many areas.<sup>9</sup>

- 56 The arrest and conviction were described by the chronicler William the Breton.

Rumor [of the group's activities] came secretly to the attention of venerable individuals such as Peter, Bishop of Paris,<sup>10</sup> and Brother Garin, counselor of King Philip [Augustus]. In order to conduct a diligent inquiry into the members of this sect, they sent a cleric named Master Rudolph of Namur on a secret mission.<sup>11</sup>

Thus mandated, Rudolph, who was devious, astute and a true Catholic, feigned enthusiasm for the sect every time he visited one of its members, and expressed interest in joining. They, in turn, thinking he was one of them, revealed their secrets.

Thus it pleased the Lord that, after long years of dissimulation, several members of the sect were located, captured and taken to Paris. There they were brought in front of the Council, which was in session. In the presence of the arch-

bishop of Sens and Peter of Paris they were condemned, dismissed from their order, and delivered to the justice of King Philip. He, as a most Christian and Catholic king, sent for executioners and had all the condemned men burned. This took place in Paris, outside the walls, in a place called Les Champeaux.<sup>12</sup>

However, all the women and other simple people, most of whom were misled or corrupted, were spared.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, as it had been claimed that the sect originated with the heresiarch and preacher Amaury, he, who had thought that he would rest forever in the peace of the Church, was posthumously excommunicated by the Council. His bones were removed from the holy cemetery, reduced to ashes and scattered on dung heaps. Blessed be God in all things, who denounces the impious.<sup>14</sup>

- 57 While the Church was preoccupied with discovering and denouncing diabolical spirits, which they held responsible for “heretical perversion,” the so-called Amaurians were multiplying. Their presence, first acknowledged in four dioceses around Paris, spread to Alsace and Switzerland.

In 1211 a cleric, Master Godin, was arrested and burned in Amiens. After his trial the original list of charges compiled after the conviction of the Amaurians in Paris was extended by the Cistercian Garnius of Rochefort, who was bishop of Langres. This new list was essentially a notice of investigation allowing agents of the Church to identify, interrogate and convict those suspected of disseminating Free Spirit ideas.<sup>15</sup>

In 1215 Robert of Courçon, papal legate and rector of the University of Paris, banned both Amaury's writings and Aristotle's works on natural history. He attacked the pan-

theism of David of Dinant. Later, the works of John Scotus Erigena were condemned as another source of the pernicious doctrine.

In that same year the Lateran Council renewed the condemnation of the Amaurian doctrine, which it judged “more nonsense than heresy.” This was a revealing statement, suggesting that beyond heresy – the negative province of orthodoxy – there was nothing that was not nonsense.<sup>16</sup>

Most of the eighty people, from all classes, who were burned in Strasbourg in 1215, belonged to the Waldensian movement. Nevertheless, some of them affirmed that “the grossest sins are permitted and are in accordance with nature.”<sup>17</sup>

In 1216, “a new and shameful heresy” appeared in Alsace and Thuringia:<sup>18</sup> “Its supporters were convinced that it was permissible, and in conformity with nature, to eat meat and other foodstuffs any day and in any season, and even to indulge in every kind of sensual pleasure without being obliged to expiate it [*nullo piaculo contracto*].”<sup>19</sup>

According to Jundt some Amaurians found refuge in Lyons among the Waldensians, who had, like them, rejected the sacraments and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. However, they did not share the Waldensians’ total commitment to asceticism and the apostolic vocation. This coalition may be the origin of the calumny that attributed an essentially Amaurian freedom to the Waldensians, something the morbid imaginations of the inquisitors equated with orgiastic license.

An unknown man was burned at Troyes in 1220 for having claimed that the Holy Spirit was incarnate in him. A similar theory, proposing that God’s presence in man left him absolved of sin, is illustrated in a *Life of Saint Thomas*

*Aquinas*, in a knight’s response to a theologian who has bid him to do penance for his sins: “If Saint Peter was saved, then I shall be also, for the same spirit inhabits us.”

Yet repression, powerless to halt the freedom of nature and the spirit it inspired, would gradually lessen, as the quarrel intensified between the “two halves of God”: the pope and the emperor of Germany.

58 Like most of the ideas of the movement of the Free Spirit, the so-called Amaurian doctrine is revealed only through the filter of the Church. Historians who believe the accusations of the inquisitors are followed by others who believe the opposite. To uncover the truth behind the lie it is necessary to understand the debauchery attributed to heretics – and to good Catholics, as well – which was often only the fanciful product of lustful imaginations tormented by deprivation or guilt.

If the pathetically credible admissions extracted under torture were appearing more and more often in sermons that criticized the very people who protested the horrors of the flesh, it was because the Church needed to use shame for tactical advantage. For, increasingly, the “pure” were leveling accusations of defilement against the Church because of its lucrative control of debauchery.

Ecclesiastical calumny lost many of its reasons for virulence in the proceedings instituted against the supporters of the movement of the Free Spirit, simply because the freedom of nature was not denied but demanded. If there was any slander, it was in the inquisitor’s confusion of the search for a more refined and carnal love with a sort of sacred prostitution in which, at least, God was still celebrated in an underground church.

The lie stems directly from the religious expression that was forced on life, and from the idea of a world whose only reality was survival, a world that existed only by virtue of God. That view of life, repressed and yet everywhere visible in the various virulent forms of reversals that it effected, is what sustained the Church. The justification of its Herculean labors depended on the incessant rebellion of oppressed nature. Clergymen and laymen, peasants and proletarians, bourgeoisie and nobility, priests and popes were all eventually caught in the grip of dissoluteness, debauchery, rape, adultery, drunkenness or gluttony, and their corrupted state led them to a dissatisfaction, disgust and fatigue that became a desperate need to expiate their own sins as well as to make the rest of sinful humanity expiate theirs.

Petrus Comestor described the students at the University of Paris at the time of Robert of Courçon and the Amaurians. His description could certainly be applied to more than one community: "In eating and drinking they have no equals. They are ravenous at table, but far from devout at Mass. At work, they yawn; at a banquet, they fear no one. They abhor thinking about the sacred books, but they love seeing the wine sparkling in their glass and swallow it down undaunted."<sup>20</sup>

But the Church knew that whatever was done with a guilty conscience would, sooner or later, lead to remorse or penance. It could wait until desires became tiresome and fading pleasures took on the ashen taste of sin.

At worst, heresy collected whatever was not sanctified by the sacraments of the Church. Philip the Chancellor continued to make bitter condemnations, but in vain: "Hypocrites, heretics and false brothers and bad Christians

are the work of the devil.... Their furnace is the fire of concupiscence; for the cause of all heresies is either lechery, concupiscence or pride."<sup>21</sup>

The attitude that plunged Christianity into the most complete disarray came from the most ordinary of resolutions, and from the most popular and shortest of credos: "Enjoy life and laugh at everything else." In the eyes of the Church there was no more urgent task than to silence anyone who encouraged the idea that such freedom could be pursued without fear or blame, or without any constraint whatever; hence it smothered and destroyed them or clothed them in the tawdry religious garb of heresiarchs. It might be said that both the clergy and the godless intellectuals who succeeded them achieved in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries what Rome had failed to achieve during the Middle Ages.<sup>22</sup>

- 59 The *Contra amaurianos*, attributed to Garnius of Rochefort, was drawn up in accordance with the list of accusations at the Paris trial, but after the trial of Master Godin of Amiens, which is referred to in the text. It revealed not so much a coherent doctrine as a number of tendencies and, above all, a distinction between educated men and simple people. The questions posed by the interrogating clerics were conveyed solely in theological, even scholastic language. Some points reveal that certain questions, which might make the difference between life and death, revolved around a dispute among scholastics over the meaning of one word. This is evident in the first, ninth and tenth paragraphs, which contain the arguments among such thinkers as William of Poitiers, Bernard, William the Goldsmith and, in 1211, Master Godin.

The opinions of simple people express more practical considerations, as is confirmed by the interrogation of the parish priest, John, who shared the life of his parishioners and declared very simply:

God made all, the good and the evil: the good to show the good will of man and the evil to show the evil will of man. Thus the good works and the bad ought to please us alike, since they are the good works of God and since it is God who makes everything, not man." [John] said that he had heard the reading of the schedule,<sup>23</sup> that there were some points that smacked of heresy and that he had not denied. He admitted that he was wrong in that. . . . On the other hand, there were some things in the schedule that he had not completely understood. When he was arrested and taken away from his parish he told his parishioners that they should not trust anyone who spoke against his doctrine and taught them differently from him.<sup>24</sup>

#### 60 *Contra amaurianos*

1. God is everywhere. No one dares deny that. Therefore, God is in every place.<sup>25</sup> If something is everywhere, it can be anywhere at all. God is everywhere. Therefore, he can be in a particular place.

On the other hand, the proposition is false that claims: God is somewhere. Therefore, this is true: God is not somewhere. Therefore, he is nowhere. Therefore, he is not everywhere.

Gregory says: "If the young king had had faith, there can be no doubt he would have had knowledge, because there is nowhere that God is not." Therefore, God is in every place.

Jacob said: "Surely the Lord is in this place." Therefore, God is in some place.<sup>26</sup>

In Sunday prayers, we pray, "Our Father, who art in Heaven." If he is in heaven, then it is the case that he is in some place.

Augustine asks: "Where was God before the world was made?" And replies: "In himself." It seems that, if he had not been somewhere, the question would have had no object, since it entailed an error. Therefore, he was somewhere. Therefore, he was in some place in this eternity. Therefore some place was eternal with God. And, finally, such a place was God, because nothing is eternal except God.

Whoever cannot be in every place is not omnipotent. Could God be elsewhere than in himself? God is in himself and in every thing that is not him. *God is elsewhere than in himself.* Therefore, he is in a place different from himself. Therefore, he is himself a place different from that in which he happens to be.

Would God be in time? God is always; therefore, he is in time. But he is in all times; therefore he is *in time*.<sup>27</sup>

The Bible says: "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be." Therefore, it is now. It is, therefore, in time that we live. Does that mean that everything would be in God? The apostle said: "In him we live, and move and have our being." And, elsewhere: "All comes of him, through him and in him." Therefore, good as well as evil. Therefore, the evil is in God. But whatever is in God, is God. Therefore, the evil is God and the creature (the devil) is in God. Because "it comes of him, through him and in him." Therefore, approving this creature, he does not reprove it.

As God and the divine essence are one and the same thing,

and nothing other – since everything is God – let us ask whether all things are in the divine essence.

But Saint Augustine said: “Of him and through him and in him, all things are of the same principle.” Therefore, if everything is of God and through him, all things are of his essence.

2. God produces everything in everything; therefore, the evil things as well as the good things.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, whoever understands that God achieves everything in himself cannot sin. It is thus that they attribute to God and not to themselves the deed of committing a sin. For, if God cannot do it [commit evil], then that means he is not omnipotent.

The prophet says: “Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?” And Isaiah: “I make peace, and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things.”

Even if he gives himself up to fornication,<sup>29</sup> someone who has learned<sup>30</sup> that God achieves everything in himself does not commit a sin.

The totality of everything one does must be attributed to God, not to oneself.

Whoever attributes to himself any action, whatever it may be, instead of attributing the totality of his deeds to God, is in ignorance, which is hell.<sup>31</sup>

3. Hell is nothing other than ignorance. Paradise is nothing other than the acquired knowledge of truth.<sup>32</sup>

4. They say that paradise is the apprenticeship to truth that they are proud to hold.<sup>33</sup>

5. If a Jew has the same knowledge of the truth as we do, there is no need for him to be baptized.<sup>34</sup>

6. If someone has been compelled to do a long penance on the orders of a priest, and then becomes aware of [our] doctrines, there is no need for him to complete the

penance in question.

Whoever knows that God is within him need never be sad, but should laugh.<sup>35</sup>

7. Everything the Parisian masters<sup>36</sup> have affirmed about the Resurrection, they treat as fable; for complete knowledge is the resurrection, and no other may be expected.<sup>37</sup> Christ was not resuscitated in the flesh.<sup>38</sup>

8. No one can be saved if he is not a member of Christ.<sup>39</sup>

9. God is all in all things. God, in fact, will be all in all; but whatever it may be, it is, because it cannot change into God. Therefore, God is in all things: God is the stone in the stone, God in God. It may thus follow that God should be adored not only out of the respect due to men, but also for divine adoration, because he is God.<sup>40</sup>

God is whatever resides within him. Everything is God, “for what has developed was life in him.” Therefore, God is everything.

All things are in God. The apostle, to the Colossians: “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible.”

The power of God and the power of divine charity are one and the same thing. But the power of God is in the stone; therefore, the power of God’s charity is in the stone.

God is the origin of all causes. When the cause subsists, the effect subsists. Therefore, when the effect is corrupt, the cause is also. But the body is corruptible, and is so by virtue of God. Therefore, God is corruptible.<sup>41</sup>

The cause of deprivation or possession, that is, of opposites, is not the same. But evil and good, like deprivation and possession, are opposites. They do not have the same cause. God is the constructive cause, not the destructive cause. But evil destroys rather than constructs. God is therefore not the

cause of evil, and it therefore seems that he is not the cause of everything.<sup>42</sup>

10. The Father incarnate was in Abraham and in all the other fathers of the Old Testament. The Son of God was in Christ and in the other Christians. And the Holy Spirit was in those who are called spiritual. Christ was incarnate in Godin.<sup>43</sup>

The Son is the incarnation of God, and God the Son is the same, and is one, numerically, with God the Father. Although the Father and the Son are different, the similarity of their divine condition seems to indicate that the Father was incarnate like the Son, the diversity of their condition not preventing such an incarnation.

Since the works of the Trinity are indivisible, if the Son became flesh, then the Father and the Spirit underwent the same fate.<sup>44</sup>

11. The body of the Lord is everywhere.

They say that there is no resurrection of the body. Some draw a distinction between external bodies and internal bodies.<sup>45</sup> The visible and palpable body they call external, the one that was fixed to the cross. By internal body, they designate a certain divine power which, in Plato, is the concept of the spirit, *Us*, *idea*.

Whence Plato's opinion that the divinity is the eternal artisan who works preexistent material rather than creating from nothingness. According to him, the *Hyle* (primordial matter) is coeternal with its artisan, like the concept of spirit, which Plato calls *idea*, that is, form, and Aristotle, aspect. And because Plato talked about artisans, and Aristotle about the effective principle, they imagined several coeternal principles. Some call the internal body this concept of spirit, or ideas, or, following Aristotle, aspect. And they empha-

size very forcefully that the internal body is everywhere.

12. The body of the Lord is as well adored in plain bread as it is in bread consecrated on the altar.

For the Spiritual, who possesses this understanding of the truth, which they claim to have, all the sacraments cease to exist, because the sacraments are manifestations of the Church. Just as certain ways of worship ended under the old law, with the coming of Christ, so must all others disappear with the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

What more can be conferred, they ask, than sanctification in everyday life and glory in society? Well then, that is what brings knowledge of the truth, without any need for sacraments!

Five years from now, all men will be Spirituals, and they will all be able to say: "I am the Holy Spirit" and "Before Abraham was, I was," just as Christ was able to say: "I am the Son of God" and "Before Abraham was born, I was."<sup>46</sup>

The Joachite element was called on to justify, seemingly for the first time, the liquidation of religion and the pulverization of God in the crucible of nature. In his *Chronicle*, William the Breton states:

They thus said that the sacraments of the New Testament came to an end in our epoch, and that the period of the Holy Spirit had started, in which there was no place for confession, baptism, Eucharist and the other guarantees of salvation. Henceforth, there would be no salvation except by the inward grace of the Holy Spirit, with no outward works. And they thought of the virtue of charity in such a broad sense that they ensured that every act regarded as a sin ceased to be so if it was performed out of charity. This is why they devoted themselves, in the name of charity, to debauchery, adultery

and all the other pleasures of the body. And they promised impunity [penance was unnecessary] to the women with whom they sinned and to simple people whom they misled, preaching that God is a being of goodness and not a judge.<sup>47</sup>

Caesarius of Heisterbach similarly states: “They said that if a Spiritual (someone who is in the Holy Spirit) indulges in fornication or some other defilement, he does not commit sin, because that spirit is God, separate from the flesh, and cannot sin. And man, who is nothing in himself, does not sin as long as this spirit, which is God, resides within him.”<sup>48</sup>

Bread is the bread you eat and not a symbol consecrated by the affectations of a priest. Likewise, God is in the pleasures of nature (“God is a being of goodness”) and not in the authority that represses them (God is not a judge). The rejection of the sacraments has nothing in common, in its fundamental rationale, with the sacramental protests of the Cathars, the Waldensians and the Apostolics. Among the Amaurians, sexual pleasure takes the place of baptism. The *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* notes: “They say, untruthfully, that the little children born of their blood are not deprived of the benefits of baptism if they are the issue of a carnal relationship with the women in their group.”<sup>49</sup>

That is a privilege of love which reveals a still little-known dimension of the courtly spirit.

61 A sermon by Johannes Teutonicus,<sup>50</sup> probably contemporary with the trial of 1209, stresses the identification with God:

Look at these profane novelties, propagated by people who are disciples of Epicurus rather than Christ. With fearsome

treachery, they are secretly committed to spreading the belief that one can sin with impunity. They are convinced that there is no sin, and that, therefore, there is no one who ought to be punished by God for having offended. Although outwardly, on their faces and in their speech, they can affect an air of piety, inwardly, in their spirit and their secret works, they reject virtue.<sup>51</sup>

An accumulation of the most extreme folly and the most shameless lies: they neither fear nor blush to assert that they are God!<sup>52</sup> Infinite extravagance! Abominable presumption! They call God the adulterous man, the companion of other men’s beds, the being defiled by all kinds of infamy, the receptacle of all crimes. This surpasses the aberrations of the gentiles, who lied more modestly when they claimed that the greatest of their princes would become gods after their death. Assuredly, anyone who could say “God does not exist” is talking raving nonsense. But the individual who claims “I am God” is even more insane.

Oh, let us hope at least that such a plague does not pollute this city, the source of all learning and the true flower of wisdom!<sup>53</sup>

62 About sixty years later, in 1277,<sup>54</sup> Bishop Stephen Tempier condemned a series of theses that were arousing quarrels and debates at the University of Paris. Several of these were reminiscent of the Amaurian doctrines. Yet the more prominent element was an intellectualized version of ideas that had proliferated among simple people, the speculative echo of immediacy experienced by the *grossi homines* who did not care about religion. Among the anathematized propositions were the following:

One can know nothing about God except that he exists.<sup>55</sup>

Nothing is the effect of chance. Everything is the product of immutable necessity.

There can be no sin in the higher faculties of the soul.<sup>56</sup>

Simple fornication between unmarried people is not a sin.

Death is the end of all fear.<sup>57</sup>

It is in this life, not the other, that man possesses happiness.

There is absolutely no need to pray.<sup>58</sup>

63 The new towns, with their bourgeoisie made rich by commerce and restless by the spirit of independence, viewed anti-Church sentiments favorably. It was in the cities of the Rhine – Cologne, Mainz and Strasbourg – and the northern cities of Valenciennes, Amiens, Cambrai, Tournai, Brussels and Antwerp that the movement of the Free Spirit was most resolutely manifest, and where it took, as the historians say, its crudest forms. Its more intellectualized penetration into Italy was caused by the keenness of the political struggles between the Guelfs, who supported the pope, and the Ghibellines, who supported the German emperor. The violence of liberation, in these struggles, amply revealed the movement of the Free Spirit's alibi, its ideological justification, its illusory rationale.

In 1236 the execution of Aleydis and approximately twenty of her companions at Cambrai emphasized the persistence of the movement of the Free Spirit in the Picardy region, whence the heirs of Godin of Amiens and Margaret of Valenciennes, and the predecessors of Quintin of Tournai and Antoine Pocques of Lille set out to radicalize the Hussite revolution.

Unlike the Waldensians – the principal victims of the

auto-da-fé ordered by the sinister Robert le Bougre<sup>59</sup> – Aleydis was believed to profess Amaurian opinions. She was identified with the Beguine who was condemned<sup>60</sup> for her “just love,” which Hadewijch mentions in her “List of the perfect.”<sup>61</sup>

In the absence of any more direct information on the doctrine of Aleydis, we can only refer to Hadewijch's ideas, though these suffered serious adulteration at the hands of the Church, and to the treaty of “refined love,” as developed fifty years later by Margaret Porete, who assimilated pure love into a life force that transcended the power of God and denatured nature.

#### *William Cornelius of Antwerp*

64 The name William Cornelius, preceded by the title Master, appears in the deed of a gift from a priest named Eustace, apparently the chaplain of the church of Notre-Dame of Antwerp in 1243. According to Thomas of Cantimpré, William Cornelius was a member of the low clergy.<sup>62</sup> He received a prebend, but relinquished his position to found a movement of voluntary poverty.

His views illustrate how deeply the ideas of the movement of the Free Spirit had penetrated into a movement that, at first, was very similar to the evangelism of the Waldensians. The situation was similar to that of the Amaurian priests, with a parish priest living among the working classes, particularly with weavers.<sup>63</sup>

The agitation that began around 1243 or 1244, continued until William's death (from natural causes) around 1253. Its pretext seems to have been popular opposition to the bishops of Cambrai (to which Antwerp was subor-



dinate), who were accused of tyranny and extortion.

In 1248 Guyard of Laon, bishop of Cambrai,<sup>64</sup> left for Antwerp in order to punish the supporters of William Cornelius. The bishop was responding to the urgings of the Dominicans, who were critical of his lack of zeal in crushing the movement. On June 23, however, he was detained by illness at the Abbey of Afflighem, where he died on September 16. Bishop Nicholas of Fountains, who succeeded him in 1249, both organized and financed the repression.<sup>65</sup>

Around 1257 Nicholas had William Cornelius's corpse exhumed and burned. This did not, however, discourage William Cornelius's supporters. In 1280 Dominican inquisitors were once again scouring Brabant, where Duke John ordered his subjects and officials to give them whatever assistance they required.<sup>66</sup>

- 65 The most radical propositions were spread between about 1240 and 1280 among the poor and exploited of Antwerp and Brabant, whose spokesman was William Cornelius. They show the climate in which Hadewijch's "mystical" texts were written, and those of her group, the Nuwen, as well as Bloemardine's later teachings in Brussels:

The indulgences of prelates do not help souls.<sup>67</sup>

No one can give alms [if they deduct them] from their own surplus.<sup>68</sup>

No rich man can be saved, and all the rich are miserly.<sup>69</sup>

It is permissible to take from the rich and give to the poor.<sup>70</sup>

No poor person can be damned, for they will all be saved.

There is no hell after Judgment Day.<sup>71</sup>

As rust is consumed by fire, so all sin is consumed by

poverty and annulled in the eyes of God.<sup>72</sup>

Simple fornication is not a sin for those who live in poverty.<sup>73</sup>

There are only three mortal sins: envy, avarice and ostentatious prodigality;<sup>74</sup> and also having one's wife when she is pregnant.<sup>75</sup>

That which is called sin against nature is not a sin.<sup>76</sup>

No man should take his wife more than three times a week.

If a woman is poor and indigent, she can give herself without sin.<sup>77</sup>

Thomas of Cantimpré adds: "It is better to be a public courtesan than to be chaste, observing the most perfect continence and keeping one's resources to oneself. This is why all members of religious orders will be damned without exception. He [William] also said that the lust of the poor is not a sin."<sup>78</sup>

### *The New Spirit in Swabia*

- 66 Around 1270 a cleric charged by the Inquisition with investigating the state of faith in the diocese of Passau compiled a list of deeds and doctrines hostile to Christianity. The text, known by the title *Anonymous of Passau or Pseudo-Rainerius*<sup>79</sup> is a violent attack on the Jews, Cathars and Waldensians (here called "Lyonists," a reference to Lyons, or "runcarri," from John of Ronco, leader of one of the Waldensian branches).

The manuscript also includes a text entitled *Determinatio de novo spiritu* [An Examination of the New Spirit]. A manuscript from Mainz states that the *Determinatio* is

the work of Albertus Magnus.<sup>80</sup> In ninety-seven propositions Albertus draws up a list of heterodox attitudes that, for the instruction of the inquisitors, he links to older heresies. Everything involved with sin is thus derived from Pelagius.

The theses most resolutely inspired by the movement of the Free Spirit are imputed to a movement based in the Riess, a region close to Augsburg. But the group must have been more widespread because one text, repeating with slight variations the points examined by Albertus, is entitled *Twenty-nine Articles of the Sect of the New Spirit... Recently Discovered Close to Nördlingen*.

The recourse to the authority of Albertus may correspond to the clergy's need to dam up the currents of freedom that were spreading everywhere.<sup>81</sup>

In 1245, after the first Council of Lyons, the Bishop of Olmtz complained of the presence in his diocese of wandering agitators of both sexes. Dressed as members of religious orders, but resolutely hostile to the ecclesiastical hierarchies, they spread the idea that God should be served in absolute freedom, outside any rule or discipline.<sup>82</sup>

In 1247, while the ideas of William Cornelius were winning substantial support in Antwerp, William of Saint-Amour, an enemy of the mendicant orders, campaigned against a sect that maintained: "People should do no work with their hands, but pray unceasingly; and, if men pray in this way, the earth will bear more fruits, without being cultivated, than if it were worked."<sup>83</sup>

In this diversity of proliferating movements so long overshadowed by the myth of Christian unity, how are the tendencies that were simply in opposition to Rome distinguished from those that rejected religious forms alto-

gether? Are we dealing with quietists who preached a form of non-action comparable to that of Taoist teachings? Beghards and Beguines also shared a scorn of work; in the state of perfection, the laborious necessities of survival are unnecessary. They were replaced, most obviously, by mendicancy (as in Margaret Porete), theft (John of Brünn) and exploitation of the work of others (the nuns of Schweidnitz).

Whatever the case, their sense of the absolute incompatibility of sensual pleasure and work, manual or intellectual, justified the frightened hatred with which the Church, as the absolute agent of earthly and heavenly survival, pursued the partisans of the movement of the Free Spirit.

For geographical reasons a plurality of influences met in the Riess region under the twin banners of novelty and freedom. The old Brenner route from Italy to the lower Rhine and through Nördlingen and Augsburg to northern Germany intersects with the ancient Roman road leading from France, across the Palatinate and Swabia, over the Danube and beyond Bavaria to the eastern frontiers.

Albertus's *Determinatio* collates a number of reports from inquisitors in different regions. Among its propositions, certain of those formulated by women shed light on the chronicled accounts of the nuns of Swabia and on how the so-called feminine mystique was viewed during the period.

A fifteenth-century historian from Töbingen, Martin Crusius, basing his account on a chronicle written a century earlier by the Dominican Felix Faber, relates that, in 1261, several houses of enclosed orders began to reveal the presence of "those adversaries of the monastic rule that are

called Fraticelli, Beghards and Beguines. These persuaded many of the cenobites to live without rule, claiming that God could thus better be served in freedom of spirit.”<sup>84</sup>

The bishops intervened to force the communities “that had already enjoyed the freedom promoted by the Fraticelli” either to disperse or to submit to the rule. Crusius records that the women’s convents did not give up their freedom without resistance. It is worth noting that acknowledgment of a rule, even assurances of obedience to the Church, were among the practices recommended by the movement of the Free Spirit for the purpose of prudent dissimulation.<sup>85</sup>

- 67 The *Determinatio de novo spiritu*<sup>86</sup> includes a series of propositions relating to the movement in the Riess and concludes with some articles from the Nördlingen list:

To say that truth can be found in the Riess is a Donatian heresy, akin to saying that God is in Africa and not elsewhere.

Man can be united with God in such a way that he no longer sins, whatever he does.

According to them, there are no angels apart from human virtues, no devils except men’s sins and vices. There is no hell. All creation is God in his plenitude. The angels would not have fallen if they had behaved as they should have in their union with Lucifer.<sup>87</sup>

Man united with God, as they claim to be, is not bound to accord honor or respect to the saints, nor to observe fasts and similar things on the day of the Lord.

Whoever is united with God can assuage his carnal desire with impunity and in any way, with either sex, and even by inverting the roles.

There is no need to believe in the Resurrection.

The good man need not confess his sins, however important they may be, but only tell them to another good man, or say in the presence of God, in secret, “I have sinned.”<sup>88</sup>

They assert that, during the elevation of the Host, they are themselves elevated; whether they are seated or standing, it is to themselves that they address the signs of reverence, but they perform all the usual gestures in order not to scandalize others.

People hinder and retard their perfection and their good qualities when they indulge in fasting, flagellation, discipline, vigils and similar things.

It is not right to take part in work, but it is good to taste the sweetness of the Lord in leisure.<sup>89</sup> Prayers have no validity when they are under the yoke of manual labor.<sup>90</sup>

They can take over the goods of anyone with impunity, without sin and without fear, on God’s behalf.

They also say that they eat in secret and without sin whenever they want and whenever they are able to.<sup>91</sup>

It is not necessary to admit sins in confession. It is enough to say: “I have sinned.”<sup>92</sup>

Because the educated are ignorant, they do not have to show them the grace they have. They do not suffer by falling into sin, because God has foreseen it, and no one can counteract the designs of God. They enjoy evil as much as good, and when it occurs they say: “That happens and that is in accordance with divine foresight.”<sup>93</sup>

Those of them who want to become perfect do not have to think about the Passion of Christ.

There is no need to feel concern, neither sorrow nor bitterness, at faults committed and days wasted. Suffering of that sort retards their access to a fuller grace.<sup>94</sup>

In their view, the blood of good men like themselves, or of others who had achieved a similar level of completeness, ought to be venerated in the same way as the body and blood of Christ on the altar. They are convinced that freedom, evil, rest and bodily well-being create in man a place and habitation for the Holy Spirit.<sup>95</sup>

They say that Christ knows them carnally, that a woman can become God, that a mother of five children can be a virgin,<sup>96</sup> that one of them had suckled the baby Jesus with his mother until she was exhausted and faint.<sup>97</sup>

- 68 In considering the convents, where repressed sexuality found a multitude of clandestine and tumultuous outlets, how are we to distinguish between the ecstatic hysteria on which the hagiographers so love to dwell and cases where the eroticism of amorous adventure, whether homosexual or heterosexual, is couched in the language of passion for the All-Loving God? We can but speculate as to what was veiled by the solemn declaration of fidelity to Rome, whose continual reiteration was in fact the sole yardstick of a man or woman's orthodoxy or heterodoxy, no matter what license he or she might secretly indulge. Among women, not a few bound their ambiguous exaltation to the pillar of the Church: Lutgard of Tongres (1182–1246), lover of the Sacred Heart, for whom “no day went by without the Virgin appearing to her” and who, the Jesuit Axters asserted, “fasted for seven years because the Holy Virgin, in sadness, had told her that the Albigensians were crucifying her Son”;<sup>98</sup> Ida of Nivelles (died in 1231), lover of the Holy Trinity; Juliana of Montcornillon (1193–1258); Marie of Oignies (1177–1213); and Christine the Admirable (1150–1224).

The case of Beatrice of Nazareth (1205–68), founder and prioress of the monastery of Nazareth in Flanders, is more dubious, although she was a member of the Cistercian order. Her biographer wrote that in 1231 “she had arrived at such freedom of spirit, such constancy of heart, and such purity of conscience . . . that, in all her deeds and thoughts, she neither feared nor was in awe of man, nor devil, nor angel, nor even divine judgment.”

Her treatise, *Seven manieren van minnen* [Seven Ways of Love], written between 1230 and 1250, gives an important place to spiritual freedom and “pure love.” In it she speaks of serving love with a free conscience, by paying no heed to the remembrance of sins committed.” She identifies paradise with “the reign of perpetual freedom” and celebrates the “desire to attain that freedom, purity and nobility of spirit in which she was created in the image and likeness of the Creator.”<sup>99</sup>

- 69 The lacunae in the biography, and some manifestations of orthodoxy, led Catholicism imprudently to enroll Hadewijch of Antwerp, the author of poems and visions in which amorous exaltation is allied with the courtly speculation of the south of France and the New Spirit of Swabia, in its repertory of the devout.

According to the Jesuit Jozef van Mierlo, Hadewijch, who was born in Antwerp toward the beginning of the twelfth century, ended her days among the Beguines of Nivelles, in Brabant, between 1260 and 1269.<sup>100</sup> Van Mierlo's research disproves the arguments of several scholars, including Paul Frédéricq, according to whom Hadewijch was none other than Heilwige Bloemardine, the enemy of Jan van Ruysbroeck. The identification, however

erroneous, reveals the difficulties that fanatics of orthodoxy face when they read her work.

Despite her contemplative life the confines of which she was hesitant to escape, her *Vision 3* expresses the idea of a God assimilated into an eternal flow of love. The producer of the material world, the guardian of the earthly economy, is dissolved into individual experience and transformed there into a lover and creator of sensual pleasures. Exile from the self and return to the self do not adequately describe the resolved tension of sexual pleasure in the union of the lovers:

Later, one Easter Sunday, I had gone to God; and he embraced me in my interior senses and took me away in spirit. He brought me before the Countenance of the Holy Spirit, who possesses the Father and the Son in one Essence. And from the total Being of that Countenance I received all understanding, and thus I read all my judgments. A voice issuing from this Countenance resounded so fearfully that it made itself heard above everything. And it said to me: "Behold, ancient one, you have called me and sought me, what and who I, Love, am, myriads of years before the birth of man! See and receive my Spirit! With regard to all things, know what I, Love, am in them! And when you fully bring me yourself, as pure humanity in myself, through all the ways of perfect Love, you shall have fruition of me as the Love who I am. Until that day, you shall love what I, Love, am. And then you will be love, as I am Love. And you shall not live less than what I, Love, am, from that day until the death that will make you alive. In my unity, you have received me and I have received you. Go forth, and live what I am; and return bringing me full divinity, and have fruition of me as who I am.

Then I returned into myself, and I understood all I have just said; and I remained to gaze fixedly upon my delightful sweet Love.<sup>101</sup>

*Vision 7*, in its utterly sensual persuasion, recalls the proposition "They say that Christ knew them carnally" of the New Spirit of Swabia: "After that he [Christ] came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him; and all my members felt his in full felicity, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my humanity. So I was outwardly satisfied and fully transported [*in allen vollen sade*]." <sup>102</sup>

As in Margaret Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, the dominant theme is the absolute sovereignty realized in love, around which the life of each person and the whole universe are meant to be ordered. "The soul can have no other desire but that of love," including even its tempests (*storme*) and its torments (*erewoet*). There is nothing base in the service of love. We must risk everything for it, and be able to renounce self-love and vanities in order to be purified in it and by it. "The soul," she says, "is united with love by sensual pleasure, not by one's being." The angels who accompany the soul in its upward journey toward love prefigure the seraphims of Bloemardine.

As Christians have been quick to emphasize, several apocryphal texts may have circulated under Hadewijch's name. That is one hypothesis. Yet the work of censorship is less doubtful. Translators and commentators have set about disincarnating the poems in which love is celebrated, as in poems of courtly love.<sup>103</sup> And what are we to think of the texts when we know that even Ruysbroeck's writings were revised? One Latin version attests to the fact

that he spoke of the Free Spirit in two poems in Flemish, which were destroyed!<sup>104</sup>

Van Mierlo regards as “extremely curious and somewhat disturbing” the *List of Perfect Lovers*,<sup>105</sup> which follows *Vision 13* and seems intended for the Nuwen as opposed to the *Vremden* (the Foreigners). Similarly Margaret distinguishes the Greater Church, in which God is realized in love, from the Lesser – the Church of “the asses of asses.”

The first twelve centuries account for only twenty of the perfect (including Mary, John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene and Saint Augustine). Most of the names cited have still not been identified (although there is a Beguine called Helsewant, from Vilvorde, near Brussels). The twenty-ninth is Aleydis, “a Beguine sentenced to death by Master Robert for her just love.” The thirtieth is a man named Constant: “He lived for nine years on all fours, on hands and feet, like an animal.” The return to nature and the nakedness of the animals is not unrelated to the state of innocence also demanded by the Men of Intelligence, and which William Cornelius attributed to the poor – to those for whom having nothing means having everything.

### ***Bentivenga of Gubbio***

- 70 The trial of Bentivenga of Gubbio reveals the presence of a Free Spirit current within the Franciscan movement that was similar – whether the result of direct influence or not – to conceptions that were widespread in Swabia between about 1240 and 1280. In Pram, Bentivenga belonged to Gerard Segarelli’s Apostolic group until the Episcopal interdict of 1281 dispersed Segarelli’s followers. He then joined the Minorites<sup>106</sup> and, in Umbria, gathered support-

ers of the movement of the Free Spirit, of whom there seem to have been a fair number. Before his arrival there was a *Congregatio Libertatis* at Spoleto, centered around someone called Ottonello, which was criticized by Jacopo of Bevagna (whom Clare of Montefalco later suspected of Free Spirit beliefs<sup>107</sup>). His influence was such that the wandering Flagellants in the valley abandoned their practices to discover the rewards of pleasure liberated from suffering.

In his biography of Saint Clare, Berengarius of San Africano describes the quarrel between her and Bentivenga:

A certain friar of the Order of Minors came to the convent to put three propositions to Clare. He pretended to ask her advice about something he claimed to have heard from a friar in Gubbio who had long been highly regarded for his sanctity. He claimed to have doubts about the three following points: man can do what he wishes; hell does not exist; the soul can lose desire in this life.

Clare did not respond immediately, because these propositions seemed to her to contain the poison of error and to reveal the exaggerated influence of the intellect. But the next night, in fervent and numerous prayers, she asked the Lord to explain the meaning of such words. And when she had understood them, the following day, she replied to the friar: “The propositions about which you have consulted me carry in them a most harmful poison if they are not understood discerningly. Insofar as it applies to good men, hell does not exist as a place designed for their punishment. Man can do as he wishes, but in such a manner that his will is ordered in accordance with the divine will. It may be, in fact, that God thus rules the will of a being by taking to himself the will of the man and giving him his own ordered will, the will

of God himself. And God adapts the will of this being to his own will, so that he no longer desires anything that could oppose the divine will. Thus such a person can do as he wishes, for what he wishes will not differ in any way from what God wishes. But if they are not in the state of which I have spoken, those who claim to do what they wish do not speak truly. In truth, the soul can lose desire in this way: not because it does not desire anything when it is in this life, but because sometimes, during fervent contemplation, and by virtue of ecstasy or of some elevation toward God, the soul can be absorbed, immersed, bathed in love, in a wonderful union. And in the extreme state it attains, the soul desires nothing beyond what it has.”

At these words, the heresiarch, surprised and disturbed by the little faith that Clare allowed to these errors, asked: “Can a man who knows a woman carnally receive the body of Christ the next morning, even if he has known her without the excuse of marriage, solely out of the desire of the flesh?”

Although, in truth, disturbed by these shameful words, Clare replied, in defense of faith and truth, “No!”

The heresiarch said, “God could have done it.”

Clare replied, “God is not the author of sin; if he sinned he would not be God, and that itself would be a sin.”

Then the heresiarch, as if scorning her and her arguments, added, laughing, “Nothing happens without God’s agreement, for, according to the Scriptures, even the leaves of the tree do not fall to the ground without the permission of God. It therefore follows that what God allows is good, because God, who is good, would not allow anything that was not good.”

Clare said, “There are two things here. In man resides the work of forbidden sin, which is always bad; in God lies

permission, which is always good. From this it follows that what God does is good, that is the permission itself and the good which flows from it, because it is by the meanness of vice that the noble fruit of virtue is made manifest.”

[Bentivenga said] that he regarded her as simplistic, stupid, absolutely ignorant in all things, because she would not attain the state he had attained, a state, in his view, superior to all others. For whoever can sin without remorse, without sorrow, without fear of punishment is considered [by Bentivenga] better, superior and happier, as he has no remorse at all, whatever sin he commits.

Those who behave according to his beliefs say that creatures can do nothing except insofar as God makes them act. So that if they are praying, everything is done by God, and if they are indulging in love or some other infamous activity, everything is done by God. They can therefore not feel any remorse.<sup>108</sup>

Handed over to the Inquisition by Clare, Bentivenga and six other Minorites were sentenced, in the summer of 1307, to life imprisonment in Florence.

Yet, in Avignon, the Spirituals were indignant at the accusation that they looked favorably on the “very wicked error of the freedom of the spirit.” Arnaud of Villeneuve, in a similar statement of censure, merges the Joachism radicalized by Dolcino of Novara with the movement of the Free Spirit. According to him the doctrine allows unrestrained sexual license and the freedom to do anything, under the pretext that God approves everything, even the killing of the pope or the king or the raping of women and girls,<sup>109</sup> “because henceforth the time has come for the spirit of freedom to rule.”

Ubertino of Casale – erstwhile inquisitor in the Spoleto region – had already, in 1305, enumerated the theses of Bentivenga “inspired by the devil to corrupt the spirit of simple people” in his *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu*:

1. Apathy: an impious deception has appeared, inspired by the enemy, that corrupts the spirit of simple people, and maintains, under the pretext of serenity in the will of God, that they should remain unmoved by both the Passion of Christ and the suffering of their fellow man, and enjoy themselves, so to speak, in the sole pleasure of God, having no heed for the injury done to God nor for the pain of their fellow man. And they say, “God leads everything to the best choice.”<sup>110</sup>

2. Sinlessness: they say that men who have the grace of God and charity cannot sin. They assert that those who sin in any way have never had charity or the grace of God.

3. From the very true principle of the death of the Son – that we can do nothing good without grace – they infer that whatever we do, everything is done by grace. For this reason, they say that eating and making love and other similar things represent no fault in us, because they are convinced that grace incites them to these things.<sup>111</sup>

### **Margaret Porete**

- 71 She originally appears under the name of Margaret of Hainaut – known as Porete or Porrette or Poirette – in the documents of the Inquisition.<sup>112</sup> The consideration paid to her until she was burned at the stake suggests either that she belonged to the upper classes or, at least, that she had benefited from the secret intervention of

someone of influence, perhaps from the Burgundian court at Mons.<sup>113</sup>

She is sometimes described as a very wise Beguine cleric, sometimes as a *pseudo-mulier* (pseudo-woman), the term applied to wandering Beguines. In a fragment of *The Mirror of Simple Souls* – suppressed in the English translation for reasons of orthodoxy – she admits to being a wandering cleric in disagreement with the clergy, from which she does not exclude the Beguines or the Minorites, though they were still suspected of Free Spirit ideas: “Friends, what will Beguines and people of religion say when they hear the excellence of your divine song? Beguines will say that I am in error, [as do] priests, clerics and preachers, Augustinians and Carmelites and Minor friars.”<sup>114</sup>

One of her early works, on “the being of refined love,” was burned in her presence in the main square of Valenciennes in the last years of the thirteenth century. Guy II of Colmieu, bishop of Cambrai from 1296 to 1306, who had ordered the destruction of the text, forbade Margaret to disseminate other books and teachings, under penalty of being deemed a heretic and apostate and handed over to secular justice.

Yet the condemned text was authorized with the – admittedly reserved and cautious – approval of Godfrey of Fountains,<sup>115</sup> François, a Cistercian from the Abbey of Villers-en-Brabant, and a Minor friar, John of Quaregnon.

Margaret immediately repeated the offense and sent a book entitled *The Mirror of Simple Souls* to other simple people and to the bishop of Chalons-sur-Marne.

She was denounced to the inquisitor of Haute-Lorraine, whose jurisdiction extended from Valenciennes to Cambrai, and was arrested in 1307 and brought before William



Humbert, the Inquisitor General of France, confessor to Philip the Fair and the future accomplice of Philip of Marigny in the trial and massacre of the Templars.

She refused to pronounce the oath binding her to tell the whole and complete truth, remaining loyal to the belief that “the free soul does not respond to anyone if it does not want to.”<sup>116</sup>

On April 11, 1310, after a year and a half of imprisonment, she was judged *ipso facto* a heretic and an apostate. A commission of some twenty theologians condemned fifteen extracts from the text, which they used as the basis for the *Ad nostrum* and the anathema against the Beghards and Beguines, tainted with the ideas of the Free Spirit, at the Council of Vienne in 1311.

On May 31, 1310, the ecclesiastical authorities handed her over to the provost of Paris with the usual recommendation to “act mercifully with quick death.” Her book was to be burned with her. Anyone possessing a copy was to relinquish it to the competent authority, under penalty of excommunication.

Margaret was executed on June 1, in the Place de Grève. According to the continuator of the *Chronicle of William of Nangis*,<sup>117</sup> her noble attitude and her devotion<sup>118</sup> moved the watching crowd to tears. A cleric from the diocese of Cambrai, Guion of Cressonaert – it is not known whether he was a disciple or a companion – was arrested for trying to save her. He was defrocked and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Margaret’s concepts were no bolder than those of Johannes Eckhart.<sup>119</sup> Eckhart however did not lead a mendicant way of life. While the Master scornfully (and cunningly) attacked those who were interested in the letter

and not the spirit of his theses, the author of the *Mirror* addressed simple people in their own language.

The ecclesiastical rationale for Margaret’s execution was to set an example for agitators in Germany and the Langres region, where there were large numbers of people “who propagated their own impurities under the cloak of devotion.”

In 1310 the Franciscan Nicholas of Lira, one of Margaret’s accusers, fulminated against the heretics who maintained that preachers were to be disregarded, and that, instead, one should live freely, according to the flesh.

In 1311, at the Council of Vienne, the new bishop of Cambrai, Peter III of Lévis – successor to Philip III of Marigny, who had sentenced Margaret – worked actively against the Beghards and Beguines. His jurisdiction extended to Brussels, where the mysterious star of Bloemardine would soon shine.

- 72 *The Mirror of Simple Souls* is one of the few texts directly inspired by the movement of the Free Spirit to have survived for posterity. The text begins in the tradition of the orthodox mystics by developing the theme that the soul touched by grace is without sin. Then, just as Beatrice of Nazareth discusses seven ways of loving, Margaret presents a scale of seven initiatory graces through which the soul comes to the enjoyment of God. Once the soul is annihilated in God, it loses its will, its desires, even its essence, and, having become seraphic, is transformed by God and identified with his totality. This stage still includes ecstatic love, the beatific vision of the mystics. But the soul’s identification with God is also the way to freedom, which is the freedom of life at one with God:

And also, why should such souls scruple to take what they need when necessity demands it? It would be a loss of innocence for these souls, and troubling to the peace in which the soul has drawn back from all things. Who should scruple to take what he needs from the four elements, taking light from the sky, heat from fire, dew from water and support from the earth? We take the service of the four elements in all the ways that Nature has needs, without the reproach of Reason; these gracious elements are made by God, like all other things; and thus such souls use all things made and created of which Nature has need, in the same peace of heart as they use the earth on which they walk.<sup>120</sup>

Henceforth the ideal was to create a nature in which God was reincarnated, as he is reincarnated in the individual united with nature. Through divine obedience the present would reclaim the innocence that Adam had lost in the earthly paradise due to his disobedience.

Whereas the Church was hostile to nature, Margaret proposed that it might be rehabilitated to its state before the Fall, before the appearance of sin and the invention of exchange. Access to it lies in the refinement of love, in an identification with the power it generates in everyone. Such a practice arouses the "sleeping god" by an alchemical process whereby desires are awakened and pursued freely, in total innocence, and with no sense of guilt.

While the mystic process leads to contemplative communion with the divine phantom, eroticized by the negation of the body, Margaret identifies the soul with God in order to reinvent the body and give love of the self the right to exercise an absolute hold over the world:

*How This Soul Is like the Deity. Chapter 51.*

[*Love.*] It is proper, said Love, that this Soul should be like the Deity, for it is changed in God, said Love, from whom it took its true form; that which was conferred on it without beginning and given by one alone, who has always loved it out of his goodness.

*Soul.* Ah, Love, said this Soul, the meaning of that which you have spoken has made me nothing, and the nothingness of this one being has cast me into an abyss deeper than measureless nothingness. And the knowledge of my nothingness, said this Soul, has given me all, and the nothingness of this all, said this Soul, has taken away orison and prayer, and asks for nothing in return.

*Holy Church.* And so what will you do, most sweet lady and our mistress? said the Lesser Holy Church.

*Soul.* I shall rest totally in peace, said this Soul, entirely alone, and completely in the service of the sole goodness of God, without being moved by a single wish, except for whatever riches there may be in him. The end of all my work, said this Soul, is always to want nothing. For, inasmuch as I want nothing, said this Soul, I am alone in him without myself, and completely free, and when I want anything, said she, I am with myself, and therefore have lost freedom. But when I want nothing, and I have lost all my will, then I need nothing: being free is my way. I want nothing from anyone.

*Love.* O most precious Hester, said Love, who have lost all your customary things, and by that loss have become accustomed to doing nothing, truly you are very precious; for in truth this custom and this loss is done for the nothing of your lover, and in this nothing, said Love, you are enraptured and dead. But you live, beloved, said Love, in his desire of the all; it is his chamber, and he is pleased to stay there...<sup>121</sup>

*How This Soul Has Given All by Candor of Nobility. Chapter 89.* [Soul?] This Soul has given through the candor of nobility of the work of the Trinity; in which Trinity this Soul plants her will so deeply that she may not sin, unless she unplant it. For she has nothing wherewith to sin, for without will no creature may sin. Now she has no fear of sin, if she leave her will where it is planted – that is, in him who has given it to her freely, out of his goodness – and he wants it back for this reason, by his goodness and his love, nakedly and freely, without any questioning on her part, but for two things: because he wishes it, and because he finds it good. And until this time she has no abundant nor constant peace, until she is purely denuded of her will.

This soul, in this state, is like the drunken man. For the drunken man never cares what may befall him, whatever it may chance to be, any more than if it were nothing; and if he does care, then he is not truly drunk. Thus if this Soul has anything with which to will, this means it is ill-planted and that it can still fall if it be assailed by adversity or prosperity. And it is not whole; for it is not nothing, for it has that with which to will; for its poverty or its wealth is in wishing to give or retain. And so I want to say, said Love, to all those who are bidden or called by inward desire to the work of perfection, by the study of Reason, willing or not, that if they wish to be what they might be, they will come to the being of which we speak, and will thus be lords of themselves and of the earth and heaven.

*Reason.* How will they be lords? said Reason.

*Soul.* This nobody can say, said the Free Soul, who takes everything without heart and has everything without heart, and if the heart feels it, that is not it.

*How One May Come to Perfection to Do the Contrary of One's Will. Chapter 90.*

[Love.] I have said, said Love, that whoever follows the prompting of his inward spirit, if he is called to come with good will – for I cannot speak of other ways – and if he abandons all his will for external things to live the life of the spirit, he will come to full lordship.

*Spirit.* Ah! for God, said the Spirit, who seeks the very same in [this] sad life, tell us how!

*Soul.* This no one can say, said the Free Soul, save he alone who is in such a created being, of his goodness toward created being. But I can tell you this, said the Free Soul, that it is right, when one reaches this stage, to look perfectly on the contrary of one's will, feeding the Virtues until they are sated, and holding steadfast without weakening, so that the spirit always has lordship without vexation.

*Truth.* Ah, God, said Truth, surely the body will be sick that has a heart in which there is such a spirit?

*Soul.* I dare say, said the Free Soul, that a will which is suited to sad life, that is to the life of the spirit, will destroy the humors of all forms of sickness in one brief moment, such is the medicinal power of the ardor of the spirit.

*Love.* This is true, said Love, let anyone who doubts it try it and see whether it is the truth. Now I shall tell you, said Love. Contrary to the Free Soul, the life of which we spoke, which we call the life of the spirit, can have no peace if the body does not always do the contrary of its will; by this I mean that such people do the contrary of sensuality, or else they would fall back into perdition of such a life, if they did not live in contradiction of their pleasure. And those who are free do entirely the contrary. For, just as it is right in the life of the spirit to do everything contrary to their will

if they do not want to lose their peace, so, on the contrary, the free do everything that pleases them if they do not want to lose their peace, because they have arrived at the state of freedom, that is, they have moved from Virtues into Love and from Love into nothingness. . . .<sup>122</sup>

So foolish was I  
 At the time when I served them [the Virtues]  
 That I could not express to you  
 What my heart felt.  
 And while I served them,  
 And while I loved them better,  
 Love, for joy of her,  
 Made me listen.  
 And yet, simple as I am,  
 Although I did not think about it at all,  
 So I began to wish to love.

And when Love saw me thinking of her, then, on account of the Virtues, she did not refuse me; but thus sheltered me from their petty service, and led me to the divine school, and kept me there without having to do any service, and there I was filled and assuaged by her.

Thought is worth nothing to me anymore,  
 Nor works, nor eloquence.  
 Love draws me so high  
 (Thought is worth nothing to me anymore)  
 With its divine gaze,  
 That I have no understanding.  
 Thought is worth nothing to me anymore,  
 Nor works, nor eloquence.

Love by nobility has made me  
 Compose the lines of this song.  
 It is about the pure Deity,  
 Of which Reason cannot speak,  
 And about a beloved friend I have,  
 Who has no mother,  
 Who was born  
 Of God the Father  
 And about God the Son also.  
 His name is the Holy Spirit,  
 For whom I have such a meeting place in my heart,  
 That it gives me joy to be led there.  
 It is the land of green pastures  
 That the beloved gives in love.  
 I do not want to ask anything of him,  
 Too much would be a great misfortune to me.  
 Therefore I must entrust myself completely  
 To the loving of such a lover.

Gentle-natured beloved  
 You are greatly to be praised:  
 Generous, courtly beyond measure,  
 Sum of all goodness,  
 You do not want to do anything more,  
 Beloved, without my will.  
 And therefore I must not be silent  
 About your beauty and goodness.  
 This I cannot conceal.  
 Ah! whom shall I tell?  
 Seraphim cannot speak of it.

Beloved, you have taken me into your love,  
 To give me your great treasure,

That is to say, the gift of you yourself,  
 Who are divine goodness.  
 The heart cannot express this,  
 But pure nothingness refines the will,  
 Which has made me climb so high,  
 In union of concord,  
 That can never be revealed.

Once I was shut up in the servitude of prison,  
 When desire kept me there in the will for affection.  
 There I found the light of ardor of divine love,  
 Which soon killed my desire, my will and my affection,  
 Which were hindering my entering into the fullness of divine  
 love.

Now divine light has delivered me from prison,  
 And joined me through gentleness to the divine will of Love,  
 In which the Trinity gives me the pleasure of its love.  
 No man knows this gift,  
 None who serves virtue knows it,  
 Nor has sentiment of nature, by the exercise of reason.

Friends, what will Beguines and people of religion say,  
 When they hear the excellence of your divine song?  
 Beguines will say that I err, priests, clerics and preachers,  
 Augustinians and Carmelites and Minor Friars,  
 On account of what I write about the being of refined Love.  
 Their Reason, which makes them say this to me, will not  
 save them.  
 Desire, Will and Fear indeed take away their knowledge,  
 And abundance, and the union of the highest light  
 Of ardor of divine love.

Truth tells my heart,  
 That I am loved by one alone,  
 And says that there is no returning  
 The love that he has given me.  
 This gift kills my thought  
 With the pleasure of his love,  
 Pleasure which raises me and transforms me through union  
 Into the enduring joy of being of divine Love.

And divine Love tells me, that it has entered into me,  
 And because of this it can do whatever it wishes,  
 Such strength it has given me,  
 From a beloved that I love,  
 To whom I am devoted,  
 Who wants me to love him,  
 And for that I will love him.

I have said that I will love him.  
 I lie, I am not the one.  
 It is he alone who loves me:  
 He is, and I am not;  
 And I need no more,  
 Than what he wishes,  
 And that he is good.  
 He is fullness,  
 And I am full therefore.  
 This is the divine center  
 And faithful love....

*How Justice and Mercy and Love Come to the Soul, When It Has  
 Emerged from Its Childhood. Chapter 132.*

There I saw the land of Freedom. There Justice came to me,  
 and asked me what saving I wished of her. And I replied, such

as I was, that I wished for no saving from her, nor from anything that torment could do to me. Afterward came Mercy, who asked me what help I wished of her. And I immediately replied, such as I was, that I wished for no help from her, nor for anything that she might do for me.

Then Love approached me, full of goodness, who had cast me out of my senses, and had given me death in the end: you have heard something about that. And she said to me:

Beloved, what do you wish of me?

I contain all that has been,

And is, and will be,

I am filled with all things.

Take from me all that pleases you:

If you want all of me, I shall not deny you.

Say, beloved, what do you wish of me?

I am Love, who am filled with the goodness of everything:

Whatever you want, we want.

Beloved, tell us nakedly your will.

Therefore, I replied immediately that I was pure nothingness. Alas, what should I want? Pure nothingness has no will at all, and I want nothing. The goodness of Love is nothing to me; therefore, everything about Love is nothing to me. She is truly filled with herself. She is: nothing is if she is not; and therefore I say that it has completely assuaged me, and it is enough for me.

Then I began to emerge from childhood, and my spirit began to grow older, when my will was dead, and my works finished, and my love who made me happy. For the spreading rays of divine love, which revealed itself to me by divine light, with piercing bolt of lightning from on high, suddenly

showed me both him and me. That is, him on high, and me so low, that I could not rise up from there, nor help myself: and there my better self was born.

If you do not understand, I cannot put it differently. It is a miraculous work, of which, without lying, nothing can be said. . . .

*Here Divine Love speaks.* Ah! Gods, said Divine Love, who reposed in the annihilated soul, what a long road and what a great distance it is from such lost life to free life, from free life which wants nothing to do with lordship! And this wanting nothing sows the divine seed, taken from the divine will. Such a seed can never fail, but few people are able to receive this seed. I have found many destroyed in affection of spirit, by works of virtue, in desires of good will; but I have found few graciously lost; and I have found even fewer who are free, that is, who live the free life, who are such as this book demands; that is, who have one sole wish instilled in them by Refined Love. For Refined Love makes you have one love and one will, and therefore my will has become a will for nothingness. And such Love is for one who is so solely refined that it is the divine work. Such a Soul is naked, and therefore is not afraid, in its nakedness, of being bitten by the serpent. And since God cannot increase his joy, neither can the joy of this Soul move nor increase by its work, if he does not do it by his work. If she is moved by her work, she would be "for" herself; and if she is naked, this being cannot be.

And since her goodness cannot decrease, malaise cannot increase by her doing; and therefore she does not increase her work; for if she increased by herself, she would be "for" herself; and if she is naked, this being cannot be.

*The Free Soul.* It is true, said the Free Soul; to that extent am I perfectly myself by means of relinquishment; for

miracles are due to Faith, and these miracles give me true knowledge of the divine gifts: Faith is the cause of this.

*How the Soul Is in Perfection of Being, When the Holy Church Cannot Take Example from Her Life. Chapter 134.*

[Love.] Such a Soul, said Love, is in the greatest perfection of being, and closest to the Distant and Close, when the Holy Church draws no example from her life. She is thus beneath the work of Humility, and beyond the work of Poverty, and above the work of Charity. She is so far from the work of the Virtues, that she could not understand their language. . . .

*How the Soul Returns to Her Original Being. Chapter 138.*

Now this Soul is in the being of this original being which is her being, and has left three behind, and has made two into one. This one is, when the Soul is restored to that simple Deity, who is one simple being of widespread fruition, in full knowledge, without sentiment, above thought. This simple being does by Charity in the Soul everything the Soul does, for the will has become simple; which simple will has no deeds in it, since it has conquered the necessity of two natures, where will was given for simple being. And this simple will, which is divine will, puts the Soul into divine being; no one can go any higher, nor aspire any more profoundly, nor can any man be more than this. Whoever wishes to understand this should beware the ruses of Nature, for thus subtly, as the sun draws water out of cloth, unseen by anybody, however closely one watches, so Nature is deceived without knowing, if it is not on its guard through great suffering.

*How Nature Is Subtle in Several Points. Chapter 139.*

Ah, Gods! How subtle Nature is in several points, in demand-

ing in the form of goodness and in the guise of necessity that in which it has nothing. Certainly, that which it demands is often dangerous; for amidst such tricks it often receives what does not belong to it, by concealing its force and vigor, and its gentleness. I have suffered this to my great misfortune; but that has been to my great fortune, surpassing that which I set out to do, or divine knowledge, without my knowing. And this divine knowledge and this rest hindered me from finding the road to my country, by hiding from me the matter, in which I should take humility, so as to know my own. And therefore I lost in that that which was mine, which never was that which I had.

It happens sometimes that one never finds two creatures who are of one spirit in one realm, but when it happens by chance that these two creatures find each other, they open themselves to each other, and cannot hide themselves, and if they then want to do so, they cannot, because of the condition of their hopes and natures, and the custom of life, to which they are called, whether they are willing or not. Such people have great need to be on their guard, if they have not attained the crown and perfection of freedom.

And therefore I tell you, in conclusion, if God has given you high creation and excellent light and singular love, increase and multiply this creation without fail; for his two eyes see you all; and if you consider and look, this gaze brings the simple Soul into being.<sup>123</sup>

### *Heilwige Bloemardine*

- 73 When Jan van Ruysbroeck, the mystic of Groenendael, was still the parish priest of Saint Gudula in Brussels, he was involved in a lively polemic against a Beguine from the upper

ranks of society whose character and ideas caught the imaginations of both the common people and the aristocracy.

Bloemardine was, in all probability, the daughter of Alderman Wilhelmus Bloemart, who died between 1283 and 1287 and came from one of the most influential families in Brussels. She must have been born between 1250 (Wilhelmus was already an alderman in 1261) and 1287. Her death certificate is dated August 23, 1335.<sup>124</sup>

The silence surrounding Bloemardine was partially broken by Henry Pomerius, author of a *Life of Jan van Ruysbroeck*,<sup>125</sup> based on the evidence of Ruysbroeck's companion and successor, John of Schoonhoven: "How he [Jan van Ruysbroeck] refuted a certain occult heresy, responsibility for which lay with a woman popularly known as Bloemardine, of great renown in the city of Brussels."

In Brussels, when the servant of God [Ruysbroeck] was a secular priest there, there was a woman of perverse beliefs, whom the people called Bloemardine. She had acquired such a reputation that when she approached the altar to take Holy Communion, she was popularly believed to be flanked on each side by seraphim.

She had written much on the spirit of freedom and on the most infamous carnal love, which she called seraphic love. Her many disciples, who shared her beliefs, venerated her as the originator of a new doctrine.

It was said that when she wrote or taught she sat in a chair made of silver.<sup>126</sup> After her death the chair was said to have been offered to the duchess of Brabant, in the belief that it was still imbued with Bloemardine's thought. Similarly, the maimed touched her dead body in the belief that they might thereby be healed.

Being a man of true piety, he [Ruysbroeck] suffered to see error so widespread, and he rose at once against the perversity of this doctrine and, though her followers were very numerous, he unmasked writings which, under the guise of truth, contained nothing but heresies, which Bloemardine, contemptuous of our faith, had for so long attributed to divine inspiration. In this, he demonstrated both wisdom and courage, showing himself unafraid of the difficulties placed in his way by Bloemardine's followers, and refusing to allow himself to be taken in by the look and smell of truth of these false doctrines. I can attest from personal experience that these wicked writings were, to begin with, clothed in a veil of truth, to such an extent that no one could have revealed the seed of error in them without grace and the aid of Him who teaches all truth.<sup>127</sup>

Bloemardine enjoyed the exceptional privilege of living a public life of self-deification, with the Inquisition powerless to condemn her,<sup>128</sup> except indirectly, through Ruysbroeck and through the destruction of her writings.

Ruysbroeck, whom by the irony of fate John Gerson suspected of Free Spirit ideas, failed in the end to counter Bloemardine's influence. Tradition has it that popular resentment of his opposition to the Beguine's Free Spirit beliefs forced him to flee Brussels and take refuge in the Abbey of Groenendael, where he spent the rest of his life.

Although she is never named in the text, it is Bloemardine whom the mystic attacks in his book *The Ornament of Spiritual Weddings (or The Spiritual Espousals)*:

Now note this with great care, so that you may grasp it. Those of whom I speak imagine themselves occupied in the



contemplation of God, and believe themselves to be the holiest men in the world. Yet they live in opposition to God, to all saints and to good men. Now observe the sign that will allow you to recognize them both in their words and in their deeds. Through the natural repose which they enjoy in idleness, they consider themselves free and united with God without intermediary, raised above all the practices of the Holy Church, the commandments of God, and the law and all the virtuous deeds whatever they may be. For their idleness seems of such great importance to them that no obstacle should be put before them by any deed, however good it may be, for their idleness is of greater excellence than are all the virtues. Thus, they indulge in mere passivity without any operation, directed up toward God or down toward man, just like the loom, which is itself passive and waits for its owner to work, lest, by doing anything, they would hinder God in his work. Their idleness thus extends to all virtue, to the point that they will neither thank, nor praise God. They devote themselves neither to knowledge, nor to love, nor to will, nor to prayer, nor to desire, for they are convinced that they already possess all they could ask or wish for.

Thus they are poor in spirit, for they are without will of any sort, having forsaken everything, and making no choices of their own in their lives. For, freed from everything, having surpassed all things, they think they possess that for which all the exercises of the Holy Church were instituted and ordained. And thus, according to them, no one is able to give to them or to take from them, not even God himself; for, in their opinion, they are beyond all exercises and all virtues, and they have attained a pure idleness in which they are emancipated from virtues. And they claim that it is more difficult to be emancipated from virtue through an idleness of

mind (spirit) than to attain these virtues. And therefore they wish to be free, and obedient to no one, neither to pope nor bishop nor parish priest. Though they may have the appearance of it on the outside, in their hearts they are submissive to no one, neither in will nor in deed, for they are completely disengaged from everything concerned with the Holy Church. And therefore they say that as long as man strives after virtue and desires to accomplish the dearest will of God, he is still imperfect, for he still seeks to accumulate virtue, and knows nothing of their spiritual poverty nor of the idleness they advocate. But to them they are exalted above all the choirs of saints and angels and above all rewards, which can be merited in any way. And therefore they say that they can never grow more virtuous, that they can never deserve a greater reward and that they can never commit a sin. For they live without will, and they have relinquished to God their spirit devoted to repose and idleness; they are one with God and have been reduced to nothing themselves. And therefore they may freely consent to the desires of nature, for they have attained innocence, and laws do not apply to them. Henceforth, if nature is inclined to do what gives satisfaction, and if, in order to resist it, idleness of their spirits must be in some way diverted or hindered, they obey the instincts of nature, so that their spirits' idleness will remain unhindered. Thus, they pay no attention to fasting or saints' days, or to any commandment or precept whatever, save for the sake of men's opinion: for in all things they live their lives without conscience.

I hope that such people will not be found in great numbers, but where there are such people, they are the most evil and most dangerous of all men. Sometimes, they are even possessed by the devil, and then they are so skilled in trick-

ery that it is hard to defeat them by rational argument. But Holy Scripture, the teachings of Christ and our faith show us clearly that they are in error. . . .

There are other perverted men who differ from the first on some points. These men also claim idleness in regard to all works, in order to be no more than a tool with which God does what he will. Therefore, they say that they live in pure passivity and believe that the work that God accomplishes with them is more noble and more meritorious than all those which any man can perform himself with the grace of God. They bear divine action and do nothing themselves, for it is God who acts when they act. Incapable of sinning, since God acts, while they are completely passive, they accomplish what God desires and nothing else. With no activity, these men have completely abandoned their inner life and want to live without choice. They affect a resigned and humble manner, and they can endure and suffer in equanimity all that happens to them, for they believe that they are in God's hands like the tool with which he accomplishes his will. Their ways and their acts often resemble those of good men, and they are different from them only in certain circumstances. They maintain that the things they are impelled to do come from the Holy Spirit, whether they conform to the law or not. In this and in like matters they are deceived. For the spirit of God cannot desire, or counsel, or do in any man, things in contradiction to the teachings of Christ or the Holy Church.

It is difficult to recognize such men unless one is divinely enlightened and possesses the power to discern spirits and divine truth. They are extremely subtle and know how to disguise beneath appearances or excuses those of their beliefs which are in contradiction to God. But at the same time,

they are so obstinate and so full of their own spirit, that they would rather die than abandon any of their dreams. For they consider themselves to be the holiest and most enlightened men in the world.

What distinguishes them from the first category is that they think it is possible for them to grow and to obtain merit, while the others claim to be incapable of new merits, for they have attained the unity and idleness which excludes all growth and suppresses all exercise. These men are equally perverse and the worst of men, and are therefore to be shunned like demons from hell.

If you have well understood the teaching which I have expounded at such length, it will be easy to see that they are in error, for they live in opposition to God, to justice and to all the saints. They are all forerunners of the Antichrist, preparing the way for all unbelieving.<sup>129</sup>

### *Sister Katrei*

- 74 The lucidity of intellectuals is most often evident in their ability to draw on the life they find around them, or even within them, in order to nourish the speculations that maintain the separation between alienated thought and the concrete. This was certainly the case with Johannes Eckhart, who was condemned by the pope on March 27, 1329, for several of his seventeen sentences. Although he was to die unexpectedly en route to Avignon, where he intended to defend them, his writings bear the mark of the Free Spirit ideas he so vehemently condemned, berating all those who took his work literally when it was meant to be understood spiritually.

The treatise attributed to Johannes Eckhart, *This Was*

*Sister Katrei, the Daughter of Johannes Eckhart at Strasbourg*, is generally held to be apocryphal. Yet there can be no certainty that the clever Dominican was not secretly delighted to see his ideas returned to their living source. He came from Thuringea, where Hadewijch had followers who were named in her *List of the Perfect*. After the time he spent in Paris he must have been aware of the Amaurian ideas condemned by Stephen Tempier in 1277 and more importantly, of the theories of Margaret Porete.

The movement was given its just due, as *This Was Sister Katrei* describes the passage of a novice toward knowledge of the movement of the Free Spirit. The initiatory trials of asceticism and deprivation in the external world lead to the stage of perfection, in which everything is permissible. Gertrude of Civitatis and her companions would do the same at Schweidnitz:

“Counsel me how I should now best be guided, you who know my life better than anyone.” He said, “I shall do that gladly: you must eat when you are hungry, and drink when you are thirsty, and wear fine linen and sleep whenever you wish, and live in pleasure, and whatever your heart desires in the way of good food or pleasure, you must grant it to yourself, and not live for anyone except yourself. Even if you saw the whole world collapsing before your eyes, you should on no account intervene, even with an ave, and you should command all creatures to serve you according to your will, for the glory of God. You should wear fine and delicate garments and remain in one place and leave everything to the care of God. If you want to make use of any other creatures, you may do so at will, for every creature you make use of will thereby be brought closer to its original state. You well

know that what you make use of is in God, to the glory of God.”<sup>130</sup> She said, “I know, and you speak truly. But know that I desire nothing but to be poor until I die.” He said, “You are wrong.” She said, “I want to remain wrong. I want to be poor and wretched, no one can change my desire in this.” He said, “By my soul, you do your God wrong.” She said, “How is that?” He said, “By obeying your own will.” She said, “God knows that I do this only to honor the path that has led me to my eternal bliss. If this path has been wrong in time and in eternity, this is what I want to be in time and in eternity. Know that I have no wish to deviate from the path of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He said, “Yet you must know that God grants you fully everything.” She said, “I accept many comforts, so that I no longer do as much penance as before. Know that if I could help all the good souls who are on the way to their eternal bliss but are not yet confirmed, I would do it with joy; and that if I might help all men to overcome their infirmities, I would do it willingly for the love of God. You must know, as our Lord Jesus Christ practiced such things until his death, it is right that I should do as much. I wish to occupy my outward powers with the noble life and the noble humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ and with his noble teaching, as long as I live within time. Know that the sublime powers of my soul work in the soul of Christ, in the heavenly father, and are united there in a single being, and are never diminished. Starting from God the Father, by means of his powers, the Holy Spirit moves from the Father to the soul and back from the soul to God, and every power does its own work here below in the Holy Spirit and in the Father and with the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This you must understand, as is fitting: he wishes to know all my thoughts and all my deeds, since the

time I became capable of distinguishing good from evil.”

He said, “My dear girl, enlighten me. The scholars say: In heaven a thousand souls can stand on the point of a needle. Tell me how this should be interpreted.” She said, “The masters speak truly, and must be understood thus: The soul that has entered into God knows neither time nor place, nor any other thing that can be expressed in words. What is more: I would say to you that if one examines the condition of the soul, one finds that it is far above the heaven and the earth and anything God has ever created. And I say further: if God had created as many heavens and earths and worlds as he has created creatures, next to the place occupied by the soul united with God, these would count for no more than the point of a needle.” And Sister Katrei continued to speak for so long about the greatness of God, and his power and providence, that he lost his senses and fainted, so that he had to be carried to a separate cell, and remained there a long time before regaining his senses. When he had recovered his senses, he asked for Sister Katrei to be brought to him. She approached him and said to him, “How are you now?” And he replied, “Extremely well. God be praised for having made a creature such as you. You have shown me the way of my eternal bliss, I have been plunged into the contemplation of God, and real understanding has been given to me by everything I have heard from your mouth. Ah, I beg you, my dear girl, by the love you have for God, to help me by your works to remain lastingly in the state I am in now.” She said, “Know that that cannot be done. You are not yet apt. When your soul and your powers have become accustomed to going up and down the path, as servants go in and out of houses, and when you have learned to distinguish the celestial people and everything that God has ever created, and to commit no more

errors in anything, understanding things as the master of a house understands his servants, then the moment will be ripe for you to understand the difference between God and divinity. And you will also understand the difference between spirit and spirituality.

“Only then will you be able to aspire to be confirmed. You must not be misled, you must divert yourself with the creatures in complete innocence and they themselves will not be doing anything wrong. Through this you must direct your powers so that you do not fall into insanity. And you must do this assiduously until the powers of your soul are awakened and you arrive at that knowledge of which we have already spoken.

“Praised and blessed be the sweet name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>131</sup>

### *The Movement of the Free Spirit Among the Beghards and Beguines*

- 75 The siege mentality of the Church envisioned the Beguine convents as ramparts against the Waldensian menace and the unrest caused by widespread pauperization. But, like the language of theology, the citadel, with all its trappings of divine steadfastness, started to crumble from within, beleaguered by a freedom of nature that the prospect of death never completely crushes.

What better protection against the ferment of moral emancipation than the indifferent control of bishops whose main preoccupations were political strategy, the imbecilities of tradition, decrepit libertinism and profiteering? What more appropriate place could there be for the sensual origins of the debate about love, so deeply rooted

in the heart of medieval life, than in those places of refuge and meeting where men and women enjoyed a beneficent idleness that left them free to live according to their desires?

From time to time, a too obvious disorder aroused the suspicions of the Church's most zealous servants, who were always anxious that their authority should not be criticized by either the emperor or the pope, depending on whom they supported. In 1239 Reinbotto, bishop of Eichstätt, threatened the ill-famed Beguines of his diocese with the most severe punishments.

In 1244 the Archbishop of Mainz, Siegfried III, "to prevent the misuse which the younger Beguines were making of their freedom, ordered their establishments in his diocese not to accept new members under the age of forty."<sup>132</sup>

At first the mirror of Beguine devotion, by deflecting toward heaven the suspicious gaze of the inquisitors, protected the Beguines from the resentment of those rivals in mendicancy, the Franciscans and the Dominicans. In 1240 Joan of Flanders ordered her magistrates to defend Beguines and Beghards from the attempted extortion of religious brotherhoods and parish priests, who were losing profitable business (for example, the burial of the dead) as a result of the unwelcome zeal of some communities.

In 1245 Pope Urban IV was still able to order the dean of Louvain "to protect them against the reckless who afflict them, and to prevent them from being abused by trials, either personally or through their possessions."<sup>133</sup>

During the second half of the thirteenth century, however, condemnation began to intensify. The Synod of Fritzlar, over which Archbishop Gerard of Mainz presided,

attacked the wandering Beguines and Beghards, who begged with cries of "*Brod durch Gott!*" and preached in secret underground locations.<sup>134</sup>

In 1277 the Synod of Trier was angered by the Beghards and other *illiterati*<sup>135</sup> who were spreading heresies and fallacies among the people.<sup>136</sup>

The attack, which ended in condemnation by the Council of Vienne, took on a systematically repressive character on February 14, 1307; the Synod of Cologne, over which Henry II of Virneburg presided, included Beghards, Beguines, apostolic followers of Gerard Segarelli, partisans of voluntary poverty, Fraticelli and Joachites in a single anathema. A text by Virneburg criticizes them "for practicing a new sort of life under the pretext of poverty, begging instead of working, to the great detriment of Christianity, and for preaching their doctrine in public although they are lay people."<sup>137</sup>

This confusion is reflected in the list of "errors":

God is in a state of perdition.<sup>138</sup>

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are no longer subject to the law, for the law is not imposed on the just, on those who live without sin.<sup>139</sup>

No one who does not follow me can be saved.<sup>140</sup>

Simple fornication is not a sin.<sup>141</sup>

Any man may leave his lawful wife to follow God.<sup>142</sup>

If a woman does not deplore the loss of her virginity in marriage, she cannot be saved.<sup>143</sup>

Despite the Bishop's threats, the number of agitators in Cologne continued to increase. "Their audacity," writes Jundt, "was such that they even disturbed religious gath-

erings held by Dominicans and Franciscans, and heckled mendicant friars in the middle of church when they dared to condemn their doctrines from the height of the pulpit. At the same time the income of both orders declined noticeably. It was therefore thought necessary to bring one of the period's most illustrious theologians to the city in order to refute a doctrine the local clergy were powerless to prove wrong. Duns Scotus arrived in Cologne in 1307 and immediately set about his task, but he died the following year without having completed it."<sup>144</sup>

At Trier the proceedings of the Council of 1310 stated: "In the city and diocese of Trier there are a number of lay people, called Beghards, after an imaginary congregation they pretend to belong to; they appear in public dressed in long tunics with large cowls, and eschew all manual work. At certain times they hold meetings,<sup>145</sup> during which they appear, according to believers, to give profound interpretations of the sacred writings. We object to their association as belonging to no congregation recognized by the Church, and to their customs of mendicancy and vagabondage."

In 1311 Pope Clement V, author of the propositions known as the *Clementines*, became disturbed at the success of the movement of the Free Spirit in Italy: "In some parts of Italy, in the province of Spoleto and neighboring areas, there are a number of men and women, both members of religious orders and lay persons, who wish to introduce into the Church an abominable kind of life, which they call the freedom of the spirit, which means the freedom to do anything they like."<sup>146</sup>

At the Council of Vienne, which took place in the same year, the pope directed two decrees against the Beghards

and the Beguines, both of which are collected in the *Clementines*, the first being the *Ad nostrum*:

We have learned from a trustworthy source that there are a certain number of Beguines, doubtless touched with madness, who indulge in discussion and preaching about the Trinity and the divine essence, and who manifest heterodox opinions about the articles of faith and the sacraments of the Church. As a result, they lead many simple and credulous folk into a variety of errors; furthermore, they commit many deeds under the veil of sanctity which are a danger to the soul.<sup>147</sup>

[The second proposition, *Cum de quibusdam mulieribus*, says:] It is not without great displeasure that we have learned that an abominable and damnable sect has arisen in Germany, formed by a number of perverse men and faithless women, popularly known as Beghards and Beguines. [It points out the following errors:] They divide the time between the creation and the end of the world into three epochs: according to them, the time between the creation and the advent of the Lord is the epoch of the Father, that between Christ's incarnation and the coming of the Holy Spirit is the epoch of the Son, and the time of redemption, which extends from the sending out of the Holy Spirit until the end of the world, is the epoch of the Holy Spirit, a time of freedom for man to do as he wishes, in which nothing he does can be called evil. – Man can acquire in this life the plenitude of heavenly felicity that he will obtain after death. – Each intellectual being possesses this perfect felicity in himself by virtue of his nature; the soul therefore has no need of divine enlightenment to rise to the contemplation and enjoyment of God. – Man can attain such a degree of perfection in his current existence that he becomes incapable of sinning, and can

make no further progress in divine grace. For if he could progress further, he would reach a higher perfection here on earth than that possessed by Jesus Christ. – When man has attained the last degree of perfection, he has no further need to fast or to pray, for his senses are then so completely subject to reason that he can freely allow his body all it likes. – Those who live in this state of perfection, animated by the spirit of God, are no longer subject to any human law, or any ecclesiastical precept, for wherever the spirit of God is, there is freedom. – The practical exercise of the virtues is a mark of an imperfect man. – Sexual union is a mortal sin if it is not performed under the impulse of nature. In such cases, by contrast, it is not a sin, especially if it is preceded by temptation. – When the body of Christ is presented in divine service, it must not be elevated, nor shown any respect, for it would be a sign of imperfection to descend from the heights of pure contemplation, to pause on any thought touching the mystery of the Eucharist or the passion of the Lord.<sup>148</sup>

The *Clementines* were to serve as such a good model to inquisitors that, in many trials, all that was necessary was for the accused to acquiesce to each of the points and to sign the protocol sending him to the stake. This was particularly true of orthodox Beghards and Beguines, who were condemned, despite their attachment to the Church, by an edict that lent the whole of their congregation the smell of the stake.

#### ***Walter of Holland***

76 Walter of Holland, who established himself in Cologne after a period in Mainz, is thought to have been the author

of various German or Dutch works, among them the *De novem rupibus spiritualibus* [The Nine Spiritual Rocks], mentioned by John of Dürbheim in 1217. The manuscript, now lost, was regarded by Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, who consulted it in the eighteenth century, as a genuine Free Spirit manual “dearer to the Beghards than any other.”<sup>149</sup>

Johannes Trithemius<sup>150</sup> calls Walter the “leader of the Fraticelli and Lollards.”<sup>151</sup> Writing and preaching in vernacular language, and therefore for simple people, Walter was one of the victims of the repression set in motion by Bishop Henry II of Virneburg. He was burned at the stake in 1322. The chronicler William of Egmont estimated the number of victims executed at the stake or drowned in the Rhine to be fifty. He recounts how nocturnal gatherings, held at a secret location called “paradise,” were presided over by a couple representing Jesus and Mary, celebrating the return of the innocence of Eden. After a sort of Mass celebrated by the Christ figure, dressed in fine clothes and wearing a diadem, a naked preacher would appear and invite the company to take off their clothes in observance of innocence regained. A banquet modeled on the Last Supper, with singing and liveliness, concluded in orgy.

#### ***Voluntary Poverty in Cologne:***

##### ***John and Albert of Brünn***

77 In 1335 John of Brünn, who, with his brother Albert, had been living in a voluntary poverty group in Cologne for twenty years, renounced his vows, joined the Dominicans and collaborated in the persecution of his former companions. His treachery apparently resulted in an agreement with Gallus of Novo Castro, the Prague inquisitor since

1330. John was to escape the stake in return for a confession, part of which Gallus used to complete the *Clementines*. This “spontaneous” collaboration excluded the use of torture, but did not prohibit a degree of cautiousness in the admissions. Like the interrogation of the nuns of Schweidnitz, this document (translated *in extenso*) illuminates both the influence and the distortion of Free Spirit ideas in para-ecclesiastical communities:

I, Brother John of Brünn, of the Order of Dominicans,<sup>152</sup> was interrogated by Brother Gallus, of the same Order, inquisitor of heretic perversion in the Kingdom of Bohemia. Did I wish to tell the pure truth, on oath, about the sect of Beghards and Beguines, and those who lived in the freedom of the spirit? I replied that I would do so willingly. For twenty years I was a Beghard, and for eight of those years I lived in the freedom of the spirit. This is how I came to join the sect. When I was living in Brünn<sup>153</sup> with a lawful wife, I asked a friend, with whom I was then on close terms, how to achieve a perfect life.

“The most perfect life in the world,” he assured me, “is the life of the Beghards, who have chosen to live in poverty. For, with more perfection than all the clerics, lay or religious, they thus follow an evangelical existence.”

“How may I attain such perfection?” I asked.

He replied, “Sell all that you have and give everything to those who live in poverty, those I have just told you about.”

To my question, “But what about my wife?” he replied that nothing bound me to her except the fact that I take pleasure in her; I could therefore easily bid her goodbye.

At first, I wanted to consult the priests.<sup>154</sup> “Useless,” he replied, “for they will dissuade you from your purpose,

as they abominate our perfection of life above all else.”

With his agreement, but not with that of my wife, I sold all my possessions. Half this sum I left with my wife and, taking the other half with me, I returned to Cologne. There I was received into the house of the poor, with my master, Nicholas, the friend I spoke of just now.

The house was situated near Saint Stephen, in the new city. When I came inside, I knelt down to hear the words spoken by my master to the brothers of that house, whom I asked to take me in out of charity. They assured me that they would receive me gladly in two or three days. I stayed with them until the morning.

When morning came, their procurator asked me, “What will you do among the poor and the despised? Do you intend to observe voluntary poverty and be despised by all?”

Humbly, I replied, “In truth, my brother, I desire to remain among you until God has led me to the state of perfection.”

“This evening,” he said to me, “when the brothers are all gathered, you must kneel down before them and ask them humbly if you can stay with them.”<sup>155</sup>

Then the procurator took me, with some of the brothers, to a more private place. He then explained some of the precepts of the order.

“Brother, if you desire to remain with us, you must put all your money and possessions in our hands. When you present yourself to the brothers, place everything on the table before them. If they order you to leave, go, and leave the money.

I did as he said, and they welcomed me into their way of perfect life. Then the procurator told me about the austerity of their order. He showed me that a true member of a



sect devoted to poverty possesses nothing, and rids himself of all temporal possessions like Christ on the cross.

I was stripped of everything. I was naked in their presence. I had put everything into their hands. I knelt down in my nakedness. Then they gave me a tunic, patched a hundred times, saying:

“Wear this tunic, as Christ wore it, to arouse derision and contempt. Like him, and for his sake, endure patiently the contempt you will receive. The more you can bear, the more sanctified you will become. If, tomorrow, when you go into the city, somebody treats you as a heretic, maltreats you, beats you or knocks you about in any way, do not respond. Bear all patiently.

“You will beg for your bread in company with the brother who will be assigned to you. You will not raise your eyes, you will keep them fixed on the ground, your face entirely covered with your cowl.

“If your brother stops, you stop. If he walks, you walk. If he cries, you cry. Act like Christ, who, as he went about the city with his apostles and his friends, was not really begging for his bread, but everywhere seeking scorn and his Passion.

“If somebody calls out behind you, ‘Brother receive alms!’, do not go back, nor look back, nor stop. Be content to slow your pace until he catches up with you.

“If you are overtaken by hunger or weakness on the way, it is permissible for you to comfort your nature by eating secretly, under your cowl, to avoid shocking people; whether it be at Easter, or any other day or season of the year. The poor of Christ commit no sin when they refresh their nature, even if they eat meat on holy days. For charity tells us to eat and drink what is given to us.

When you return to the house, with the brother in ques-

tion, you will kneel down before him, you will kiss his feet, you will ask pardon of him if, on the way, you have offended him in anything. When the brothers are seated at table, after the benediction, you will eat what you are given in silence. Similarly, in church, remain on your knees, your head covered with your cowl. When you have said your matins or your prayers, stay there and meditate on the Passion of Christ, without leaving the church; allow yourself to be penetrated more deeply by divine plenitude. If you happen to witness the elevation of the body of Christ a single time, that should suffice as much as seeing it a hundred times. Watching the elevation is the act of those who simulate sanctity and who want to make a public show of what they neglect within themselves.

If some place lends itself to prayer, they say that they should take Communion once on Sundays and twice during the week: this is what is fitting for the poor of Christ. There is no need at all to confess everything to priests. Did they spend the night with a woman? Then they should feel no remorse, for true poverty, which proceeds from the divine presence that they possess deep within them, will answer for it.<sup>156</sup> In truth, the priests understand nothing about these matters. On the contrary, they see these devotees of poverty only as ruined souls.

“If your nature is overcome with sleep, do not feel any remorse, whether you are sleeping at home, in church or during divine service. Similarly, eat when you are hungry to refresh your nature. If, when you are walking on a Sunday, you find some coins on the road, do not pick them up, out of respect for the Ten Commandments. But on the other six days you may pick up whatever you find and take it back to wherever you are staying.<sup>157</sup>

“Similarly, if some poor brother stops and asks you for hospitality, you should follow the example of Christ and wash his feet. You will receive him by kneeling down before him and you will do him charity by asking him to pray for you.

“Do any deeds that are contrary to your wishes in order that your life may be annihilated and diminished and, thus, totally subject to the spirit.<sup>158</sup> Because your nature is sterile, it is in your interest to annihilate it in all your deeds. This is why your nature must be broken and subjected to divine will, so that by obedience to this will it will be able to lead all desire and will to its realization.

“If you are seen to eat an egg in the morning during Easter week, have no scruples about it, do not think it a sin and do not confess it to a priest, under the pretext that this priest is subject to Christ and has yielded his flesh in his service. Similarly, when you are on the road, do not ask anyone for anything and avoid places where alms are distributed to others.<sup>159</sup> Do not hold out your hand for alms to anyone whatsoever. But if the hand of God has permitted you to receive any, take them gratefully. If anyone sends you on an errand, obey in complete humility. When you are walking the streets, keep from going into any houses; rather, ask for hospitality in a loud voice and, if you are not invited in, sleep on the doorstep. If you are maltreated by brigands, suffer patiently, following Christ’s example.”

Then John received from the brothers the teaching reserved for those who have arrived at this stage [of initiation].

“Brother, you have now completed the stage of which we have spoken. Henceforth, whenever your nature demands, you may sustain it by eating, drinking and making use of anything available to it. Just as your external nature, annihilated in the service of Christ, needs to be refreshed in order to

serve him anew, so it is necessary to restore the part most closely connected to the spirit. Therefore, eat as often as you wish. Even if it is Lent, or the eve of the Sabbath, eat meat and milk products if you can procure them. There is no sin in that, for the simple reason that you need to restore your nature, which has been weakened in the service of Christ. Do not let your conscience be troubled by it, and do not confess it to priests, because they regard as foolish any man who, having as his aim the attainment of supreme freedom, allows divine nature and truth to act on him even in sleep.

“And you will have a total right to lie and mislead people in every possible way. Have no scruples about this: when you are free in spirit, you are freed from sin.”<sup>160</sup>

If a brother has no money, he has the right to receive it from the hands of strangers; for, by spending this money, he does nothing other than send it into eternity.<sup>161</sup> As he is free in spirit, there is no need for him to pay it back. If he did, it would sully his conscience.

And if he finds some money on the road? “He should not give it up, but spend it with his brothers in the service of Christ. God has decided so in his providence: the money is just as much the possession of he who finds it as of he who has lost it.”

And if the owner of the money reclaims it? “Ah, then the one who is free in spirit should intimidate him with words and gestures. He should say, ‘This money is yours as much as mine, for God gave it to me so that I could spend it and send it into a state of poverty, which is the highest state. That is why I have sent it into eternity.’”<sup>162</sup>

If he is arrested, it is better for him to perish or to kill the other party than to agree to return the money; if he fails in this, he will lose his freedom of spirit and move from the

level of the eternal to that of the temporal, which is what he must guard against doing. But if he dies, his spirit passes immediately into eternal life.

And if he meets a sick man on the road? “He should sympathize with his sufferings, serve him with care, ask him whether he has any money and relieve him of it, so that that sum should not fall into the hands of the priests.” And if the sick man balks at this? “Oh, then have resort to violence, steal the money, and then go off with your brothers and sisters to spend it in freedom of spirit and send it into eternity. And, above all, have no scruples! And no remorse if the man dies of hunger! All you have done is returned him to his original elements. Have no fear of the devil or hell or purgatory, for, in truth, nature does not recognize their existence. They are just inventions of priests and clerics to frighten men. The self-aware man is himself the devil, hell and purgatory when he tortures himself. But the free in spirit avoid this kind of torment, because they are liberated by divine truth.”

A brother of the Free Spirit has the right to preach when he is given hospitality. What if they ask him on what authority he does this? He will reply: “Anyone may receive from me, just as well as from a priest, the truth which he can hear and learn from my voice. When he preaches, someone who is spiritually poor, sitting in a corner of the church, sees divine truth just as clearly as, and perhaps more clearly than, when a priest addresses the people in a public sermon. If a Beghard preaches in public, he expresses himself with much more clarity than a priest, because those who are called the poor of Christ have drawn from the abyss of the Trinity a truth to which no one can accede unless they are free in spirit.”<sup>163</sup>

“Yet if someone says, ‘How do you know this truth when you can neither read nor understand the Holy Scriptures?’,

reply, ‘It is better to see the Scriptures and the truth than to read them.’<sup>164</sup>

“In answer to the question: ‘Why do you say that?’, retort, ‘Who sees in truth is freed from himself, has withdrawn from himself, has abandoned himself and all other creatures.’<sup>165</sup>

“To anyone who asks you, ‘Where are you going?’, say ‘I do not know, except that I am going where God and truth are leading me. For I am not master of myself; I am utterly dissolved in the flux of eternity (*totaliter in eternitate liquefactus*).’

“If anyone asks you what kind of freedom you claim to possess, say, ‘I am free through my truth. No one, and no creature, can stand in my way.’

“If anyone asks you, ‘What is the basis of freedom and truth, and how are they to be attained?’, reply, ‘I belong to the freedom of nature. I satisfy that in everything it asks of me and I give it everything in sufficiency.’<sup>166</sup>

“If I solicit a woman during the holiest of nights, I do not feel the slightest scruple of conscience in thus assuaging my appetites. I see no sin in that since, by virtue of my freedom of spirit, I am a man in accordance with nature. It is therefore right that I should find free satisfaction in the works of nature.

“And that is perfect freedom: the hand may obtain everything the eye sees and desires! If any obstacle appears in his way, he has a total right to remove it. For if a man stands up to what is vexing to him, his freedom is not compromised.

“Brother, when you strike he who strikes you, when you kill he who tries to kill you, do not have a bad conscience, do not confess it to a priest. The one you have killed has merely been happily returned to his original element, whence he came.”

When they have reached this degree of perfection in free-

dom, the brothers who live in the spirit are totally and corporeally transmuted: they have become one with God and God is totally and corporeally with them. Because of this unity, the angels are incapable of distinguishing, in the mirror of the Trinity, between God and a soul which has lived in freedom of spirit.<sup>167</sup>

If a brother and a sister living together in freedom of spirit have together brought a child into the world, they have every right to put it to death or throw it into the water as if it were a little worm.<sup>168</sup> And they need have no scruple about this, nor confess it to a priest, for they have merely returned it to its original element. They have every right to declare what they have done, by reason of their perfect freedom of spirit, and without feeling the slightest sense of sin – unlike priests.<sup>169</sup> And why should the poor in spirit feel any scruple, since they possess nothing, neither anything with which to feed a child, nor anything for their own sustenance?

Even when they speak lying, misleading or harmful words, they cannot sin; they are incapable of it. They have attained the highest degree of perfection; it is impossible for them to be more perfect.

Among themselves, the brothers and sisters use special signs of recognition, by means of which they make mutual contact and express their desire to be united. If a sister places a finger on her nose, she invites a brother to come to her house. If she touches her head, then the brother enters her room and prepares the bed. If she touches her breast, he climbs into the bed and performs the task of nature and of love as many times as he is able.<sup>170</sup> Yes, those who live in freedom of spirit can do everything without sin.

For a brother and a sister of this freedom, taking Com-

munion in the morning does not prevent them from making love in the evening without the slightest sin.<sup>171</sup>

They take Communion very often and frequently go to confession, to set a good example for other people. When they die, they say, they fly directly to the empyrean heaven, even if they die without extreme unction or confession, which they regard as inventions of the priests and clerics. They also say that there is neither hell nor devil, and that God does not impart himself to the hands of the priests in the transubstantiation of the bread during the Mass; for the priests are neither in grace nor in charity, and this is something that nobody can achieve only by withdrawing from ordinary mortals: “And I have never seen such a priest, therefore none of them can consecrate the body of Christ.”

They say that truth is only to be found among the poor, and not among priests, who are [so] given to vanity. The priests do not possess God, nor do they understand the truth. The poor of Christ therefore have no need to tell the truth to priests. Similarly, they need not confess their secrets to the priests, nor obey the clergy. They neither recognize fasting nor other good works.

When the poor in spirit becomes detached from all creatures,<sup>172</sup> he reaches the dignity of, and shares in, divine nature. There is then no need for him to honor the saints.

If a brother who is about to take Communion feels hungry, he may eat and then take Communion. Just as the spirit acts freely, so the flesh may freely and without sin perform the work of nature, with one woman or with several. If nature has become weakened to any extent, it is right to give it comfort, even if this entails theft or rape; because, for the free man, all the things that God has created are for everyone.<sup>173</sup>

“If somebody says to you, ‘Brother, I am as free as you, because my nobility claims the same nature as you,’ you should reply, ‘If you have spent your life with Jesus Christ as your model, as I have done, then you are free to live [as you intend]. For myself, I have spent my life in the contempt aroused by poverty, and, thanks to Christ, I have endured many torments.’<sup>174</sup>

“If I enter a tavern, and eat and drink with no means of paying, I can leave freely without the slightest sin. And if anyone has the impertinence to demand that I should pay, I am free to thrash the complainer, without sin; for God has assigned all goods to himself, so that I can help myself to them and send them on to eternity.”<sup>175</sup>

If a sister of freedom goes to a brother’s house after he has taken Communion, and says to him, “Brother, I ask charity, sleep with me,”<sup>176</sup> he should not say, “I have taken Communion,” but should perform the work of nature, heartily, two or four times, to satisfy nature, without scruple and without confession.

If he desires to perform the act of sodomy with a man, he may do so freely and lawfully. And without any feeling of wrongdoing; otherwise, he would not be free in spirit.

If a brother who is still a novice commits gross sins, he should not say that they are grave, but only that they are venial. For priests divulge what they hear, and, as they are not in the truth of perfection, it is important not to reveal everything to them.

To those who are in true freedom, they also say that no one can give them an order, excommunicate them or prohibit them from doing anything whatsoever. Neither the pope, nor the archbishop, nor any other living being has authority over them: they are free, and are not subject to the

jurisdiction of any human being. This is why they pay no heed to the rules and commandments of the Church.

### *The Confession*

“I admit to having lived in sin for eight years. I believed all that I said above to be true. I did not consider myself to be in a state of sin because I was in freedom of spirit. That is why I never regarded anything that I did as being a sin: eating meat during Holy Week and on the eve of the Feasts of the Apostles, or indulging in lechery, tricking people, stealing from them and beating them. I did not go to confession before I took Communion.”<sup>177</sup>

Among two hundred Beghards and partisans of freedom, hardly one is to be found who does not adhere to the above articles of belief.

Thus the Beghard Albert<sup>178</sup> maintained that anyone who lived in true freedom could say Mass beneath his cowl as well as a priest, as he could be united with God just as much as a priest at the altar.

Frequent taking of the body and blood of Christ in Communion, or multiple celebrations of the Mass, does not make a man holy or increase his sanctity. For we can plainly see that priests who celebrate Mass every day are as bad as, if not worse than, people who rarely take Communion or seldom go to Mass.<sup>179</sup>

He also said that the man who is free in spirit enjoys God more authentically than one who gets up every night to pray on his knees, and that, in the elevation of the body of Christ, man is not transported toward higher regions.

Everything a man does below the belt is not a sin. In Brünn, I saw a Beghard give Communion to a Beguine with whom he had slept all night, in my presence.

It is, they say, only stupid men who are preoccupied with Christ's Passion. They refer to these people vulgarly as *Blochweg*.

Man must transcend himself and be watchful, then he can act as he likes. He should not fast or indulge in good deeds, for such an attitude hinders [perfection] more than it encourages it.

They do not have to look at the body of Christ if they can avoid it without causing a scandal. For they are convinced that the man of free spirit has the body of Christ in his heart as much as the priest has it in his hands. Thus I heard one Beguine say that these damned priests behaved so much like gods in church that it was no longer possible to find repose there.

Hell is nothing but man's own will. There is no natural fire there. When a man breaks his own will, he breaks his own hell.<sup>180</sup>

They say, and firmly believe, that all carnal sins and sins against nature are not sins at all. Many Beghards do not believe the Scripture passages concerning the symbol of faith. The word of the Beghard is more powerful than that of a preacher, because the Beghard has studied his doctrines from the book of the Trinity,<sup>181</sup> whereas the priest has studied them from the skins of calves [parchments].

Albert was questioned by Father Gallus, of the Order of Dominicans, who asked him what fundamental principles the Beghards acknowledged, since they neither regarded sodomy as a sin nor even admitted that sin existed. He replied: "I thought and firmly believed what all the Beghards believe: man can attain a freedom in which he becomes free in spirit. Then mortal sins are so venial that holy water expunges them. If you regard mortal sins as sins, then there is

no free spirit. Any sin which is mortal is in itself venial. That is why, when you confess, it is right to confess only venial sins, however great your sins might actually have been." They act thus solely to humor other people and to pass as saints among those around them.

In this wretched freedom of spirit, I, John of Brünn, and my brother Albert remained for twenty years. I believed in what has been described. I never regarded it as a sin. We would never have confessed if we had not been afraid of men, and many other things that have not been written in this book.

Note here the errors of the heretics recorded in the *Clementines*.<sup>182</sup>

### *The Nuns of Schweidnitz*

78 On September 7, 1332, the inquisitor Johannes Schwenkenfeld, who was murdered in 1341, began an inquiry at Schweidnitz<sup>183</sup> into the activities of a congregation of *caputiatae* – Beguines or nuns living outside the rules recognized by the Church. The interrogation took place in the refectory of the Dominican monastery. There, in the presence of the inquisitor and ten clerics, sixteen novices gave evidence against their mistresses.

All but two of the accused, who maintained a lofty reserve, were "traveling" and stayed in other convents. (The proceedings mention Strasbourg, Bratislava and Aix-la-Chapelle.) No torture was used, but the constant reminder of the *Clementines* meant that a witness often found it prudent to mumble her way through this or that article. The evidence underlines clear similarities between the Beghards of Cologne, to which John of Brünn belonged,

and the congregation of Schweidnitz, which the nuns had called the “Community of the Daughters of Udillynde” since its foundation in 1306.<sup>184</sup>

79 Interrogation of the nuns of Schweidnitz (extracts):

Hedwig of Bratislava,<sup>185</sup> interrogated under oath, reported that, in their view, their state of perfection permitted them to regard sleeping, waking, eating, drinking and fasting as equally meritorious. All the works they undertook for God were good, because their being was their own work.

In their house, there was a small room into which no one but the mistresses could go. The sect liked to induct young girls, who could be instructed according to its plans, rather than older women, who could not be educated as the girls could; for, as they said, you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.

They lashed themselves until their blood ran, using thongs and ropes with sharp points knotted into them. They had to do this, they said, to subdue nature.

Hedwig said that sometimes, when there were several of them in one room, the first would leave and would prostrate herself on the threshold, the second would trample her and lie by her side, the third would do likewise, and so on, until they had all left the room. This happened at Bratislava, and Hedwig took part in it. . . .

. . . When young girls joined, said Hedwig, she taught them to go without food, drink, etc., until they were perfect. However, those whom the mistresses deemed to have attained perfection could and should eat their fill, because of the privations they had endured earlier.

[To the young novices] they claimed that there was no need to possess clothing. If one arrived with fine clothes, they

were taken away, as they were reserved for the perfect. And they dressed her in rags that only partially covered her.<sup>186</sup>

And if she refused to wear these clothes? Then they told her, “You are not fit for a life of poverty.”

I have heard them say that a human being is realized only in proportion to his perfection; those who are in such a state of perfection and freedom of spirit are not bound to obey anyone at all.<sup>187</sup>

When Hedwig said to them, “I must go to confession, because I was weaving during the week of Pentecost,”<sup>188</sup> they replied, “There is no need for confession, as what you did were good works.” According to them, sin was what went against their own wills.

They told the novices, “Do what we tell you and you will not be sinning, for we do not order you to do anything that could be a sin.” . . .

She heard Gertrude of Civitatis, here present, maintain that, as God is God, so she was God with God. And she was the same as Christ, who was never separated from God. And if she indulged in any impurity,<sup>189</sup> her equality with God returned her immediately to God in her original innocence.<sup>190</sup>

And when Hedwig reproached Gertrude for her wounding words, the others defended her. . . . They said, “We look in the book of life, but priests and preachers look in calf skins [parchments]. We want to close our house and we want to do what we like.” . . .

According to Adelheide,<sup>191</sup> their teaching urged the novices to indulge in such serious mortification that some of them succumbed to madness. One novice, who was found among lepers, had lost her reason as a result of peculiar activities and extravagant mortifications. When they asked a woman

named von Glatz why she did not eat although she lay on her bed prostrated by illness, she replied, "Because I have reached such a level of perfection that I no longer need to eat or drink, as Christ has fed me." Her presumption drove her mad.

Adelheide had heard from those who associated with them that they called their sect the Union of the Daughters of Udillynde and had several principles. First, their sweet and flattering words attracted both virgins and married women, whatever their state or condition. They then persuaded these women to accept their authority and will, and to ignore the monastic orders, the Church and everyone. Second, they strongly advised these women to remain within the congregation house, to stay in the kitchen or other rooms, and not to go to church and listen to sermons. To judge by what they said, they had to believe them, and the Lord God would inspire them as soon as they had broken their own will and had given themselves up to the work of charity. . . .

[They incited the women to act] in ways that would break their natures and their wills. Hedwig of Bratislava confirmed this by telling of the day she found, to her horror, that a caterpillar had been cooked with the vegetables. The mistresses encouraged her to eat it and overcome her nature, but she refused and fled from the room in tears.

Adelheide told of a dead cat that one novice found in a bowl; it was to be skinned and then baked. She felt such a strong repugnance at doing this that she tried to escape the obligation. But they forced her to extract the cat's fat and gather it as an ointment for their shoes. And then, to overcome her natural horror, they sent her to sell the skin in the public square. This happened in Strasbourg. . . .<sup>192</sup>

Adelheide had this from a reliable source: when those who had attained their so-called freedom, and were deemed

perfect and fully practiced, left the congregation, it was to take their pleasure with the Beghards, on every occasion.

They ate meat at Easter and on the eve of the Feasts of the Apostles; whenever they could do so without causing a scandal. This did not disturb them, nor did they confess it, nor did they have any scruples about it.

The Beghards and these women, who made such shows of sanctity and the most austere poverty in fact committed all the filthiness and all the sins of Sodom.

Adelheide asserted that which follows with complete certainty, because she heard it from the [novice] to whom it had happened, and from many others who had had similar experiences. They abused their companionship and indulged in mutual and shameful contact in the anal region. The prelude to their pleasures was to take turns sliding their tongues into one another's mouths. They did this at any time, even in church, during the sermon, the Mass or other divine offices.

By professing the opinion that all the most infamous things were lawful, they attracted, and still attract, the wicked, including some members of recognized religious orders, priests and members of the secular clergy. One day, in their house here in Schweidnitz, Adelheide was serving food to some Beghards. Later, when they wanted to talk to the Beguines, they shouted at her, "Get out, you have no business here!"

From Gertrude de Civitatis, here present, Adelheide heard these words: "If God has created everything, then I have shared in his creation, I created everything with him. And I am God with God, and I am Christ, and I am more than these." . . .

Catherine<sup>193</sup> recounted that one Beghard, a member of a sect in Glogovia,<sup>194</sup> said to her, when she was alone in



church, "If you conquer yourself, if the higher virtues achieve victory over the lower ones in your life, then you will attain perfection and you will have a subtle spirit. It is true to say that, until now, you have shown only a coarse spirit. Once you are perfect, nothing that happens in the charity<sup>195</sup> of God can harm your chastity. You will not be committing any sin."

When women experience shame and try to resist those who impudently touch their breasts and other places, the Beghards and nuns say that this is a sign of their coarse spirits. [They add:] "You cannot have had enough spirit in all your life, to behave like a courtesan [curialiter] or to show yourself off to a man!" . . .

Margaret<sup>196</sup> heard them maintain that they wanted to strengthen those tempted by concupiscence in this manner: if the object [of desire] was a woman, they had to renounce her and her company and seek a man.<sup>197</sup> It was important, however, that there was always to be two.

Margaret was scandalized when she heard these propositions. Either she had not properly understood, or it was evil. But an experience reassured her that the proposition was, indeed, pernicious. One day, when she was disturbed, one of the women embraced her and spoke such words that her flesh was greatly moved. Then the woman confided to her: "If you will consent to my desires, I shall reveal a secret that you are ready to hear, a secret such that you will never want to leave us."<sup>198</sup> This woman was Anna the Blind.<sup>199</sup>

### **Thomas Scoto**

80 Thomas Scoto, whom Alvaro Pelayo mentions in his *Collyrium contra haereses* (1344), occupied a marginal position in the movement of the Free Spirit. Although he did not

call for the transcendence of God through immediate sensual pleasure, he did emphasize antireligious irony, which the supporters of the movement of the Free Spirit were fond of using to establish their authority. He prefigures Herman of Rijswick and the skeptics of the Renaissance, providing valuable evidence of the rationalist, materialist and atheist tendencies that official history has always denied, and through which alienated thought has expressed its rejection of the religious world.

Thomas Scoto, first a Dominican, then a Franciscan, was educated in Portugal in the first half of the fourteenth century and was a contemporary of Heilwige Bloemardine, John of Brunn and Johannes Eckhart. After challenging him in Lisbon, Pelayo had him thrown into prison and, in all probability, burned. In addition to accusations of necromancy and magic the author of the *Collyrium* lists seventeen other of Scoto's indictments.

1. The longevity of the ancient patriarchs is a fable.
2. Isaiah's prophecy, *Ecce virgo concipiet*, relates not to the Virgin Mary but to some servant or concubine of the prophet. The word *virgin* should be understood in the sense of *puella* or *adolescentula*, girl or young woman.
3. The world has been misled by three impostors: Moses misled the Jews, Jesus the Christians and Muhammad the Saracens.
4. At the College of Canon Law in Lisbon, he taught that the words of Isaiah, *Deus fortis, pater futuri saeculi*, did not refer to Our Lord Jesus Christ.
5. After death, souls are annihilated.
6. Christ was not the true son or the natural son of God, but his adopted son.

7. He denied the perpetual virginity of Our Lady.
8. He taught that philosophical reason was a better support for faith than the Scriptures, and that the world would be better governed by philosophers than by theologians.
9. He was a supporter of the concubinage of friars, and spoke disrespectfully of Saint Augustine and Saint Bernard.
10. He denied that Christ gave his authority to Saint Peter and his successors or to the bishops.
11. He was a pre-Adamite.
12. He believed in the eternity of the world.
13. He denied the Last Judgment, the resurrection of the dead and the glory to come.
14. He regarded Aristotle as wiser than Moses and better than Christ, who was a bad man, hanged for his sins and for associating with prostitutes, whom he visited.
15. He blasphemed against the Eucharist and the authority of the dogmas.
16. He attributed Christ's miracles to magic.
17. He held mistaken beliefs about the sacraments.<sup>200</sup>

### ***John Hartmann***

81 On December 26, 1367, in Erfurt, John Hartmann, originally from Ossmannstedt, and known among the Beghards as *Spinner* (the Weaver), appeared before Walter Kerling, appointed inquisitor by Pope Urban V and highly regarded by both the pope and the emperor.

The questions asked were based on the *Clementines*. The loquaciousness of Hartmann's replies goes far beyond the simple requirements of approbation. The plethora of information and the mockery, to which Kerling, in his way,

concedes, indicate that the accused had no illusions whatsoever about his fate.

Undoubtedly, Hartmann was one of the two condemned men sent to the stake at Erfurt in 1368 by Walter Kerling, who was also responsible for the execution of seven Beghards (out of a total of forty accused) at Nordhausen (in Thuringia) in the same year:

#### *The Interrogation of John Hartmann at Ossmannstedt*

In the name of God. Amen. In the year 1367, 6th deposition, December 26, from nones to compline, at Erfurt, in the diocese of Mainz, in the papacy of our very holy Father in Christ, our master Monseigneur Pope Urban V, and in the lands of our honorable Master in Christ, the archbishop of Mainz, in the great estuary, there appeared in public – in the presence of my notary, the notaries public and the undersigned witnesses, and in the presence of the Venerable Religious Brother Walter Kerling, Dominican, Professor of Sacred Theology and inquisitor of heretic perversion, delegated by apostolic authority to several regions of Germany – a certain Beghard by the name of John Hartmann, from the town of Ossmannstedt, in the diocese of Mainz, who is known among the Beghards as John the Weaver.

He first took the oath in due and proper form, and swore by the Holy Gospel to tell the truth, now and always. To the question of the inquisitor Walter, "In what does freedom of spirit consist?" he replied, "It consists in the remorse of conscience ceasing to exist entirely, so that man is made incapable of sin."

On the subject of the first article of the *Clementines* (*Ad nostrum*) – "If, in this life, a man is in this contemplation of which we have spoken, in the highest degree of perfection

originally experienced when he was in the abyss of divinity, would there be a difference between him and God?" – he replied that, in such perfection, and at the highest level, he is with God and God with him, in a unity where nothing can distinguish between them. He added, "In that consists true freedom of spirit. Thus, all remorse of conscience ceases, and such a man is rendered incapable of sin."

To the question of whether the man who attains such a state of contemplation here on earth can progress any further, he replied, "No, in such freedom there is no progress. He who has attained that degree of perfection has rendered himself absolutely inaccessible to sin."

On the second article of the *Clementines* (*Quod jejuna*), he asserted that one need neither pray nor fast once the level of perfection has been reached. The power of the senses thus submits to the spirit and to reason; it is therefore lawful to grant the body whatever it wants.

Of the third article (*Quod illi qui sunt*), he said, "Those who are in this degree of perfection and in the freedom of spirit are no longer obliged to obey men, or any precept, or the rules of the Church: they are truly free. Such a man is king and master of all creatures. Everything belongs to him. He may legitimately receive whatever he likes and take it for his own use. And if anyone should wish to prevent him, to put an obstacle in his way or seize his possessions, he would be justified in killing him. By putting him to death, he would be returning him to his original element. He may legitimately undertake anything that ensures his pleasure."<sup>201</sup>

It would be better for the whole earth to perish than for him to renounce an action to which his nature urges him. This, he said, is as true for one region as for all.

May a man of free spirit legitimately appropriate a golden

chalice from its owner for his own use? Yes. Moreover, he said, it would be preferable to steal a golden chalice than a pile of rags.

If the emperor prevented him from taking an object for his personal use, would he kill him? His reply implied a distinction: if the emperor was not free in spirit, he would kill him, certainly. But if the emperor had attained the highest perfection, in the freedom of spirit, then there was some doubt, and he would not wish to pronounce on this question for the time being.

On the subject of the fourth article (*Quod homo ita poteste*), this is what he said: "Such a man who has attained, at the outset, the level of perfection, is assured of final bliss from that moment. It is the degree of perfection which distributes this bliss in life, and he would attain it in the felicity of life, if only the body were not mortal."

According to him, a man who is free in spirit is as blessed as the Blessed Peter or the Blessed Virgin Mary, whether in heaven or in the beatific life.

Once united with God in such a degree of perfection, can one dispense with intermediaries? Yes. In such a state, neither the angels nor Mary could establish a distinction between him and God.

In the unity of the divine essence and the three persons of the Trinity, does the man who is free in spirit, and who has reached his [Hartmann's] degree of perfection, want to be the Father or the Holy Spirit in the deity? He reasoned that, on the divine level, the Son is his brother, and that he is consubstantial with him.

In response to the fifth article (*Quinto quod quolibet intellectualis*), he affirmed that nobility of spirit is one with God, because it has come from the ebb of divinity and its flow

into the deity. That is where pure and true blessedness is to be found.<sup>202</sup>

The free in spirit do not need the light of elevated glory to see God and enjoy him blissfully because there is nothing to separate them from God.

In response to the sixth article (*Sexto quod in actibus*), he confirmed that the man of free spirit becomes incapable of committing an offense. He can do all he likes and wishes. If his nature prompts him to the act of love, he may legitimately indulge it with his own sister or with his mother, wherever he likes, even on the altar.<sup>203</sup>

Indeed, as a consequence of the kinship of nature, it is more natural to make love with one's own sister than with another woman.

He added, "The perfect and free man rejects what are normally considered virtues, as he is not subject to any law, the rules of the Church or any other precepts. He is free in spirit, he is *ein freie Geist*, a free man. Only spirits who have made little progress in spirituality are bound to observe the laws and precepts of the Church." Free men generally refer to the people who live within the law as coarse beings.

Knowing his sister carnally would make her neither less virgin nor less chaste. On the contrary, the carnal union would increase her chastity.

And a union with a girl? Neither he nor she would lose their virginity. Moreover, if she had lost her virginity by being violated by others, she would recover it by sleeping with a free man in a state of perfection.

He gave an example of ten men who knew one girl carnally. One of them, the coarsest in body and even in natural capabilities, possessed her first. The others followed, until the last, who was the smallest and the least of them. Well,

if the last to possess her was free in spirit, the corrupted girl would recover the virginity the others had taken from her, thanks to him.

According to him, women are like cows and calves. Just as these were created for man, to be eaten, so women were created, to be used by anyone who lives in the Free Spirit.<sup>204</sup>

"But," asked the interrogator, "what if two men, both free in spirit, want to know a woman: who will go first?"

"As before," he replied, "he who is the most free in spirit should unite with her first, and then the other one."

"And if they are both equally free in spirit?"

"Well, then they play dice, and the one who is lucky can know her first."

To the question "Was Christ free in spirit?" he replied, "No." He proved this with the Gospel. In his Passion, Christ said, "Father, if it is possible, take this cup from my lips: not according to my will, but according to yours." In his view it was not until the eve of the Sabbath that Christ attained true freedom. This is why the sixth day of the week is called, in the vulgar tongue, *fritag* (day of freedom).

When he was asked whether Christ had known Mary Magdalene carnally after his Resurrection, he replied that this was the subject of serious and profound research, and, though he well knew the answer, he preferred not to give his opinion. But, he said, smiling, the inquisitor ought to be gracious enough to tell him whether, as some have claimed, men and women mix in the future life as they do here below. Because, if that were not the case, men would certainly prefer to stay here with their wives than to aspire to a future life.

Mary was not free in spirit; otherwise, she would not so

often have deplored the absence of her son: "Alas, my child, alas, when shall I see you again?"

For the seventh article (*Septimo quod mulieris osculum . . .*), he stated that the carnal act to which nature impelled human beings is not a sin for a man of free spirit. But some embrace and kiss women so that their behavior cannot be distinguished from that of other men, and so that people will not call them imbeciles (*gabhardi*) and say that they cannot act as men[?].

Of the eighth article (*Octavo quod . . .*), he said that the man of free spirit has a perfect right to ignore all the injunctions of the Church, and is not bound by any rule. In inward contemplation, he need not participate in the elevation of the body of Christ, in order not to be disturbed in the purity and loftiness of his [own] contemplation. That would be to waste his time in the outward world. A man who is perfect in the freedom of spirit does not need to receive any sacrament, unless he has wandered from the path so badly that he wants to lose his way.<sup>205</sup>

Even if he has wandered that far, it is just as possible for him to find God in food as in the sacrament of the Eucharist; indeed, he would probably find more pleasure in it.<sup>206</sup>

If he was never baptized, and nobody knew this, he would not worry about it, unless he had made up his mind to lose his way. If a heathen was in the freedom of spirit, he would have no need of baptism.

Similarly, the man of free spirit need not confess, because he cannot commit sin and he rejects all sacraments.

No one can express the truth of illumination except he who has found it in himself and is truly free. The inquisitor ought therefore to show intense gratitude for the revelations with which he had been illuminated. In his view, such reve-

lations were worth more than all the money the consuls of Erfurt kept in their tower.<sup>207</sup>

He was then asked whether he put these propositions forward as a result of some madness of the heart, debility of the body or other infirmity. In no way, he replied. He spoke quite sincerely, because his conceptions were ones he had found within himself.

The truth of these proposals could be expressed only by those who had felt them in themselves. Preachers preach and teach out of books; in their attention to parchments, they forget what they are teaching about. But anyone who perceives things in the intimate depth of the divine abyss can speak like him.

But what was the reason for his pallor,<sup>208</sup> he was asked; was this the result of some weakness? He said it did stem from a weakness of some sort, but he did not wish to reveal its cause for the time being.

Would the freedom of spirit allow him to deny [what he had admitted]? Yes. If there was a threat to his body, he could legitimately have denied and abjured as many times as was necessary to save himself, without sinning. He would not be lying if he swore and denied in this way, but would be telling the truth. If, for example, he had known his own sister carnally, and had been accused of it, he would have had the right to deny it and to swear that it was not true. By acting thus, a man of Free Spirit would not be uttering a lie, because he would mean by it that he had not done it in eternity. He does not have to express himself within the framework of the temporal. If he can thereby mislead the inquisitor and his accuser, he is telling the truth on the basis of freedom, in which not even the slightest lie can exist.<sup>209</sup>

*The Men of Intelligence*

82 On June 12, 1411, William of Hildernissem, of the Order of Carmelites, appeared before the inquisitor Henry of Selles, who was acting for the Episcopal court of Cambrai. He was accused – along with a layman who had by then died, Giles of Canter (or Giles the Cantor or Aegidius Cantor) – of having carried out certain responsibilities in a Free Spirit group in Brussels known as the Men of Intelligence.

William was born at Malines.<sup>210</sup> His brother was Jan of Hildernissem, priest of one of the parishes of Neckerspoel, in Flanders, until 1394. In 1572 there was still a descendant of the Hildernissems, Brother Adrian, among the Carmelites at Malines.

According to Goyers, William was a reader of the Holy Scriptures in the Carmelite monastery at Tirlemont. We do not know the circumstances of his meeting with Giles, a sexagenarian layman and *illiteratus*, claimed by some to be of noble family. It is possible that they were brought together through a common interest in the theories of Heilwige Bloemardine, which were all more inveterate because they were drawn from the inexhaustible well where the appetite for pleasure discovers in its subtleties a justification for freedom.

No inquisitor, except Jan van Ruysbroeck, had dared attack Bloemardine, and even Ruysbroeck, in the sanctuary of Groenendael, still took care not to mention her by name (as if some mist of passion floated between the young priest of Saint Gudula and the Lady Heilwige). Likewise, the supporters of the group led by Giles and William tried to assassinate Henry of Selles as he was crossing a ford. (Henry, in fact, was attached to the Abbey of Groenendael,

the retreat where Ruysbroeck died in 1381.) A song ridiculing the inquisitor was also current in Brussels, according to Latomus.<sup>211</sup> Appointed by Peter of Ailly, the bishop of Cambrai and a friend of John Gerson, Henry was given the task of uprooting the considerable remnants of the widespread movement instituted almost a century earlier by Bloemardine.<sup>212</sup> He succeeded in getting William to abjure the most subversive part of their doctrine and to put the blame for it on the dead Giles. William was sentenced to three years in prison, then to seclusion in a monastery of his order.<sup>213</sup>

The leniency of this punishment may have been related to the support this group enjoyed both among the working classes and the notables of Brussels (its meetings being held in a tower belonging to an alderman).

83 Articles submitted for retraction by William of Hildernissem:

1. The said lay seducer [Giles of Canter] repeated many times to a number of listeners, “I am the savior of mankind. Through me they will see the Christ, as they see the Father through the mediation of Christ.”<sup>214</sup>

2. In the end, the devil will be saved. But then he will no longer be the devil, and magnificent Lucifer will be the most humble of all. In the end, everyone will be saved.<sup>215</sup>

3. The devil did not carry Jesus to the top of the temple.

4. One day as he was walking along, Giles told me that the Holy Spirit inspired him and said to him, “You have reached the state of a three-year-old child. You will no longer fast; quite the reverse, you will eat milk products during Lent. All men and women of the sect should do this. They

should not bother with fasting. When they can do it without attracting the attention of people outside the sect, they should eat meat during Lent and on holy days.”<sup>216</sup>

5. They pay no heed to the statutes, precepts and commandments of the Church, nor to prayer, because God does what he intends and wishes to do, and there is no need to address prayers to him.<sup>217</sup>

6. They do not bother to confess, but, solely to avoid arousing people’s anger, they do sometimes go to a priest. They admit some venial sin to him, but remain silent about their criminal lechery and their mortal sins. Thus, as some of them have explained, they cannot be accused of indifference [toward the Church or be accused of a lack of faith].<sup>218</sup>

7. They do not allow any of the rigors of penance, believing that we have no shortage of that [in life].<sup>219</sup>

8. Among the women of their sect, there is one who refuses to make love with anyone. Therefore, she has to endure a great deal of persecution from the other members, both men and women, who blame her for abstaining from all carnal relations.<sup>220</sup>

9. The said Giles had a particular way of making love – which was not, however, against nature – which he was certain Adam had used in paradise. Brother William did not follow him in this path.<sup>221</sup>

10. They developed a private language: they called the act of love “the pleasure of paradise” or “acclivity” [ascension]. They can thus describe their libidinous acts in irreproachable terms which other people cannot understand.<sup>222</sup>

11. Among them there was an old woman whom the said layman called Seraphine. She openly declared that it was permissible to make love outside of marriage without sin. Indeed, such acts were purely natural, like eating and drink-

ing. Yet, unlike the other two, this act was condemned. This is why she, and others, never ceased to be astonished at the blindness of men who commonly think this way.<sup>223</sup>

12. One of the women, who was married, made no distinction between one man and another. She admitted them all, without distinction, depending on the time and the place. This practice is quite common among the women of the group.

13. Brother William did not share his thoughts with everyone. He shared only his intimate conviction with a few; namely, with those of the group who indulged in the act of carnal union without remorse or fear.

14. According to Brother William, all their acts could be excused or justified by reference to the Holy Scriptures, except coitus, which the Church condemned. He therefore recommended that his disciples be very careful when talking about this illicit copulation.<sup>224</sup>

15. When some talked about the way Brother William had been forced to repudiate the theses he had preached, the said Seraphine had replied, “He did not repudiate them, he merely stated, ‘I did not say that, but this,’ and by adding or removing a word here or there from his discourse, by correcting his manner of expressing himself, he escaped unpunished.” The result was that he was regarded as having confirmed his statements rather than repudiating them.

16. They related all their contrary and infamous acts to divine will, saying that God willed it thus, not so much by his permissive will as by his beneficent and efficacious will.<sup>225</sup>

17. They met outside the city walls of Brussels, in a tower belonging to an alderman of the city, and there celebrated their conventicles.<sup>226</sup>

18. They say that the period of the old law was the age

of the Father, and the period of the new law, the age of the Son. Now the period of the Holy Spirit has arrived, which they call the period of Eli. The Scriptures are abolished, with the result that everything previously considered true is now denied, including Catholic doctrine and the Catholic truths which preach poverty, chastity and obedience. According to them, it is the opposite of these truths that should be propagated in the reign of the Holy Spirit.<sup>227</sup>

19. They attribute all their inspirations and most secret suggestions to the Holy Spirit. This is the source from which the said layman frequently drew his prophecies. As a result of one of these inspirations, he ran a long way, completely naked, carrying a plate of meat on his head for some poor person.<sup>228</sup>

20. They were surprised when anyone made the sign of the cross, and asked, "Are you worthy to be blessed at this point?" Similarly, the sect's supporters, especially the women, persuaded several honest men not to preach chastity or virginity, or advocate continence, either in public or in private. They claimed that no one was a virgin, with only one exception, whom they called wisdom.<sup>229</sup>

21. They defend ideas about purgatory, just as about hell, which are opposed to those of the Church.<sup>230</sup> And they have a strange and false way of talking about these matters.<sup>231</sup>

### *The Picards or Adamites of Bohemia*

- 84 The Hussite movement developed after the execution of Jan Huss at Constance in 1415, and later liberated Bohemia from the yoke of the Church. The Taborites are a part of the movement related to Waldensian elements in which voluntary poverty provided an entry for Free Spirit ideas. Around 1418,<sup>232</sup> groups of Picards<sup>233</sup> arrived in Bohemia,

fleeing the persecution that had been instituted against the Men of Intelligence, or using the Hussite insurrection as an opportunity to practice their freedom unhindered.

The Picard doctrine prevailed, especially in regions with weak Taborite influence, such as Zatec, Plzen and Prague. It manifested itself, in watered-down form, in the closed arena of theological dispute, in the works of Sigmund of Repan and, primarily, in those of Martin Húska, called Loquis, who preached a sort of Dolcinism, evoking the end of time and the rule of the saints.<sup>234</sup> According to him there was to be "a new kingdom of saints on earth, and the good would have no more suffering." He added, "If Christians would always have to suffer in this way, I would not want to be a servant of God."<sup>235</sup>

In February 1421 Lawrence of Březová recorded in his chronicle that Free Spirit ideas were gaining ground in Taborite areas. "On account of this heresy, alas, the brothers living at Tabor split into two fractions, one Picard and the other Taborite. The more faithful section, the Taborites, expelled more than 200 men and women infected with the Picard heresy."<sup>236</sup>

The term Adamites, as I. de Beausobre called them, refers to the Edenic innocence of their behavior, which they were beginning to propagate openly.<sup>237</sup> According to Lawrence:

As they went on their way through the forests and hills, some of them fell into such madness that men and women took off their clothes and went naked, saying that clothes had been adopted as a result of the sin committed by their first parents, but that they were in a state of innocence. By a similar madness, they imagined that they did not sin if one of



the brothers had commerce with one of the sisters. And if the woman had a child, they said that she had conceived by the Holy Spirit.<sup>238</sup> [Baptism does not exist, because] the children of parents living in sanctity [that is, as members of the community] are conceived without original mortal sin...<sup>239</sup> They pray to the God that they possess within themselves, saying "Our Father, who art within us..."<sup>240</sup>

Húska remained at a distance from the Picard radicalization. Loyal to the apostolic tradition he salvaged the more moderate demands and incorporated them into a defense of religious modernism, then preoccupied with scholastic quarrels about the Eucharist. The true spokesman of the Picard community, which remained autonomous from December 1420 until January 1421, was Peter Kanis, supported by ordinary men and women like Rohan the Blacksmith, Nicholas, called Moses, Adam and Mary. The chroniclers were indignant over sermons preached in taverns and the sexual license celebrated throughout the group.

The Taborite leader, Nicholas of Pehlimov, published a treatise against Peter Kanis, and, around mid-April, John Žižka, the military leader, sent his army against the group that had been expelled in Tabor. Fifty prisoners, including Peter Kanis, were burned at Klokoty. The survivors of the Picard community withdrew to a place not far from Tabor, where they organized resistance under the leadership of Rohan the Blacksmith. On April 20, after violent battles, they were defeated by Žižka, and twenty-five prisoners were sent to the stake. Others were burned at Prague, yet the movement did not disappear entirely. On October 21, 1421, some supporters of Kanis who had taken refuge

in a forest outside Bernatrice were captured and executed, except for one whose life was spared so that he could give an account of the group's doctrine. Others briefly occupied the fortress at Ostrov before escaping to the south. And there were accusations, dating back to the time of their retreat, that they had also raided and pillaged villages.

Although Húska abjured and severed his connection with the Picards in March 1421, he became a sacrificial victim of the generalized terror. While he was traveling to Moravia with Procope the One-eyed, he fell into the hands of the Hussite Baron Borek. Žižka desired that the two of them be burned in Prague. But, because of the fear of unrest – for Húska had large numbers of supporters in the city – the magistrates sent their executioner to Rudnice, where, after lengthy torture, Húska and Procope were put to death.

### *Herman of Rijswick*

- 85 The process of desanctification – which the Reformation was to take over and develop into a rationalism underwritten by divine law – brought the Holy Spirit back down to a human reality of intellect. This was in sharp contrast to the approach of the movement of the Free Spirit: no longer was the deity resolved into a flux of passions for which the body supplied an alchemical matrass and consciousness a principle of transmutation. Even atheism, with its claim to have deposed God, actually preserves him as a secular separation – crystallized in a principle of intellectually governing both the individual body and the social body.

Herman of Rijswick belongs not to the movement of the Free Spirit, but to that of free thinking. He is one in a

long line of intellectuals whose boldness lies less in their critical ideas than in the recklessness that impels them to brave the stake in order to propagate openly those ideas that outcasts have always secretly espoused from the moment they escaped the clutches of fear and the priests: namely, that there is no God, that the world has existed for all eternity and that religions are a web of absurdities in which imbeciles wrap themselves.<sup>241</sup>

Like Thomas Scoto, Herman would have vanished from memory, which is regularly purged by the Church and secular powers, if there had not been – ironically, within the Church – those executioners who perpetuated their victims’ memories.

#### 86 *Records of the Accusation of Herman of Rijswick:*

In the year 1502, Herman of Rijswick was sentenced to life imprisonment by Brother John Ommaten, Dominican, Professor of Sacred Theology and inquisitor.

Here are the main heretical articles which cost him life imprisonment. He said, first, that the world had existed for all eternity,<sup>242</sup> and had not begun at the creation, which was an invention of the foolish Moses, as it implies in the Bible.

Second, God never created angels, good or bad, as that is not mentioned anywhere in the Scriptures. There is no hell, as we imagine it. After this life, we will have no other life at all as individuals. When Socrates died, his soul died, as it had begun, with his body.

The most wise Aristotle, and his commentator Averroes, have come closest to the truth.

Christ was an imbecile, a visionary naif who misled simple people. And I maintain that this Christ has damned

the whole world and saved no one. For indeed men kill each other because of him and his farcical gospels [*suum Evangelium fatuum*]. All Christ’s deeds are contrary to mankind and right reason. I openly deny that Christ is the Son of Almighty God. I challenge that Mosaic law was received directly from a visible God. I believe our faith to be a fable, as is proved by the antics described in our Scriptures, biblical legends and evangelical ravings. I regard the Gospel as false, for anyone who can create the world without incarnation can redeem it without incarnation.

I have admitted all these articles and similar ones with my own mouth and while being of sane mind, before the inquisitor, the notary and witnesses. And I add, I was born a Christian, but I am not a Christian, because Christians are utterly stupid.<sup>243</sup>

Herman was sentenced to prison in The Hague, but he managed to escape. Arrested and condemned as an apostate for having distributed “several books written by his hand,” he was sent to the stake on December 15, 1512, by the inquisitor Jacob van Hoogstraten. His books were burned with him.

#### *The Alumbrados*

- 87 According to Bataillon, the first appearance of the qualifier *alumbrado* was in 1512, when it was applied to a Franciscan “*illuminated by the darkness of Satan.*”<sup>244</sup>

In Toledo, where the ancient influence of heterodox Sufis may have survived clandestinely, a group formed around Isabel de La Cruz, who acquired such a reputation for holiness that the Church was hesitant to take action

against her, even though her theories echoed those of Margaret Porete.

On September 23, 1525, Grand Inquisitor Manrique promulgated an edict against the Alumbrados in Toledo. Among the forty-eight propositions it condemns, some, amalgamated with those of Lutheran origin, belong within the movement of the Free Spirit.

Isabel de La Cruz was arrested in 1529 and sentenced to life imprisonment. A year later one of her disciples, the preacher Juan López, was burned at Grenada.

The chronicler Alfonso de Santa Cruz has left a list of the main articles condemned at the trial of the Alumbrados of Toledo:

They say that the love of God in man is God...<sup>245</sup> [They] assert that ecstasy, or illumination, leads to such perfection that men can no longer sin, neither mortally nor venially, and that illumination makes them free and releases them from all authority, and that they are not answerable to anyone, even God, as they have entrusted themselves to him.<sup>246</sup>

They call the host a bit of pastry, the cross a stick and genuflection idolatry. They regard the annihilation of their own will as the supreme glory...<sup>247</sup> They deny hell...

Far from lamenting the Passion of Christ, they rejoice over it, and indulge in every sort of pleasure during Holy Week. They affirm that the Father was incarnate like the Son, and believe they can speak with this God neither more nor less than they can speak with the Corregidor of Escalona. When they want to remember Our Lady, they look at a woman's face instead of contemplating an image. They called the conjugal act union with God. The sect centered around Isabel de La Cruz and a certain Father Alcázar.<sup>248</sup>

At the same time, a group of Alumbrados was developing around the *beata* Francisca Hernández, from Canillas, near Salamanca. Around 1519 her court was made up of young clerics: Bernardino Tovar, the Franciscan Gil López and the young theologian Antonio of Medrano, whose amorous relationship with Francisca was denounced to the Inquisition, which condemned the lovers to live separately.

The saint thus left for Valladolid, where she lived first with Bernardino Tovar and then with the banker Pedro Cazalla. There seems to have existed an occult center, called "paradise," where Edenic innocence presided over refinements of love. This same behavior also appears among the Men of Intelligence, where chastity, libertinism and "refined love" existed together. After the trial Antonio of Medrano declared that, since he had known Francisca, God had given him the grace to no longer experience the desires of the flesh: he could now sleep in the same bed with a woman without prejudice to his soul. Francisco Ortiz, by contrast, affirmed: "After having had relations with her for about twenty days, I realized I had acquired more wisdom in Valladolid than if I had studied in Paris for twenty years. For it was not Paris but paradise which was able to teach me this wisdom."

Francisca was regarded as having attained such a degree of holiness that continence was no longer necessary. But the essence of her teaching is concerned with the impeccability conferred by love, which the theologian Melchior Cano expresses in a formulation characteristic of the movement of the Free Spirit: "To remove fear and to give assurance."<sup>249</sup>

In 1529 the Inquisition arrested Francisca and her follower, María Ramirez, using the usual hostile methods and their refinements, torture and the *quemadero*, to make the

two women denounce as Lutherans Bernardino Tovar, his brother and fourteen other people.

Although it may seem ironic to associate Lutheranism with people whom Luther and Calvin abhorred and called “spiritual libertines,” the inquisitors’ strategy was driven by a fundamental caution. In several regions of Spain the Alumbrados represented such a powerful force that the Church did not dare attack them directly, preferring to treat them as if they were Protestants, whose condemnation would not arouse any controversy. There were so many of them in Seville that the Inquisition gave up trying to intervene. “The greater part of the city is infected,” reported a letter of the period. “There is not a duchess or a marquise, or any woman of high or low condition, who cannot be accused of some error of this heresy.”<sup>250</sup>

The mysticism of Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross – first held in suspicion, then later endorsed by the Church – would channel passions and natural urges toward less carnal ecstasies, including the trick of self-divinization.

A group in Llerena (Extremadura) provides evidence of the persistence of the movement in the second half of the sixteenth century. In 1578 a Dominican, Alonso de La Fuente, while attacking the Alumbrados in a sermon, was interrupted by a woman from Llerena who said, “Padre, the life they lead is better than yours, as is their doctrine.” Her movements were subsequently shadowed by the Holy Office, after which she confessed the names of her companions.

The teaching was spread by eight members of the secular clergy, whose two leaders, Fernando Alvarez and Father Chamizo, advised novices to pray and meditate on the

wounds of the crucified Christ with such ardor that it would provoke violent emotion, a flushed complexion, sweats, heart pain and nausea, and would finally culminate in a movement of desire they called “melting in the love of God.”<sup>251</sup>

Rendered incapable of sin through this orgasmic ecstasy, believers reached a state of perfection wherein they were justified in following their desires and in challenging the rites and authority of the Church. The accusation described them, like the Beghards, as permanently plunged into a sort of inward exaltation.

Apart from Alvarez and Chamizo, who were accused of having initiated thirty-four people into the heavenly pleasures, the group in and around Llerena comprised Juan García, cleric of Almendralejo; the theologian Rodrigo Vasquez, parish priest of La Morera, who declared, “If the Turks had been able to capture and govern Spain, we would all live as we liked”; Doctor Cristóbal Mejía, cleric of Cazalla; Pedro de Santa Maria, a Franciscan from Valladolid, age sixty-three; and a priest from Zafra, Francisco de Mesa, who frequently said, when speaking of the Passion of Christ, “What is the point of thinking about this man’s death every day?”

At Zafra the followers met at the home of Lari Gómez, the widow of Francisco García of Barcarota. One of the most enthusiastic of them, a cobbler from Llerena named Juan Bernal, planned to present a memorandum to the court in defense of the Alumbrados.

The group had been in existence for four years before the bishop of Salamanca, Francisco de Soto, was instructed to conduct an inquisition into it, in 1578. His death at Llerena on June 21, of that year was blamed on the Alum-

brados, who were said to have poisoned him. Most of them perished at the stake.<sup>252</sup>

### *The Loyists and Eloi Pruystinck*

88 Eloi Pruystinck, whom Antwerp chronicles call Loy (or Lodewick Schaliedecker, or Eloi the Roofer), and the *Summa doctrinae*, Eligius Pruystinck, came from a proletarian background. He was described as “*illiteratus et mechanicus*” and “*die geen geleerdeyt hebbende*” (the uneducated).<sup>253</sup> The bill of indictment confirmed that he worked as a “slate roofer” and that he lived in the heart of the working-class neighborhood of Saint-André in the Rijke Beukelaarstraat.<sup>254</sup>

In the wake of its economic success Antwerp saw a proliferation of personal fortunes, which would either be used to increase profits or for charity. The new wave of individual initiative recklessly crashed onto the shore of a society sterilized by: its agrarian archaisms; the belief that the Protestants found themselves in a divine capital; free exchange, which provided the basis of a godless social contract; and brazen private enterprise, in which the businessman willingly considered himself a demiurge.

During these years of intellectual ferment, often colored by Protestantism, it is likely that Eloi attended the secret meetings on Eikerstraat, where the Scriptures were freely discussed, before the law put a stop to them. He may have met David Joris of Delft,<sup>255</sup> who was certainly in Antwerp in 1524. Joris’s *Wonderboeck*, published around 1542, shows Eloi’s influence, as well as how the two men diverged.

Jules Frederichs published a short text by David directed against the Roofer:

*What Is Meant Exactly by Being Poor in Spirit: Against the Doctrine and Teachings of Eloi the Roofer.*

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>256</sup>

Given that we participate in the image and glory of God, and that we are created to praise him . . .

Some people, nevertheless, think that I have indeed (by all appearances) wished to attribute too much power to man; and that, far from having been created by God, I created him myself. But it shall be said that no one will preach contrary to my thought. I shall explain how it is to be understood. In doing so, I shall prove that I seek not my own glory but only the glory of God; that I intend to indicate and enlarge the one and only door which leads to the Lord, namely that which lies in all the Saints and the Faithful. By this, I mean to reduce and annihilate by the power of my attack certain people who deny the resurrection. . . .

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Some people try to use this verse to claim that no one is poor in spirit unless they have neither will, nor possessions, nor knowledge. They explain it anew, with their own interpretation, which they present as the truth, as they mock repentance and penance. And they say that those who worry about the Lord, who seek to do good and to respect the most precious wishes of God as expressed in the Gospel, are fools. For, no matter how long man tries to fulfill the most precious will of God, he is not poor at all, because he still has the will to accomplish the divine will. Man would be empty if he acted as if he were not, as if he neither wished nor desired anything, neither God, nor Truth, nor himself, since, being empty, he would recognize himself as such and would

want nothing else but himself (which is now, however, himself again, as was said earlier): what I wanted was Me, and what I was was what I wanted, etc.

Thus, we pray to God (he says) to make us lose God, and to deny life to everything: oneself, truth, God and knowledge. Not to live, nor feel, nor know that God lives within you, to lose your will, your knowledge and your life, both that of God and your own life (or the life of any creature), and, further, not to occupy any place in the universal system in which God could act to manifest himself by some distinctive sign: this, according to his teachings, is what primarily defines a poor man.<sup>257</sup>

While Eloi was developing ideas in the Free Spirit tradition David Joris was throwing himself into the free-for-all inaugurated by Luther and Calvin, which spawned a litany of popes founding new churches on the stumbling blocks of their own personal problems.<sup>258</sup> Less naive and less scrupulous than Eloi, Joris, chased from the Netherlands to Switzerland by the ecumenical police of the Inquisition, the Consistory and humanist informers, would live on the money of his disciples and die peacefully in Basel, after having lived a life of wealth and distinction under the name of John of Bruges.<sup>259</sup>

In February 1525 Eloi set off for Wittenberg, convinced of the correctness of his ideas and determined to have them accepted by Luther, whom all Europe was watching; a man caught up in his sudden fame, and whose shadow, out of all proportion to the pettiness of the person, was spreading across the world. Did Eloi meet Hans (or Johannes) Denck, banished from Nuremberg at the age of twenty-three for having located forty paradoxes in the Bible and

for asserting in his *Confession* that there was no “other guide but the inward world of God, which comes from the Holy Spirit”?<sup>260</sup> There is no proof that he did, but there are several points of agreement between the two men.

Eloi confronted Philip Melancthon in the presence of Luther, who was so scandalized by the opinions of his interlocutor and the workings of the devil he saw in them, that he sent the Protestants of Antwerp a warning about the “*Rumpelgeist*”:

Luther – *An die Christen zu Antwerpen* [To the Christians of Antwerp]

I have heard how much your region is being agitated by minds full of error, who do all they can to impede the progress of Christian truth; I know that a devil incarnate has arrived among you, with the intention of leading you into error and distorting the true meaning of the Gospel so that you will fall into his darkness. So that you can avoid his traps more easily, I shall tell you some of his propositions: “Every man,” according to him, “has the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is nothing else but our reason. – Every man has faith; nature teaches me to do to my neighbor what I would have him do to me; to want to act thus is to have faith. – Everyone will have eternal life; there is neither hell, nor damnation; the flesh alone will be damned. – The law is violated by wicked desires, so long as the will does not give way to desire. – Whoever does not possess the Holy Spirit does not possess sin, either, because he does not possess reason.” Everyone wants to be more learned than Luther, and to win their spurs at my expense. Once your devil had left my presence, he denied all these articles, although they had been shown to be his and although he had betrayed himself by defending

several of them. Truthfully, he is unreliable and a liar, full of insolence and audacity, quite capable of both affirming and denying something, at the same time, not daring to argue any of the propositions he puts forward: the only reason he came here was so that he could boast that he had disputed with us. He energetically maintained that God's commandments are good, and that God did not wish sin to exist, to both of which I willingly agreed; but what he obstinately refused to admit is that God, while not willing sin, allows it to govern men. I have no doubt that he will tell you that I have said that sin is willed by God. . . .<sup>261</sup>

The letter<sup>262</sup> is not dated, but its wording places it somewhere around March 27, 1525, the day Martin Luther wrote to Spalatin: "I have had a new species of prophet here, from Antwerp, who affirmed that the Holy Spirit is nothing other than intelligence and natural reason. How furiously Satan has unleashed his forces against the Word! I regard it as one of the harbingers of the Day of Judgment that Satan can see that day approaching, and is therefore spewing out all his anger."<sup>263</sup>

Back in Antwerp Eloi continued his agitation. In all probability he met the humanist Johannes Campanus, a gentle man and a dreamer with no aggressions and no pretensions to being a great thinker.<sup>264</sup> His project *On the Possibility of a Union of the Christians and the Turks* was partly inspired by Eloi's ideas.<sup>265</sup>

Eloi and nine of his friends were arrested in February 1526 for the crime of heresy and reading prohibited books. On the twenty-fifth they were sentenced to do public penance, a light punishment due to the relatively moderate penal regime that the regent, Margaret of Austria, encour-

aged in the Netherlands.<sup>266</sup> Eloi and his friends were hostile to all forms of martyrdom, and they did not hesitate to deny and retract everything. The fact that the *pectoralia*, in which the accused were dressed, bore effigies of Luther, and that the accounts of the hearing named the guilty parties as Lutherans, was a normal consequence of the indiscriminate malice behind the Inquisition, which delighted in mixing libertarian thinking with Lutheran asceticism.

Of the eight accused – a bookbinder; his servant Peter; Jan Schoelant; the wife of Adrian Formant and her sister; Roch de Kelnere, a fabric cutter; Master Peter Barbier; and Rut, a stocking maker – none reappeared before the Antwerp courts until 1544.

After making honorable amends Eloi was sentenced to wear a sign on his chest designating him a heretic, but, according to van Meteren, he simulated such perfect devotion that the magistrates excused him from wearing it.<sup>267</sup>

Thus protected by the shadow of the law the group set to work with renewed energy amid the general atmosphere of pleasure that arose at the end of the plague in 1530. Some Loyist texts were published and diffused in the Netherlands and Germany. These were the work of either Eloi or of Dominic of Uccle (Dominicus van Oucle), who was described in the 1544 accusation as "writer of all their books."<sup>268</sup> Emanuel van Meteren points to the presence of several members of the bourgeoisie among the many followers,<sup>269</sup> "the best, the richest and most highly regarded, who lived with the others joyously and in an epicurean manner." Later he talks of their "impious opinions, gratifying the world and the flesh, abusing and making fun of the Roman Catholic religion as well as the Protestants."

The Loyists gradually stopped hiding and revealed them-

selves with a lack of caution regarded by some as impudence. Thus Carnovianus, while passing through Antwerp in 1533, witnessed the execution of some heretics on May 3, and later (in 1534) indignantly described the Illuminati of Antwerp in a letter sent from Freiburg-in-Breisgau to Johannes Hess of Breslau. He wrote: "These men are far more perverse and more obstinate than the Anabaptists." Although he does not name them, the Loyists were the only group in Antwerp at that time who were capable of arousing more hatred in an austere reformer by their "perversity" and their "obstinacy" than the Anabaptists.

In 1531 Margaret of Austria ceded the regency of the Netherlands to her niece, Maria of Hungary, sister of Charles V, who determined, as she wrote to her brother, to pursue the heretics "whether or not they show repentance, with enough severity to root out their error in a single blow, with no other consideration except not to depopulate the provinces completely."

In 1534 the arrest of the French jeweler Christophe Hérault allows the identification of one of Eloi's followers mentioned in the list of those condemned in 1544. Having fled from Paris, where he was wanted for Lutheranism, Hérault fell into the hands of the law in Antwerp on December 24.<sup>270</sup> The justification for his order of imprisonment was that Hérault did not possess any certification, either from the ecclesiastical or the lay authorities. But no charge against him could be proven. He was set free and, at the trial of 1544, escaped the accusation of relapsed heresy, which would have sent him to the stake.

The persecution of the Anabaptists may have temporarily freed the Loyists from the menacing eye of the inquisitorial monster. The Loyists scoffed at baptism and rejected

both the tyranny and the messianic violence of the supporters of Melchior Hoffmann and John of Battenburg, and took no part in the Antwerp Anabaptists' attempt to seize the town hall on May 11, 1535, which ended in the massacre of the Münsterians.

Although ordinances and proclamations against the heretics were increasing, the siege of Antwerp gave Eloi and his friends a reprieve. In 1542, the duke of Guelders, siding with the king of France in his war against Charles V, sent the condottiere Martin van Rossem into the Campine, where he marched on Antwerp. Among the leaders of the militias defending the city the chronicler Papenbrochius cites the names of the van Berchems, disciples of David Joris. And it was through the influence of the Jorists that repression would fall upon the Loyists.

For several years the civil and ecclesiastical authorities had tried desperately to crush a particular form of Anabaptism, a sort of individualist Anabaptism, led by the author of the *Wonderboeck*. In 1544, at Deventer, a trap set by the police resulted in the arrest of Juriaan Ketel, a friend of David Joris. Subjected to extreme torture he denounced Cornelius van Lier, the lord of Berchem (a locality close to Antwerp), his two brothers-in-law, Joachim and Regnier van Berchem, and their mother as members of the sect. He also named Geerit Kersemaker, the jeweler Christophe Hérault and a "slate roofer."

On July 8 the Deventer magistrate informed the governor, Maria of Hungary, and the Antwerp authorities. The Protestants also reacted. In 1544 Vallerand Poullain of Strasbourg wrote to Calvin: "Our brothers from Valenciennes, who recently brought us some writings of the Quintinists, have returned. . . . I should be very pleased if



you could take up arms against the Quintinists.... My brother Raymond writes that these horrors are spreading in Lower Germany now, a result of the actions of two individuals called David and Eloi. He has not yet sent me the account of their doctrine, which he promised me. As soon as he does, I will send it on to you." The "account of their doctrine" mentioned by Poullain's brother Raymond was probably the *Summa doctrinae* published by I. von Döllinger.

Eloi was arrested on July 15 or the night before and was immediately tortured. From his first interrogation it was learned that, nine or ten years earlier, Hérault had bought a pamphlet from "*Lodewyck Ruystinck, schaellideckere van zynen ambachte*"; that the said Eloi (whose name is given here as Johannes Denck) had begged the Holy Church to help him believe in the resurrection of the body, but that he had not succeeded, and that he regarded the body as mortal and souls as eternally saved in God.

The first trial, in 1525, had been conducted by the Inquisition. The second was conducted by the civil magistrature, at the urging of the governor, Maria of Hungary, who demanded quick, merciless justice. On July 14, 15 or 16 the authorities seized Hérault; then Jean Davion, a rich bourgeois, originally from Lille; Jan Dorhout, a poor huckster; Dominic of Uccle, the scribe or author of the pamphlets; Germain Bousseraille, a poor peasant; Gabriel van Hove, a rich fish merchant; Henry de Smet, or Smits, a painter and potter; Cornelius vanden Bossche, engraver and carver; Aerden Steenaerts; Adriaan Stevens; and Jan van Heer.

In 1526 Eloi had only a handful of supporters. Now they numbered in the thousands. Many fled, going into exile in England (where they probably joined the Familists of

Henry Niclaes<sup>271</sup>), in Germany and in Austria. They avoided Holland, where repression against the Anabaptists and the Jorists was peaking.

At the beginning of September, Davion and Dorhout, who had been arrested in Antwerp, came face to face with Eloi and Hérault, who had been imprisoned in the castle of Vilvorde, near Brussels. Around September 14, Dominic of Uccle, apprehended in Rosendael, was transferred to the Steen at Antwerp. There, after learning of the tortures that Eloi had undergone, he hanged himself in his cell while his warder was absent.

Early in October, de Smet, Steenaerts, Bousseraille, van Hove and Stevens were arrested in Antwerp. Vanden Bossche and van Heer escaped justice. On October 8, Hérault and Dorhout were sentenced to death. They were beheaded the following day. About the same time, de Smet managed to escape. Eloi was returned to Antwerp on October 18 and signed his death sentence on October 24. On October 25 he was burned *extra muros*. Davion, Bousseraille and van Hove escaped the executioner's sword until February 28, 1545. Stevens was set free and paid a fine. On December 20, 1561, van Heer, who had sought refuge in London, received amnesty for good behavior and returned to Antwerp.

There is no reason to believe that the story of the Loyists stops there. Leaving aside their influence on the Quintinists, the Familists, Dirk Coornhert's circle and the Ranters, it would be interesting to look closely at the iconoclast movement, the popular anticlerical demonstrations and the "moral affairs" of the period. On October 2, 1555, for example, a group of men and women practicing sexual freedom was reported in the area around Alost. In

1561 an attack on a Dominican monastery near Bruges was attributed to the same group.<sup>272</sup> The exploits of Jacob Gherraerts, known as the Dutchman, leader of a “sect of murderers and thieves,” no doubt call to mind the supporters of Battenburg more than the peaceable Loyists, but Eloi’s doctrine does not suggest that those trying to live in their own way would have let themselves be killed without defending themselves.

- 89 In the absence of Dominic of Uccle’s books and pamphlets – which an analysis of the *Indices librorum prohibitorum* and chance research may one day bring to light – the only evidence for the Loyist doctrine is Luther’s letter, a fragment by David Joris, the *Summa doctrinae* and local chronicles. The theories of Quintin of Tournai and Antoine Pocques, as summarized by Calvin in his diatribe against the spiritual libertines, reflect those of Eloi to some extent, and seem to derive from them. Finally, the “Apologetic Retort of Philip Marnix of Saint Aldegundis,” which appeared in Leiden in 1598, contains, in addition to references to David Joris, statements that are manifestly Loyist in origin.

The *Summa doctrinae*, which was almost certainly the work of Raymond Poullain, reflects the Loyist confessions and, therefore, the least compromising aspects of their opinions and behavior. (At his first interrogation, Eloi acknowledged the rejection of the Resurrection, the opposition between justice and mercy, and the paradox of animal and spiritual being.)

The account, whose impassive tone was designed to feed the Calvinist spirit, provides some understanding of the ideas and behavior publicly acknowledged by the accused and attested to in their pamphlets. But language

of that sort is simultaneously truth and dissimulation.<sup>273</sup>

This attitude and behavior is undeniably part of the Socratic tradition of skepticism. Nonetheless, doubt is used here in a way that differs from the rationalist and tolerant ideal of Montaigne, Rabelais and Coornhert, and even from Geoffroy Vallée’s *Flau de la foy*, Noel Journet’s mockery<sup>274</sup> or Thomas Woolston’s *A Discourse on the Miracles of Our Saviour*, which call to mind allusions to Christ in the *Summa doctrinae*.

When Eloi affirmed before Luther that “Every man has the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is nothing else but our reason,” he did not speak of a matter of simple rationalist prejudice, but of the subversion of the dominant language, coded in accordance with scriptural dogma. Luther regarded the translation of the Bible as an opportunity to remove Rome’s monopoly over its imposed meaning and, consequently, over the whole ordering of Christian life. But how would it be possible to lay claim to the only possible authorized interpretation, when the texts were now within everyone’s reach? The Protestant prophets’ weapon against the authority of Rome turned against them with the rapid spread of printing.

Seen in the light of the rationality encouraged by the development of mercantile society, the Church was revealed as both a web of absurdities and a Spanish inn, where everyone found only what they brought to it. The collapse of sacred language and its distortions is indicative of the way in which the Loyists and their competitors lived according to their desires, hiding the carnal behind the ambiguities of the spiritual. Guillaume Farel was correct to consider the libertines more dangerous than the papists, “because the papist, admitting that there is a literal and a historical

meaning, condemns neither of them; whereas the libertine, who says that all Scripture has a dual meaning, spiritual and literal, condemns the literal and accepts only the one he calls spiritual.”<sup>275</sup>

Marnix of Saint Aldegundis put it more crudely: “They maintained that the ceremonies and sacraments were only children’s games, and that the word contained in the Scriptures was not the true word of God but only the husk or covering of it, and that it could be used by heretics as well as by the orthodox.”

Drawing up the bill of indictment against the libertine to whom he was responding, Marnix wrote: “He mocks the prayers of the Church, even the prayers addressed to God for your salvation and prosperity, gentlemen, and for the good and the peace of all the people. He makes fun of the preaching of the word of God, saying that it is dead syllables, with no efficacy. He slanders ecclesiastical order and discipline as the tyranny and inquisition of Spain. He rejects schools, colleges and universities. He sneers at the commentaries and interpretations of holy and learned men...”<sup>276</sup>

The *Summa doctrinae* also emphasizes the extent to which masters and experts were turned into objects of derision by the Loyists, who, according to David Joris, “say that those who worry about the Lord, who seek to do good and to respect the most precious wishes of God as expressed in the Gospel, are fools.”

Not only did they repudiate all the forms of the Church – its power, rites, sacredness and laws – but they even seem to have broken the boundaries that appropriation of wealth placed on the freedom of pleasure. Without pretending to apply Calvin’s description of Pocques and Quintin to

them – “Work was not something they regarded as appropriate” – it is significant that, according to the accounts of the hearing, none of the accused left any property or possessions. There is every reason to believe that the money used by the Loyists for the pursuit of pleasure, the printing and diffusion of pamphlets, even for the protection and flight of supporters threatened by repression, came from wealthy bourgeoisie. Those contributors were moved to give money not out of a sense of asceticism or sacrifice, but out of a sudden need to express their humanity, as if the passion for pleasure would allow them to break with the mechanisms of profit. Among the Loyists, therefore, the poor acceded to a life without financial anxiety, thanks to a realization on the part of the rich that they could give themselves up to pleasure without fear of remorse, sin, the anxieties of possession or the resentment of the deprived.

It is necessary to mention here a legend, substantiated by Norman Cohn and Romana Guarnieri, which originates not in any historical fact but in a novel by Georges Eekhoud, *The Libertines of Antwerp: The Legend and History of the Loyists*.<sup>277</sup> Eekhoud was, in his way, the Dumas of Eloi Pruystinck, and he records that the Loyists were in the habit of dressing in silk clothes, made to look like rags or workers’ clothes, on which Hérault used diamonds and gems to depict the plaster stains of a mason or the discarded entrails from a fishmonger’s stall. Eekhoud claims to have taken this information from an oral tradition that was still alive around 1900 in the neighborhood of Saint-André.

90 Extract from the *History of the Netherlands* by van Meteren:

Yet it [the Inquisition] seems without a doubt to have stopped numerous forms of crudely disguised heresies, which had blended with the reforms and changes in religion and which, alas, caused numerous disturbances in Germany and the Netherlands, creating many followers in different cities, such as the Anabaptists of Amsterdam, whose deranged faith caused them to run naked in the streets, as many stories report. The same was true of those in Münster, and the supporters of David Joris, etc.

Around 1540<sup>278</sup> a burgher of Antwerp, a slate roofer named Eloi, began to gain attention and, although he had no education, succeeded in persuading many people that there was no resurrection of the body after life on earth; that natural death was resurrection; that the soul (a soul incapable of sin) then returned to God, whence it had come; that the innate torment of the body, human misery and the decay of the flesh were the true hell; and that there was nothing else to be expected or feared, etc.

This doctrine was pleasing and indulgent to the world, but it was not the wise and intelligent doctrine which proclaims that man, the most wretched of all creatures, was nonetheless created in the image of God and thereby shares in the wisdom, justice, power, grace and love of God, which renders the sensible man both content and fearful; so that the reasonable man finds a pleasure beyond all others in thanking God for his love and in praising his name eternally, because he thinks he has been created a little better than the other creatures.

Many defenders of religion resisted the new ideas [of Eloi]. This was why the heretic Eloi, whose followers were called "Loyists," became the subject of legal proceedings. But, in fear, he did not show himself to be perverse, nor

obstinate, nor the leader of a sect, as most of the others had. The Antwerp magistrates merely sentenced him to wear a tin sign on his chest, designating him a heretic. The trickster was so skilled in hypocrisy that he obtained a pardon from the priests, on the grounds that his heresy was nothing but empty words, malignantly interpreted to his disadvantage. He expressed profound remorse, scrupulously respecting Roman Catholic doctrine and following the Mass every day with so much devotion and ostentation that he seemed completely in accordance with the Church. Then<sup>279</sup> he traveled through Germany, propagating his doctrine among the people.

When he defended his teachings in writing, some zealots encouraged him to argue with the learned Philip Melanchthon in the presence of Martin Luther. There, his heresies were exposed and his arguments refuted. Luther said openly that he was possessed by the devil. After that, when he had set off to return to Antwerp, Luther and Melanchthon ensured the magistrates of the city that there was a heretic troublemaker among their citizens. They pointed out his arguments and his heretical statements, and explained where they appeared in his writings and how they were propagated, etc.

This is why the magistrates kept an eye on Eloi, even though the warnings coming from heretics were themselves suspect. Eventually, large numbers of followers gathered around him, among them some of the richest and most highly respected of the bourgeoisie. They lived with each other in a joyous and epicurean manner, believing that they had found true knowledge and peace of conscience, driving all inward and spiritual disputes from their hearts.

Eloi distributed pamphlets outlining his heresies. He and a number of rich citizens were arrested as a result of these Proclamations. Two were beheaded. Then Eloi himself was

condemned to the stake for having continued to spread his heretical doctrine despite his promise. Although he was ready to retract, he was burned around 1546,<sup>280</sup> praying God to grant him a speedy death.

John Davion and someone named Germain were beheaded after him, along with a rich fish merchant who, with other rich and important citizens, had long tried to win favor from the court of Queen Maria, the Regent. It seems that they declared their penitence, but in vain. Other prisoners fled, and many escaped to England, Germany and elsewhere.

Because of the severity of the interdicts, the magistrates made urgent appeals to put an end to the proliferation of such impious opinions, which were so indulgent to the world and the flesh, which derided both the Roman Catholic and reformed religions, and which tried to make theirs much more catholic; that is, more accessible to the vulgar.

As for the atheists, the libertines, the followers of Henry Niclaes, the “Family of Love,” the fanatics (or Illuminati), those who did not want to die or be martyred for religion or in defense of their words or deeds – against heresies of that sort, which were concealed or hidden by pretense, the Proclamations had a reason for being. But as the politicians and the Roman Catholics wanted to retain their supremacy and demonstrate it to the people, they confused the distinctions [between Protestantism and the sects<sup>281</sup>].

In the first place, they rely systematically on the terms of the Scriptures, according to which God, by his laws, threatens all men, Christians, Jews and Turks, with torment and damnation, while also, by his word, promising salvation to all men.

The threats of the law, like the promises of the Gospels, are thus addressed simply to all men, “for there is no respect of persons with God.”<sup>282</sup>

If someone says, “Only those who believe shall be saved,” they reply first that faith is a gift of God, and then that it is not part of divine goodness to require of anyone that which has not been given, for nothing can be possessed which has not been given by divine goodness.

And then they ask who would dare to assume the faith and to declare that what he believed was true. Since everyone can be misled by faith, it follows that men are not in any way saved by faith, but only by divine mercy, which God has promised to grant to all men.

Further, if prayer and faith could incline God to pity, this would mean that God is changeable and inconstant, which is incompatible with his nature.

Lastly, they argue, to believe that God takes a person’s faith into consideration – by offering him one’s faith one can guarantee one’s salvation – is to turn faith into an idolatrous idea. They ask why God – since everything comes by and through him – would give something only to demand it back as payment for salvation.

They have amassed a great deal of evidence from the Scriptures, according to which all those who transgress God’s law risk judgment and damnation. But all men transgress his law. It therefore follows that all men are condemned. And they cite in evidence: “Cursed is everyone who does not observe

91 *The Essence of the Doctrine of Certain Persons, Today Discovered in Great Numbers in Antwerp, and Here and There in Brabant and Flanders, and Who Are Sometimes Called Loyists, from the Name of Their Instigator, Eloi, an Uneducated Working Man, and Sometimes Libertines, Because of the Carnal Freedom Which Their Teaching Seems to Allow:*

and obey all the things written in the book of the law.”<sup>283</sup> And “Man will account for all unprofitable intentions”; “All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law: and all who have sinned under the law will also be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who shall be justified.”<sup>284</sup>

To this they oppose the divine promises by which God affirmed that he wanted to have pity on all men and ensure all men of the remission of their sins, as is attested in Jeremiah: “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. . . . But this is the covenant that I will make. . . . I will put my law within them, and I will write it down on their hearts. . . . for I will forgive them their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.”<sup>285</sup>

They claim that these statements are contradictory, because God is simultaneously punishing and pardoning sins. Because if he punishes, how can he pardon, and if he pardons, how can he punish?

They add, if God damned the whole world, what would become of his mercy and his promises? And if he saved the whole world by virtue of his universal mercy, what room would that leave for his justice? And if he damned some according to his justice and saved others according to his mercy, then God would be showing [human] favor, something entirely alien to his nature. This is why it is necessary that God’s justice be shown in respect to all men; and, likewise, that his mercy and promise of salvation be granted to all men, so that his truth appears in all divine words and cannot vary. For “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”<sup>286</sup>

It is their custom – their method of reasoning – to relate one part of the Scriptures to another, that is, to set the law against the promises. Indeed, to simple and inconsistent people, all these things seem different and contradictory; and, when they meet anyone, their main purpose is to sow seeds of doubt and uncertainty. And they are quite ready to believe that the Scriptures are contradictory, since they cannot find agreement between the different passages.

If someone asks them, “How should we understand the Scriptures in a coherent manner?” they reply, “We are not learned or erudite. What do you think of the Scriptures? For our part, we are looking for a master who can set our minds at rest about these matters.”

This is what you should most often expect when they bring together apparently obscure and contradictory passages of Scripture to present to people. Thus: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him,”<sup>287</sup> and “My spirit shall not always abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh,”<sup>288</sup> and “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”<sup>289</sup> Who, then, could assert that he has the spirit of Christ and not also admit that he is still in the flesh?

Likewise, it is written, “Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God’s seed abides in them.”<sup>290</sup> And, by contrast, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.”<sup>291</sup>

And, likewise, Christ said to the Jews, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”<sup>292</sup> He thus ordered his own death. Why, then, attribute his death to the Jews? And if God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, what was his offense?

They present references like these to incompetent people and even to experts, who discuss them among themselves in

a variety of ways which it would be irksome to repeat. Then, when they see that these people are unsettled and taken over by doubt, they urge them to explain the difficult points of the Scriptures, and undertake to oppose them (which they would not do if they did not think they had faith).

They relate the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans to what they call conciliation, as they believe it to conform with their ideas. In it, Paul establishes the dual nature of the human being: one, an animal being, who is outward, carnal, born of flesh and blood, incapable of perceiving the divine; the other, an inward and spiritual being, born of God. Between these two there is an unending struggle: if the flesh covets, etc., and if the spirit, etc.

The animal component of man is unfaithful to the divine law. It is disobedient and pursues sensual pleasure. By contrast, the inward component created in God's image and born of God, never approves the deeds of the flesh. It combats them relentlessly, suffers from the revolt of the flesh, and deplores the wretched enslavement that prevents it from acting as it intends.

This is why the spirit never commits sin, even if the flesh sins. And, likewise, as the flesh cannot but sin, so the spirit cannot sin, since it derives from God. This is why he is constrained to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of death?"<sup>293</sup> They relate the preceding passages, and similar ones from elsewhere in the Scriptures, to these two components of man, and maintain that these references can easily be in harmony even in the existence of this duality. Indeed, God's justice is manifest in the outward and animal being of man, since this is afflicted with various evils, punished and condemned to a pitiful death.

It follows that all that belongs to outward man is damned, and all that belongs to inward man is free and saved. In this way, justice and mercy find their explanation.<sup>294</sup>

92 The last confession of Eloi Pruystinck (October 24, 1544):

Here follows the statement made by Eloy Pristin in favor of John Davion. Today, October 24, 1544, Eloi, slate roofer, declared, under oath and on the verge of death he was to have tomorrow, that John Davion had not given a penny to him, Eloi, or to any other man, to have printed (in any place whatsoever, whether it be Germany, Austria or any other country) any of his books, and also does not know of, nor ever has known of, the said printing, the said Eloi declaring that he had never had any dispute or argument with the said Davion relating to the Christian faith, nor had he ever brought anyone to the said Eloi for that cause, nor for holding any dispute relating to the Holy Scriptures. He further said and declared that the whole of any confession or argument he had earlier made before Monseigneur the Procurator General and Commissioner of the court of Our Lord the Emperor, or before Monseigneur the Margrave, the Schout, the Burgomaster and Aldermen of Antwerp was made under torture, and therefore to retain and prolong his life, desiring therefore that the same should be revoked, so that no manner of prejudice should attach to the said Davion. And the said Eloi, to purge his conscience, said, by his share of paradise and by his baptism and the bitter death that would be his tomorrow, that the same was true. And this in the presence of Brother Nicholas Buyscher, Brother Sebastian van Runne and Brother Jacques du Boys, Jacobin friars, and Jacques au Theaulme, Cornelius au Ancre, Christian de Ridder, Lieven

de Backere, all burghers of the city of Antwerp, and William, banker to the queen, etc.

In witness to the truth of the aforesaid, together each of them here set their manual signature.

Thus undersigned: Brother Nicholas Buysere, Jacop vanden Bossche, I Eloy.<sup>295</sup>

### *Quintin of Tournai and the Spiritual Libertines*

#### 93 Extracts from the *Chronicle* of Pasquier de la Barre:

About the month of November in the year 1546, a rumor was spread in Tournai that an old man named Quintin Thierry,<sup>296</sup> who had been in the service of the queen of Navarre, had retired to that city and was the leader of the sect of those who were named Quintinists, from the name of the said Quintin, having shortly before been the cause, by his doctrine, of two persons having been beheaded in the city of Valenciennes for belonging to that sect and holding its opinions, one of them a brewer named Huchon de le Garde, and the other named Jano.<sup>297</sup> After which they obtained information about the position of the said Quintin, as a result of which information the magistrate of the said Tournai found the said Quintin to be a member of the pernicious libertine sect. And to prevent the said Quintin from sowing the seeds of his perverse and dangerous doctrine in that city, this magistrate had the said Quintin apprehended and taken prisoner and any others who consorted with him and conversed with him daily, being thereby suspected of being likewise tainted and holding the opinion of the libertines, to wit Jean Leconte, weaver, Jean Hugo, cobbler, Nicholas Scrabe known as Magret, Jean Marliere known as

Brevin, Pasquier Caudron, stocking maker, and others.<sup>298</sup>

All these prisoners were interrogated several different times about their faith, life, conversation and doctrine in the council hall of the said city (in the presence of Monseigneur the Prince d’Espinoy, lord of Anthoing, at that time governor of Tournai, members of the Council of the Bailliage of Tournesis and the provosts and jurors of the said city). Who, to the said interrogations conducted individually, responded variously to the best of their capabilities, so that, after several confrontations and evidence of statements made in various places, presented severally and on different days, both singly, and in company with the said Quintin Thierry, Jean Leconte, Jean Hugo and Nicholas Scrabe known as Magret, his disciples were found (even by their own confessions), attained and convicted of being of that libertine sect. By reason of which the said Quintin, as chief of the said sect, was condemned to be burned in the marketplace after having been strangled, and the said Leconte, Hugot and Magret were condemned to be beheaded: which happened soon after.

A marvelous thing,<sup>299</sup> for that the said Quintin was leader of the libertine sect of the Quintinists and had sown his errors and perverse opinions in many areas and regions – in the kingdom of Navarre, where he had been resident and a pensioner of the queen, in Poitou, Limousin, Paris, Antwerp, Valenciennes, Tournai and other surrounding towns! From which regions and cities he had nevertheless always been forced to absent himself when his wickedness and perverse doctrine became known; otherwise, he would long since have received the punishment he deserved, which would have been better, as he would not have been the cause of the seduction and perdition of so many souls. Yet despite this, the said Quintin could neither read nor write, and thus forged



his sect and his opinions out of his own head, rejecting all the Holy Scriptures and the institutions of the Church, adducing and declaring, whenever anyone cited passages from the Holy Scriptures to confuse and destroy his opinions, that “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” He maintained several mad, absurd and dishonest opinions against the honor of God, the blessed and glorious Virgin Mary, the holy writings and institutions of the Catholic Church, some of which I note here, so that the reader may guard against them in times to come.

He maintained first that it was not right to live by the Gospels, and that it was a bad thing to follow them or likewise any other Holy Scriptures, that God had given men authority and power to do whatever they wished and to live in accordance with their desires and pleasures. They did not sin because God, on his death, had pardoned all and abolished sin. That those who believed otherwise lived according to the devil and not according to God.

That men could sleep with as many women as they wanted and found that God had not commanded that they should marry, and that a poor girl of light morals was as valuable in the eyes of God as the Virgin Mary.

That there was no Resurrection, that the soul went to God and not the body, which was a clay vessel and, once dead, was like a broken pot which was no longer anything.

That man could not commit sin and that it was God who committed the sin in man, that if someone saw or presumed that a man was committing sin, the sin fell on the watcher or presumer.

That it was not committing a sin to kill a man, that it was comparable to one clay pot breaking another clay pot.

That they should lend their wives to one another; to do

otherwise would be a lack of charity, that man did not intend to sin, that God did everything in man.

The said Quintin maintained his opinions in different and contrary ways, for, sometimes, as is said above, he rejected the Holy Scriptures entirely, and at other times he used them and cited them for his own purpose, as when he maintained that Our Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins and that sin died with him, meaning to infer from this, as is said above, that man could no longer commit sin because Christ could no longer die for us, adducing, in response to some propositions relating to the Virgin Mary, that Saint Paul said that we are the temple of God, and that if Our Lord had cohabited in the Virgin Mary, he did the same in us. The said Quintin maintained various other opinions and errors, all concerning the freedom of the flesh, which it would be too verbose to list.<sup>300</sup>

- 94 *Against the Fantastic and Crazy Sect of the Libertines Who Called Themselves Spirituals, With an Epistle in the Same Manner Against a Certain Cordelier, Member of the Sect, Who Is a Prisoner in Rouen*, by John Calvin (extract):

For in sooth a man never needs any other schooling but his own<sup>301</sup> to be able to blaspheme against God, destroying the truth with malicious wiles. [It is older people who] encourage simple people to live a life of dissolution... so that each lives according to his appetites without scruple: abusing Christian freedom by removing the restraints on all carnal license... They disparage everything they do not understand, finding their happiness in their forbidden pleasures... When they want to transport their listeners above the heavens, they attract them into carnal delights, and

make them fall back into the concupiscence from which they had withdrawn.... And Saint Jude said...that “these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.”...

For they have it that man torments himself in vain if he has scruples about anything: but that every man should let himself be led by his spirit. Thus they confound all order, mocking both the fear of God of the faithful, and their respect for his judgment, and all respect for human honesty. And this is the freedom they promise, that a man should give himself up to whatever his heart desires and covets, and that he should make no difficulties about obtaining it, as if he were not subject to the law or to reason:<sup>302</sup> for they do not like to hear that servitude spoken of....

About fifteen years ago, a man named Coppin, a Fleming from Lille, began stirring up this filth in his birthplace; he was ignorant, and had no other means of self-advancement than his own audacity, bearing out the proverb that a fool never doubts anything.

Then another arose, named Quintin, who gained such a reputation that it eclipsed the memory of the former.... He was from the region of Hainaut, or near there. I do not know how long he had lived in France, but I saw him there more than ten years ago.

Then he was accompanied by a Bertrand des Moulins, who has since then, as they believe, become God or nothing, that is, he is dead to this world....

...There was also a third, named Claude Perceval. All of them toiled so hard that they infected much of France: such that there was hardly a place where they had lived which was not to some extent affected by their corruption....

...It is true that they had help from another figure whom I have not yet mentioned; this was a petty priest named Messire Antoine Pocques, whom I met three years ago.<sup>303</sup>

What made Quintin and his companion change from tailors to scholars was that they enjoyed being comfortable and well-fed, and work was not something that suited them....

...Therefore, they decided to gain their living by chattering, as priests and monks do by singing....

[Calvin regrets having to sully his paper with such characters, but:] What else should I do, when I see four rogues, who have already caused the ruin of more than 4,000 men, still at large after at least three of them have turned God's truth upside-down....

[According to him, they are worse than the pope, who leaves some form of religion, whereas:] The whole purpose of these men is to mingle heaven and earth, to annihilate all religion, to wipe out all knowledge of human understanding, to deaden consciences and to leave no difference between man and beast....

The Quintinists have a wild language in which they cluck and warble, so that they can no more be understood than the song of the birds. Not that they do not use the same words as other people, but they disguise their meaning so much that no one can tell what they are talking about, nor what they are trying to affirm or deny.... Now it is true that they do it out of malice.... They never reveal the mysteries of abomination that are hidden within, except to those who have taken the vow....

[Calvin boasts about having defeated Quintin in a contest of eloquence.] They hold that there is only one spirit of God, which exists and lives in all creatures.... They take the devil, the world and sin to be wholly imaginative which

is nothing.... [These are] vain thoughts that should be forgotten, like dreams.... On the question of sin, they say only that it is a deprivation of the good, but this is a *cuider*,<sup>304</sup> which fades away and is abolished when there are no more instances of it....

...They teach that one should no longer spend time thinking of these things, since sin has been abolished, and it is folly to continue to torment oneself as if it were something that existed. Likewise, they say that man is composed of his body and a thought [*cuider*], and that natural man takes his souls from the devil and the world, and yet that this is no more than a vapor which passes away and not a permanent thing....<sup>305</sup>

They say that God does everything.... That fat idiot Quintin was once in a street where a man had just been killed. There happened to be one of the faithful there who said, "Alas, who has done this wicked deed?" Without delay, he replied in his thick Picardy accent, "Since you want to know, it was me." The other, in amazement, said, "How could you be so cowardly?" To which he replied, "I am not. God is." "Why," asked the other, "must you impute to God crimes which he has commanded should be punished?" At which this filthy man spewed forth his venom even more forcefully, saying, "Yes, it is you, it is me, it is God. For whatever you or I do, it is God who does it, and whatever God does, we do it, because he is within us"....

...Has someone behaved in a dissolute way? He should not be vituperated because of it. For that would be to blaspheme against God. Does a man covet his neighbor's wife? He should enjoy her if he can. For he can be certain that he is doing nothing but God's will, and whatever he does will be a divine act. As for possessions, anyone who is able to get hold of any,

whether by cunning or by force, should use them boldly. For he will be doing nothing of which God does not approve. And whatever he may have taken, he should not worry about retribution. For it is entirely wrong to criticize God....<sup>306</sup>

...This is, in fact, their primary aim: to dull the conscience, so that everyone does whatever comes into his mind and whatever his heart feels like.... After they have removed the bridle from everyone, so that they can do whatever seems good to them under the pretense of letting themselves be led toward God, they deduce from this same principle that it is wrong to pass judgment....

...For, in truth, they are sensualists who mock everything and take nothing to heart for fear of dying of melancholy, except when things are not as they want them.... All their pleasure lies in giving themselves a good time and not worrying about anything. They have heard this sentence of Solomon, that a sorrowful spirit dries up the bones. Thus, for fear of becoming thin, they find means of enjoying themselves. By treating everything that ought to afflict the children of God as if it were good, they have no occasion to be grieved. That is how, by taking as much pleasure in evil as in good, they turn everything to their profit....<sup>307</sup>

...Two of these men were executed in Valenciennes for having said that Jesus Christ did not die on the cross, that it was only a lying thought. Is it not a fine beginning to make of Jesus Christ a phantom of which we know nothing?... They regard all that he did and suffered as a farce or a morality play staged on a scaffold to represent the mystery of our salvation....

Quintin became incensed when he was asked how he behaved. How, he asked, can Jesus Christ behave badly?... Since we are Jesus Christ, the only issue is that what is already

perfect in us should be reiterated. . . .<sup>308</sup> Regeneration is the return to the state of innocence in which Adam lived before he sinned. They take this state of innocence to mean not seeing any difference between black and white: because Adam's sin was to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Therefore, to mortify the old Adam is not to see with discernment, as if one had knowledge of evil, but to let oneself be led by one's natural senses, like a little child.<sup>309</sup> They even support this argument by using those passages in which childlike simplicity is recommended to us. . . . If they see a man who has objections to doing evil, they say, "O Adam, you are still there. The old man has not been crucified in you yet." If they see a man who fears the judgment of God, they say, "You can still taste the apple. Watch out that a bit does not get stuck in your throat and choke you." . . .

. . . Those who are no longer in a position to sin they call new creatures, because they are delivered from lying thought (*cuidar*) and thus have no more sin in them. . . . When this lying thought is abolished, there is no longer a devil, nor a world, according to their opinion. . . .<sup>310</sup>

[They say] that it is only carnal marriage if a man's heart is not given to a woman, or when the wife no longer has any pleasure in her husband. . . .

. . . These wretches profane marriage, and men mingle with women like brute beasts, as their desires lead them. And they disguise their beastly defilement under the name of spiritual marriage: giving the name of spiritual impulse to the raging impetuosity that inflames a man like a bull and a woman like a bitch in heat.<sup>311</sup> And to leave no order among men, they create a similar confusion about possessions, saying that theirs is the communion of saints, in which no one possesses anything of his own, but everyone takes what he can get.<sup>312</sup>

## IV OUTLINE FOR AN ALCHEMY OF THE SELF

### *The Creation of the Self*

- 95 There is no eternity save that which lies at the heart of the present moment, in the unfettered enjoyment of the self. Although each of us starts along the path as a whole, living being, intending to return just as we were when we left off, we become completely lost in a maze of wasted time, so that what returns is only a corpse of our being, mummified in its memories.

The striving of humanity after survival is a saga of childhood bartered away for decrepitude. This sacrifice was an investment in a social-improvement society which is now on the verge of bankruptcy. The sole consolation of the age is that the prospects of this racket are now distinctly short-term, and that consequently we are all obliged to look sideways at our wretched existences, so utterly devoid of any real pleasure, set in eloquent juxtaposition to the riches attainable if only we were to embrace the portion of life that has been driven underground.

I know of nothing more odious than the commonly accepted formula that calls for everyone to renounce his

life in order to save it; yet I am delighted that, because of the increasing difficulty of subsidizing survival, a new awareness is slowly emerging. It is based not on collective work or the poverty of selfish ambition, but on their opposite, on the invitation to become oneself, to create oneself by creating the terms of one's own pleasure.

While contemporary history is writing the last chapter of survival – using all the appropriate platitudes – the end of the twentieth century is preparing to discover the unexplored territory of life that lies right at its feet. In a few decades I am sure that it will be as normal to enter into the wondrousness of being alive as it is to go pick mushrooms. It is, therefore, all the more astonishing that the greatest passion within the heart of man has never had an official existence.

Paradoxically, the Middle Ages seem closer to us, in their demand for immediacy, than the period that extended from the Renaissance to the 1960s, when every generation seemed to delude itself about its future history: well-being was the carrot that it dangled in front of itself, on the stick of future progress.

The virulence of ecclesiastical propaganda showed that many were less interested in heading toward heaven or hell than in compulsively satisfying their natural desires. This was fortunate except for the fact that hedonism, strained by the manipulations of the Church and the threat of the stake, was less concerned with the public emancipation of conscience than with epicurean pleasures, which are sold off today at the price of merchandise and devalued labor.

I have tried here to pay homage to the alliance of pleasure and lucidity by rescuing from darkness and silence those who celebrated true life in a time when lies about

its nature proliferated along with the violence of the repressed, even though they sometimes were responsible for their own powerlessness and succumbed to the corroding effect of contempt, caused by their feelings of obvious superiority over the Christian herd and its guard-dogs.

The century in which God and Marx have finally died while burying their own dead must give these individuals the recognition they are due. But we must beware the hounds of heaven who are still yapping at the gates of this ideological debacle. It is no longer possible simply to reiterate Free Spirit ideas, because the dominant language has changed its vocabulary, and, with the collapse of religious power, God has been eliminated, excreted through a cleansing purgative, only to be replaced by ideas that are even more constipating, and made of the same fecal matter. More important, because the elitist attitude stems from alienated thought, all thinking bears the indelible imprint of survival. The idea that reliance on the lucidity of the few will lead to the freedom of all is so ingrained in new forms of slavery that the leaders are worn away up to their knees or even higher, revealing their true nature as truncated men.

There is no other guide to the emancipation of all than the individual will to live, creating around itself the conditions of its victory over the absolutism of death on the installment plan.

- 96 Alchemy is, fundamentally, a process that hastens the purification that nature itself supposedly carries out, transforming base metals into noble metals, symbolized by gold. That it originated in the sacred knowledge of priests suggests that it derives from older practices. Telling in

this regard is the concern for *unity*, as exemplified in the androgyny of alchemical marriage or in the inseparability of the transmutation of metal and that of the alchemist himself.

In the hands of the sacerdotal caste, alchemy expressed the esoteric will to appropriate the essence of the heavenly economy: the metal-standard of exchange, the symbol of spiritual supremacy and a major advantage for the conduct of earthly affairs.<sup>1</sup>

Just as *religio* is mythic unity substituting for the unity of human development in its natural setting, so the *Ars magna* of the priests of exchange usurps the rights of an alchemy in which man draws on all his component elements – mineral crystals, vegetable sap, animal urges – to create a humanity capable of humanizing the whole of nature.<sup>2</sup>

True alchemy is the transmutation of elementary forms of life into human life. From it will emerge the civilization that will supplant the barbarous, primitive culture of work. And I think there is no better indication of this than the amount of fervent attention surrounding birth and babies.

We are only just now realizing that bringing a child into the world is no longer simply a matter of reproducing intellectual and manual slaves. A new consciousness is developing that sees every birth as the early stages of a creation that needs to be perfected, of a life to be saved before the closed universe of commodities stifles it in the polluted air of profitability.

What was the source of this idea of supposed ontological suffering, this notion of life-as-difficulty, which herds of philosophers constantly flock to for inspiration? No doubt, it came with the stasis, known as the need to sur-

vive, that requires the creation, simultaneously, of quotidian routine and self-fulfillment.

A creation that bears the mark of alienation is like a bruise to the very soul, leaving a lingering melancholy that pulsates through the most successful artistic achievements. Even though art has come to stand for life – after having usurped the place reserved for genuine creativity – it still reminds us of gratuitous pleasures; but only when that art triumphs in the marketplace does it escape the contempt that the standard of profitability reserves for every missed chance to make money.

The ultimate disgrace is aptly revealed in the title of “Creator” applied to a God who has created from his own substance a universe in which his creatures, deprived of his resources, begin in a state of total deprivation and progress toward nothingness. A desert valley irrigated with tears is a rather pathetic creation. It is not difficult to understand how the men and women who tried to establish a paradise on earth, here and now, saw themselves as superior to God.

### *The Materia Prima*

- 97 The movement disguising itself under the clerical name of the Free Spirit traced, beneath the filaments of everyday life, a path more secret and less tolerable than the alchemical magistracy and its degeneration into the genesis of the work of art.

From the beginning alchemy was based on a fundamental deception. To see this, one need only consider that the *materia prima*, the raw material it claimed to transmute, was exclusively mineral: the most inert of the

natural elements, and the most easily exploitable.

Such conceptual poverty could have arisen only from the alienated thought of the sacerdotal blacksmiths, priests aping the God they had fathered, the sovereign Spirit that raised the base products of a denatured nature – stone, lead, copper, iron – to the dignity of gold. In the same way, the heavenly spirit allowed the heap of vile, corruptible matter that constituted the body to bask in its aura of everlasting life.

But in the unity of the living there is only human matter; and by human I mean humanized and dehumanized at once, in the certainty and uncertainty of choice, in appeals to profitability and their rejection and in the confusion of darkness and light.

To the extent that one can indeed speak of an enlightenment advanced by the movement of the Free Spirit, it lies in having pointed up the similarities that exist between the *materia prima* and the fractured sensual body – the body held in check by the rule of the mind, condemned to unpredictable and compulsive moments of release, the very image of life turned inside-out by the permanent jolts and turns of death.

This natural chaos is fostered by all societies, whether civilized or primitive, that are governed by the spirit of power and profit, and this chaos is the raw material of an alchemy of experience, which anyone could master. It is the primordial element that needs to be gradually refined until it becomes the philosopher's stone. When the stage of "perfection" is finally reached, the permanent creation of the self gives life to whatever it touches.

The initial act is to recognize the *materia prima*, the material of one's pleasure, freed from whatever conceals

it and controls it. All the supporters of the movement of the Free Spirit insisted that life meant life immediately present. There was no hell, no resurrection, no Last Judgment, no divine overseer, no secular power. They were not interested in religious, philosophical or political quarrels; social confrontation interested them only when it opened the door to absolute emancipation. Realizing that God had been created in the image of their alienation, they abandoned the great external, productive subject, whose spirit signified servitude and tyranny, and made themselves earthly gods in the ceaseless flux of a universal attraction they called love. To pass, through love, from the frustrated nature of desire to the untrammelled freedom of re-created nature – this was the project they shaped during those centuries shut off from the progress of history. It is now resurfacing as the only alternative to the collapse of the economic system and the bankruptcy of the underwriters of survival.

Living matter in the state of sexual exuberance manifests itself among human beings inversely to the amount of power they have in the social and economic organization. The disregard, even contempt, in which women, children and simple people are held by *vir economicus* is sufficient indication of their blithe inadaptability to the functions of government. Woman – except as mother or as pure object – is lascivious, useless and harmful, and arouses a horror of the feminine affecting even that part of femininity which male worshippers of the patriarchal and celestial menhir repress so thoroughly.

The anchor of misogyny plunges deep into the waters of the origins, into the primal and sexual dampness so essential to the alchemical project. Floods, swamps and

sap stirred by the moon are the natural settings in which the body is formed, the cosmic womb wherein it is nourished before some natural ebbing of life drains it dry.

Simple people are the volatile fluid of the social body. Do they not behave like women and children, needing to be led with a firm hand and punished for their own good, to save them from their natural tendency to stupidity and brutishness? When clerics – who are now known as “intellectuals,” because they take pride in the alienation of the mind rather than in the alienation of the body – treat such people as satyrs, brutes and monsters scarcely emerged from animality, as a natural chaos destined to be dominated, ordered and purified by the combined intelligence of God and his clergy, they are making the Church into the agent of a kind of alchemy. The divine magistracy transmuted the lead of the *vulgum pecus* into a pontifical aura. The process, both spiritual and material, was invented by the perverse intelligence of Satan and his henchmen – those who refused to pay tithes and adhered to heresy – transforming the gold of Rome back into lead by involution. Surely this represents an absolute recognition, in the myopic gaze of orthodoxy and its inseparable twin, heterodoxy, of the *materia prima*, the natural matter in which the human and the inhuman are intermingled.

But, contrary to the viewpoint limited to God and the devil, which reduces the game to a winner and a loser, as in the horse race or rat race found in market civilization,<sup>3</sup> everyone can enjoy a sensual freedom that slips away from the iron grip of priests and all other authority. The idea that everyone has an irrepressible right to follow his desires and enjoy to the fullest what little life he is given evades absolute repression, because those who have been blinded

to their own bodies by the light of the spirit do not understand that life carries on where it began, beyond good and evil.

The movement of the Free Spirit emanated from the *materia prima* of life as much as it escaped the grasp of the ecclesiastical and secular authorities. Its consciousness was rooted there, through an alchemy in which nothing, in the end, is any different from what it was already in the beginning, as in the proposition Hyppolytus of Rome attributed to Simon the Gnostic: “All earth is earth, and it does not matter where you sow. The promiscuity of men and women, that is the true communion.”<sup>4</sup>

### *The Athanor*

- 98 For the athanor of the alchemists – the furnace in which the *materia prima* was refined – there is one primordial location, revealed yet secret, tangible yet invisible, near and distant: the body. The body, enslaved and fragmented by the spirit it contains, with God’s help is little more than excrement from on high. The body, without which nothing exists, is reduced to nothing by an existence that has been reduced to thought. The body, called “the prison of conscience,” in its all too rare raptures of sensual enjoyment, is the very conscience that seizes hold of pleasure and undoes the knots of dissatisfaction, the only conscience in the universe in which we are always present. For the body is the fire, the crucible and the raw material of individual and collective alchemy.

The locations of the earth and the body are kept secret lest celestial damnation overtake them. These sites are especially secret both as sites where the quest for pleasure



is initiated and where forbidden pleasures are unleashed through the desperate rage of its inversions. The fire of death masks the fire of life, the passion for destruction covers up and replaces the passion for creation and for self-creation.<sup>5</sup>

The economy flaunts itself in the full light of day that, ultimately, reveals nothing but the economy in all its various manifestations. Sensual pleasure, however, as an element that cannot be reduced to the economic, remains occult, shrouded in night, condemned to the underworlds of intimacy and interiority.

The economy pretends to cast light on everything that is obscured by darkness. Yet the tyranny of the market does not see through to the vitality that negates it, but it does see the part of life that it negates through repression. The only secret place it knows and recognizes is the attic where whatever is useless or harmful to the reproduction of power and profit is carelessly thrown, including its own outdated forms and archaic religions.<sup>6</sup> Its *loca infesta* are haunted by ritual orgies over which the hydra of femininity rules; thus, it assumes that every man has within himself a dark recess where he sequesters “inadmissible passions.”

From the market viewpoint inwardness – necessarily suspicious, since anything concealed is by definition inadmissible – exists only as inverted exteriority<sup>7</sup> and is the seat of frustrations, desires, satisfied or unsatisfied, that have been hidden away in the anguish of remorse, penitence and moral decay.

This curse, which is shamelessly accommodated in the deepest recesses of the heart and mind, is surely identical to the hell of ignorance described by the Amaurians. The remark frequently attributed to the movement of the Free

Spirit – “What the outward man does cannot sully the inward man” – surely also gives to the athanor its function of dissolving and transforming the world of mercantile objectivity, the hostile world outside man, into the subjective and the living.

- 99 Alchemical language was not essentially motivated by a desire to keep the profane at a distance, any more than the misappropriation of religious terminology was designed to ward off suspicion, as the inquisitor responsible for repressing the Men of Intelligence believed. How could occult meanings be given to key words in common usage, paralleling and mocking the official meaning – *paradise* signifying “innocence of pleasure,” *I beg charity* meaning “make love to me,” *ecstasy* implying orgasm – without including devotional books whose meanings could be understood quite differently?

Words shifted their center of gravity. They became guided by a different reality – not the reality shaped by the economy, but the reality underlying the living being. Beneath the prevailing stream of words, used by the majority to proclaim that power was the only reference point, ran a living undercurrent: original sexuality, the cosmic womb where freedom was gestating, the subjective consciousness where body and spirit came together in the unity of each orgasm. The appropriation of language is both the labyrinth and the Ariadne’s thread that lead to the heart of life, to the latencies that wait to be born in each of us, and which economic necessity paralyzes and corrupts with its universal negativity and its fundamental inhumanity.

*The Negative and Its Treatment*

100 The whole of survival is centered on negativity. It is reality reduced to the perspective of the market, a reality that runs out the course of its history, from alpha to omega, according to a fundamental imperative – an imperative that, in its mythic conception, is called “God,” and, according to the ideology of industrial societies is called “economic necessity.”

Through its denial of the human and its inversion of human growth this negativity creates a dialectic of death in which every life becomes the nothingness to which it was doomed initially. This is why history illuminates with the light of despair, why emancipation gives rise to new forms of slavery: the law is that of decline, gradually brought to an absolute limit by the boredom of perpetually beginning again. So many philosophical tears have been shed since a wrong turn sent human evolution from its creative path toward the necessity of work! So many fools have wept over the inexorable human condition, over the profitable deception that calls destiny a dead end!

After 10,000 years of lamentation and a few years of bankruptcy, which are every day confessed and countersigned, it may occur to late twentieth-century consciousness that the true meaning of destiny is to create life and increase its enjoyment, not to accumulate devalued money, boast about the impotence of power and produce an ever-growing volume of misery.

The alchemical unconscious, which is inseparable from the earliest human experiences of flux and change, inherent in the sense of change heightened by the use of fire and the pleasures of love, is still dominated by a nostalgia

for permanent creation. Moist heat allied with dry heat slowly separates base metals from their impurities, clarifying them until an element of pure life appears, which purifies and vivifies whatever it touches. Although identified with the struggle of each moment from which spring both the luminous contagion of the philosopher’s stone and the elixir of youth, I do not see the pursuit of pleasure as any different from that which occurs in early childhood. The wish to take possession of one’s body and to feel better and better in it, until even one’s every thought and action is directed to the practice of happiness – this is a wish that seems all the more precious as we come to realize the worthlessness of so many empty ventures whose accounts have been tallied by death and wasted existences, brilliant, obscure, stupid, intelligent, royal or slave – one following another in a repetition of the same motives.

101 The gods are the absolute negation of life. The only gods are the gods of survival, just as our society has no other axiom but the economy. This is why divinity and its offspring claim to see, hear, touch and experience as if they were pure positivity, the unique reality, the only movement in which each element becomes its contrary, the absolute cycle where being is reduced to nothingness. In spite of our best efforts to avoid bathing twice in the same stream we find that it does not really matter since all waters flow from the same polluted source. This is the sad mix of jubilation and dismay to which the whole philosophical discourse of humanity has been reduced. It is hardly surprising, then, that people merely have to express their bitterness to appear lucid.

The identification with God demanded by a number

of the advocates of the movement of the Free Spirit indicates the traps that await anyone who fails to break away from the lure of economized existence in its claim to be the sole mode of existence.

According to John Hartmann, the author of *Sister Katrei*, self-deification made Sister Katrei, Gertrude de Civitas, even Quintin of Tournai,<sup>8</sup> into God and devil, good and evil, *übermensch* and *untermensch*, *coincidentia oppositorum*, dominant world and dominated world: nothing more and nothing less than the totalitarian universe of survival, reality reduced to universalized exchange.

To proclaim oneself God is fatally to inherit his lie or, if you prefer, his authoritarian truth. To behave as master of things and creatures (compare with Hartmann and *Sister Katrei*), dismissing all guilty conscience regardless of one's actions, is to pledge allegiance to the artificial processes of denatured nature. That sort of behavior – which Sade and Nietzsche would justify as they did all strategies of revolution – is to the project of the fulfillment of life what the charlatanism of the gold blowers was to the alchemical magnum opus. The stuff of deified being is not made of metal but consists merely of power whose leadened weight has been gilt with the superficial brilliance of freedom.

102 Right now, I can think of nothing as important, yet, at the same time, more unimportant, than survival.

I hope it ceases to be a priority, as if surviving were necessary first in order to live later. (Experience has shown, however, that allegiance to survival kills life as surely as work destroys creativity.)

The point is not to neglect survival entirely – how

could we – but to reverse the perspective so that survival becomes a consequence of the will to live rather than the condition for it. The way in which health issues are being approached now suggests a certain awareness of the claims of living.

For a long time illness and the fear it inspired governed health. In the struggle against the torments that endlessly assailed it health was a matter for witch doctors, healers and physicians. Every illness set off a system of panic and alarm that men of science encouraged whenever they intervened to allay its effects. But now it is obvious to most people that the doctor's curative power and his arsenal of chemicals are often ineffective, even harmful, if patients are not energetically committed to wanting to live, motivated not by a refusal to suffer but by a will to enjoy themselves to the fullest.

The idea of vitality also makes no sense if the fears accompanying the preoccupations of survival – finding enough money or credit to get food, clothing and a place to live – do not give way to a dialectic of life, to the demands of desires rooted in the heart, to an existence that reveals its uniqueness. This uniqueness lies in the exuberance in which positive and negative, pleasure and displeasure, harmony and discord throb with the rhythm of life until, out of breath, they run their course. But it is an end that has nothing in common with the death that governs the society of survival, whose withered state is the distinct sign of both beings and things.

Everyone, without exception, is an alchemist, distilling his own substance at every moment. But the magnum opus is inverted and corrupted: the best becomes the worst, creativity becomes work, the richness of being dwindles into

possession, authenticity turns into appearance, agony begins at birth. The millenarian incitement to produce one's own unhappiness has so thoroughly impregnated the world of the imagination that everything from art to daydreaming consists of negative scenarios, doomed love affairs, inevitable failures, inevitable obsolescence, bitter victories or bliss in ignorance.

The only way to remedy the lassitude brought on by survival is through a treatment, focusing on negativity, that uses alchemy to rid life of the effects of survival, radically remaking the human from what is most human: namely the search for pleasure.

The construction of a nature emancipated from the mechanisms by which it is denatured can be seen in the laughter and amused incomprehension with which the younger generations greet the political masquerade, the blackmail of war and insecurity, the manifestations of authority, racist and sexist attitudes, expressions of contempt, and the inflexibility imposed by the worship of the militarized commodity market, the foundation of our wonderful civilization.

As for squandering one's last energies in an attempt to reintegrate oneself into the misery of work, or walking willingly into the trap of a computerized social world, these choices must be left to those irretrievably conditioned to poverty. For the rest of us, a good watchword would be: "The minimum of survival in the service of a maximum of life."

The unavoidability of negotiating the meshes of the commodity system – the necessity of obtaining a modicum of money – should only encourage us to exploit to the hilt whatever facilities offer themselves that can help

us get the time to pursue the pleasure of belonging to ourselves and the pleasure of creating.

While it may be temporary, a solution that allows salaried workers to take more leaves of absence, or that lets unemployment money go toward keeping a garden, seems a better use of the national debt than investing in a sluggish economy or subsidizing a school for criminals by allocating funds to an army that seems more useless and absurd than ever.

If life was able to resist the oppression of a sovereign economy, it can surely triumph, today, over an economy that is falling into ruin. And if the need to survive threatens modern cities with something as ancient as famine, why shouldn't the revulsion provoked by a system of profit-oriented inhumanity encourage the foundation of its absolute opposite: immediate enjoyment with nothing expected in return? Abandoned factories will one day be transformed into creative workshops capable of supplying life's desires with whatever material support – no matter how luxurious – they might require.

- 103 The most radical element of the movement of the Free Spirit had to do with an alchemy of individual fulfillment, in which the creation of a superior state of existence (the all-important "perfection") was achieved by a gradual relinquishment of the economy's hold over individuals.

There is ambiguity in the meaning of relinquishment, as there is in the meaning of perfection, sometimes understood as a state of fulfillment, sometimes as permanent self-creation. In communities where the Cathar perfects exploited the masochism of the novices (like Cologne or Schweidnitz), relinquishment implied ascetic trial. But the

idea that a happy life had to be deserved, had to be earned by submission to restraint, makes happiness a sort of compensation, a release that is its own negation. This much is evident: one of the surest laws of the corruption of pleasure is the law that claims to satisfy sensual desires by initially discouraging them. All too often, the will to rid oneself of the old world only led to the inevitable reproduction of the mechanisms of the market society and its divisions of power, to the point that a genuine emancipation was not possible. But even if their actions were questionable, followers of the movement of the Free Spirit identified, with remarkable lucidity, all that is negative: work, constraint, guilt, fear, money and possession, keeping up appearances, exchange and the striving for power.

If the healthy rejection of work did not explicitly derive from a wish to create the self and to create the conditions for self-enjoyment, the task of ensuring the minimum needs of survival involved questionable means. These included the financial support of parishioners (probably used by the Amaurians), mendicancy (Margaret Porete, the Beguines and Beghards), theft, embezzlement, improper solicitation of legacies (the friends of John of Brünn, the community of Schweidnitz), personal support of rich members (the Men of Intelligence, the Loyists, the Alumbrados), various forms of opportunism (Quintin of Tournai), the exploitation of women (John Hartmann) – all strategies that modern revolutionaries, whether contemptuous of work or not, have sometimes deigned to use despite the emancipation they extolled.

Similarly, the rejection of all constraints, although constantly reiterated in Free Spirit discourse, aroused some mistrust when it was accompanied by the elitism that har-

bored the old separation of the spirit, the alleged superiority of intellectualism. Fortunately the disappearance of feelings of constraint, guilt and fear usually sprang from a sort of irrepressible exuberance of life.<sup>9</sup>

In its radical conception – when it does not demand humiliation – the practice of voluntary poverty challenges *having*, as impeding the freedom of *being*. The money that was solicited, panhandled, found or stolen by the community in Cologne was neither saved nor used as capital: it was used to binge on food and drink, “sent into eternity,” accompanied, if necessary, by its previous owner if he argued that it was still his.

Beneath their cowls and rags, the Beguines of Schweidnitz wore delicate underclothes (confiscated from the novices). Concerned that their indulgence in luxury might be found offensive, the Loyists wore garments of rich silk made to look like work clothes (those of plasterers, roofers, fishmongers...). The vagrancy for which the clerics criticized them was, in fact, an endless amorous quest, a move from one place of pleasure to another.

Their search for an authentic experience of life was the basis for a critique of outward appearance, what would now be called “role” and “spectacle.” In the name of the freedom of nature, refined through amorous relations or “spiritual marriage,” Quintin of Tournai and his friends rejected the *cuider*, the mythical representation in which all people are bound, in spite of themselves, to act as economic beings rather than as beings of desire. Similarly, nudity, when not used as an expression of Christ’s obstinate miserableness, as in Francis of Assisi or Jacopo of Todi, expressed contempt for the social representation attached to clothing. The nudity of Giles of Canter was a renewal

of the innocence of childhood, so that the world could once again be ordered along the lines of satisfaction, not the parameters of duty.

Unlike the self-hatred in which the mystics abased themselves to the greater glory of God, the conception of “poverty of spirit” propagated by the movement of the Free Spirit implied a relinquishment of the economy’s hold, with its congested and self-destructive pleasures, its imperatives to power and profit, its overall pollution of the market. To free oneself of socially inculcated ignorance, of a whole science based on individual unhappiness, is to start down the path closed off by the economy: that of *gai savoir*, of understanding through the pleasure principle.

The movement of the Free Spirit espoused an *amor fati*, not to be confused with fatalism, which made it incumbent upon everyone to embrace the will – mistakenly described as “divine” – which lay within them. God and the denatured nature that he had wrought would thus be transcended by a subjectivity which by transforming itself would come to *be* the meaning of a universe restored to an ever-expanding life.

The true lesson of the *indifferentia*, or *apatheia*, which so offended Ubertino of Casale is simply the need to lose all fear and all respect for the society of survival in order to pursue one’s own fulfillment as a microcosm with every chance of living life to the fullest.<sup>10</sup>

What seems to have militated against the Free Spirit movement, judging by the testimony we have, was its tendency to intellectualize. This pitfall awaits whenever mystified consciousness is delivered up to the scalpel of theoretical criticism without likewise suffering the devastating critique of a life lived without restraint.

Today we may legitimately assume that the only proper way to deal with the negative (apart from residing in a thought which, no matter how acute, remains alienated, and therefore equally negative), will be found instead in a vitality capable of dissolving the negative drop by drop.<sup>11</sup> In fact it is not the battle against the negative that has to be won, but the triumph of life over a dying society.

Only those things that strengthen life can defeat everything that corrupts it. The laughter that destroys the seriousness of all authority and the gift that sweeps away the fundamental value of exchange both participate in an alchemy of the self whose crowning glory is love, the philosopher’s stone in which existence comes back to life and genuinely creates itself.

### *Refined Love as the Basis for the Creation of a New World*

- 104 The totality of love is contained in the love of life; the corruption of one entails the corruption of the other. Since nothing is more incompatible with economy as love and life, their shared fate condemns them to unfulfillment, and millenarian opinion regards them as ephemeral. In the order of things – which is the inhuman fate of a humanity composed of producers and buyers – life and love do not, and cannot, exist.

Yet the world seems to be changing course. Not because it is fearful, or hopeful, of the Last Days. Nor is it due to revolutionary upheavals, which – even to those who thought they were leading them – were never more than the permutations of a changing market. The collapse of our civilization and the denaturation of the earth are suddenly

“elsewhere” and “once upon a time” for all who refuse to rot in the decrepitude of profitability and competitive power. If life is welling up and is threatening the laboriously programmed routines of the thousand daily dead, it is because survival can no longer contain it under the weight of its deception.

The pleasure of living, as we should know from children, no longer has to assert itself by paying tribute to the rhetoric of its failure. Despite all the old oppressions, love of the self – as revealed in childhood and in the renewed awareness of lovers – radiates a power for which industrial power, gathered into nuclear radiation, would be its fatal antithesis. For this reason I take the demands of love to constitute entirely, at all times and in all places, the sole alternative to market society.

Either the economy will succeed in submerging the living, or society will rely on the predominance of desires emancipated from their inversion in the market. Either we will all perish in the increasingly debilitating quest for profit and prestige, or the primacy of pleasure will destroy work through creativity, exchange through the gift, guilt through innocence, the will to power through the will to live, anguished satisfaction through the natural rhythm of pleasure and displeasure.

A wager is set. At stake, on the one hand, is the tendency to abandon the best for the worst; on the other is the hope held out for the transmutation of the individual id. On the one hand: self-contempt, the virtue that the slave takes pride in, and that lets him give himself over to someone else – politicians, priests, doctors, psychoanalysts, thinkers, institutions, governments. On the other: the art of pleasure, patiently loosened from the grip of death.

The movement of the Free Spirit asked the question at the historical moment when the market process was just beginning to accelerate. The end of the twentieth century will hear the answer in the final implosion of the machine that removes what is living from the individual. But in the words perilously wrung from the language of God, and in the words derived today by a life that has no recognized meaning, there is the same cyclone of pleasure that sweeps through history with timeless violence. The quest for a love discovered in the pure material of humanity is the basis for the universal measure of a radically new society.

105 The world has merely changed in accordance with the laws of economics. The time has come to create a world in accordance with the harmony of pleasures. In its most original form, the movement of the Free Spirit uses the protoplasmic energy of life<sup>12</sup> as the basis for its magnum opus. This consists of the transmutation of the *materia prima* – the id – which is led through successive purifications, to a fusion in which pleasure, unable to tolerate anything but itself, has absolute power to trace from the heart the only worthwhile path of destiny.

This oneiric project, in which everyone will take part, is the only reality that can authorize humanity to turn the world upside-down before it is crushed by its absurdity. There seems to be only one way to break down the stubborn resignation with which so many people continue to desire and venerate that which kills them. Communication must be established between the seeds of life present everywhere and nourished – as plants are nourished by green thumbs – by the intensity of attention each individual gives to the refinement of his own pleasures.

The philosopher's stone is at the heart of the experience of love, recalling humanity to the life from which it has been separated by the economy. It is there that the body learns to abolish guilt and discover innocence. It is there that the fragmentation into mental and physical principles is overcome, for the hand devoted to sensuality and the intellect devoted to the sensitive consciousness of pleasure<sup>13</sup> share in the alchemy that Gustav Meyrinck describes as inverting understanding: introducing that of the body into the mind and that of the mind into the body. There, finally, in outline, is the universe of the gift. It is not the sacrifice implied by the law of exchange, but love of the self emancipated from individualistic selfishness and its exclusive appropriations; self-love that is enriched by what it offers.

Yet the trials of survival – the negative – are so numerous that it takes an absolute love of life, if not an irrational and mad conviction, to reach the heart of love. To arrive at oneself one must begin with oneself. And this can happen only by leaving behind the senseless struggle of contending day after day with the constraints of work and money, by escaping the age-old snares of fear and criticism, and by freeing ourselves of the various trappings that anchor us to the old world.

Each individual is his own fate. It is impossible to premeditate or predestine my fate apart from the surges and the undertows of my will to live. This, at least, is what I intend to bet all my chips on. But who cannot claim to harbor some of those shadowy black figures that lead one to the stake? Bewitching elements of survival control even the gestures that exorcise them. The space and time allowed for life is very limited.

Yet nothing can stop me from searching out that strange crowd of people who inhabit the shadows of the scaffolds, the darkness of prisons and factories, the secret places of the city, or the forests from which the Papagenos and Papagenas have yet to emerge. It is they who have lived and are still trying to live by forsaking the imperatives of survival. That crowd is a part of us, and lives within us. To hear their voices we need only listen below the vain cawing of death.



# NOTES

## PART ONE: FROM THE TWILIGHT OF THE BUREAUCRATS TO THE DAWN OF DIVINE ECONOMICS

1. Hunting weapons were transformed into commodities and into the defense of commodities, and gave rise to the most dehumanized of all social groups: soldiers, cops, executioners, the people who do the dirty jobs. It may be that in the Mesolithic era the first exclusive appropriation of hunting grounds following changes in climate, which disturbed the natural profusion of berries and fruits, encouraged the transition to an economy of exchange.

2. The third element, the soul, or double, is the mythic consciousness of life projected onto another existence.

3. It is significant that the religious deformation of the totality of life – the *Magna Mater* and its patriarchal form, the great god Pan – is manifested through the unleashing of terror, through a storm of panic.

4. Thus Neanderthal man, not to mention the producers of the economic era (from 8000 B.C. to the present day) who prepare to die of hunger and boredom – which represent them – in front of the television.

5. This is why there is no radical language. At best there is only a language that, by emphasizing the line that separates it from life, by asserting itself everywhere, gives life the job of erasing it.

6. Christianity has never practiced the virtue of tolerance (except

today, in its collapse) because, unlike ancient Rome, it has put a market value on its spiritual product. The missionary rides on the coattails of the colonist so that he can hang the deadly sign of Christ everywhere, as an absolute mark of the imposed price.

7. The only major thought produced by Christianity is that which has been extricated from it using the weapons of Greek dialectic: John Scotus Erigena, Johannes Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa and Jacob Boehme.

#### PART TWO: THE CHURCH STRUGGLES TO EVOLVE

1. Whence the name chosen by Giles of Canter's group in Brussels: *Homines Intelligentiae* (the Men of Intelligence).

2. Joachim of Fiore, *Concordia novi ac veteris testamenti* (1200), II<sup>2</sup>.5.21a, and III<sup>1</sup>.7.28c.

3. Even though, during internal bureaucratic struggles, perfectly indoctrinated and sincerely Christian clerics were reproached for feigning faith, the accusation was made often enough to show that the Church did not believe in a faith spontaneously practiced as a result of some natural virtue.

4. The Church has no meaning if the world ceases to be identified with a religious form. Even the State and its various manifestations of hierarchized power survive at the cost of a reality tirelessly reduced to the economy and its social contract.

5. Jean Bordenave and Michel Vialelle, *Aux racines du mouvement cathare: La mentalité religieuse des paysans de l'Albigeois médiéval* (Toulouse: Privat, 1973).

6. The human grandeur produced by the Romans is still impressive in the twentieth century. It continues to exorcise its fundamental baseness by perpetuating the cult of the military will – that stiffness of the mechanized body that judges, oppresses and condemns adherents to social contempt or incarceration.

7. Here is a model of pure abstraction from the world and the self, perpetuated in the suicidal behavior of the priests of radicalism.

8. The bishop of Lyons very quickly opposed Peter Waldo's reforms.

9. The trial instituted by Nicholas V to exterminate the Fraticelli gave new currency, with the authority of the holy inquisitor Giovanni da Capestrano, to legends of the sexual promiscuity rites (*barilotto*) and the murder of children born as a consequence.

10. Angelo Clareno, *Historia septem tribulationum ordinis minorum* (Rome, 1908).

11. Joseph de Guibert, *Documenta ecclesiastica christianae perfectionis* (Rome, 1931).

12. Eugenio Anagnine, *Fra Dolcino e il movimento ereticale all'inizio del Trecento* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1964). For all the desacralized intentions of the Bolsheviki's proletarian collectivism and the nationalist collectivism of fascism, both continue to obey the religious form characteristic of the structure of the agrarian mode of production. The dominance of agriculture in Russia, and industrialized Germany's dream of a return to the land, meet in the bureaucratic uniformity of the State.

13. Auguste Jundt, *Histoire du panthéisme populaire au Moyen Age et au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Sandoz and Fischbacher, 1875), pp. 45–46.

14. Romana Guarnieri, *Il Movimento del Libero Spirito: Testi e Documenti* (Rome: Edizioni de Storia e Letteratura, 1965), p. 427.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 459.

16. The sublime function of the spirit still survives. Intellectuality, its desacralized form, continues to lead the flock of simple people – citizens, proletarians, electors – from left to right and from right to left, treating them as completely feeble-minded; it follows that those who govern them have, at best, the intelligence of imbeciles.

#### PART THREE: THE PRINCIPAL MANIFESTATIONS OF THE MOVEMENT OF THE FREE SPIRIT FROM THE THIRTEENTH TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

1. Auguste Jundt, *Histoire du panthéisme populaire au Moyen Age et au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1875), pp. 20–21.

2. Germaine Catherine Capelle, *Amaury de Bène: Etude sur son panthéisme formel* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1932).

3. Born around 1180 Caesarius of Heisterbach entered the Cistercian monastery at Heisterbach in 1198 or 1199. Interested in both visible and invisible phenomena Caesarius was obsessed with the devil, whom he was continually trying to expel, two centuries before the witch-hunters created a host of panic lurking in fields, towns and the subconscious. Caesarius was responsible for the education of novices, and he left a number of pedagogic treatises.

4. Caesarius emphasizes age, knowledge and theological responsibility, qualities that make the accusation of using the intellect for purposes hostile to the Church much more sensitive.

5. William Aurifex (that is, Goldsmith). This may be a pseudonym or, perhaps, an allusion to alchemical activity. According to the chronicler William the Breton his untimely zeal aroused the suspicions of the Church. That he is called a "prophet" seems to indicate that he propagated the ideas of Joachim of Fiore in a radical form, almost fifty years before Gerard of Borgo San Donnino.

6. Ursines, near Saint-Cloud (Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, "Un fragment du procès des amauriciens," in *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* [Paris: J. Vrin, 1950-51], vol. 18, p. 332).

7. He was one of the first to express (at the stake) the idea of the realization of God in man.

8. Lorris, according to Barthélemy Hauréau, *Histoire de la philosophie scolastique* (Paris: Durand et Pedone-Lauriel, 1872-80).

9. Caesarius of Heisterbach, in Josephus Strange (ed.), *Dialogus miraculorum* (Cologne: H. Lempertz, 1851), vol. 1, ch. 22. The documents translated constitute only a fraction of what is still to be discovered and published. But they are enough to correct the opinion that several centuries of religious addiction have been imposed on minds always ready to forget life, which they claim to control. Readers are free to interpret them however they wish. I, for my part, am quite happy

to draw on anything that contains traces of life and the passionate use that can be made of it today.

10. Peter of Corbeil.

11. Rudolph was later awarded, for his denunciation of them, the position of cantor in the church of Cambrai.

12. Les Champeaux was just beyond the Porte Saint-Honoré, where Les Halles now stands (d'Alverny, "Un fragment," vol. 18, p. 328, n.4). In fact, ten of the accused went to the stake on November 19, 1209: William of Poitiers; Bernard, the only one to have been arrested in Paris; William the Goldsmith; Stephen the deacon; Stephen, Deacon of Vieux-Corbeil; Stephen, priest of La Celle-Saint-Cloud; John, priest of Occines; Dudon, the priest and private clerk to Amaury; Elmange the acolyte; and Odo the deacon. They died without showing any signs of repentance. According to the *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* (Heinrich Seuce Denifle and Aemilio Chatelain, *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* [Paris, 1889], vol. 8, pp. 70-71), "Bernard dared to assert that he could not be consumed by the fire nor tortured by any punishment insofar as he was a being possessing existence, as he was God by virtue of the very fact that he existed [literally: "he said that he was God insofar as he was an existent being, because what he was was in God"]." Four were condemned to life imprisonment: Ulric, Peter of Saint-Cloud, Master Guérin and Stephen of Vieux-Corbeil.

13. Women and simple people were treated like mindless animals, a flock that had been led away from the paths of the Church by bad shepherds inspired by the devil and insurgent nature. Once back in the bosom of the Church, under the control of new secular priests, most of the accused were plunged, through a mixture of terror and clemency, into a state of submission in which it was easy to persuade them to confess and inform. Caesarius tells of one of these "truths" propagated by the Church in order to end the lies that had gained widespread currency among the people: "As they [the condemned] were being led to punishment such a furious storm arose that nobody doubted that the

air was being stirred up by the beings who had seduced these men, now about to die, into their great error. That night the man who had been their chief knocked at the door of a certain woman recluse. Too late he confessed his error and declared that he was now an important guest in hell and condemned to eternal fires" (Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, rev. and enl. ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1970], pp. 152-53).

14. William the Breton, "Gesta Philippi Augusti," in H. François Delaborde (ed.), *Oeuvres de Rigord et de Guillaume le Breton* (Paris: Renouard, 1882-85), vol. 1.

15. M. Bouquet (ed.), *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France* (Paris, 1738-1876), vol. 16, p. 175.

16. Today, the dominant meaning still condemns as unreal anything that does not belong to the mechanisms of orthodoxy, and all scientific, political, social and economic heterodoxies.

17. Johannes Nauclerus, *Chronica* (Cologne, 1544), p. 912.

18. This is where Johannes Eckhart was born in 1260.

19. Livarius Oliger, "De Secta Spiritus Libertatis, in Umbria Saeculo XIV: Disquisitio et Documenta," in *Storia e Letteratura Raccolta di Studi et Testi* (Rome, 1943), vol. 3, p. 101.

20. Petrus Comestor, *Scholastica historia Magistri Petri Comestoris sacre Scripture seriem breuem nimis et expositam exponentis* (Paris: Ichan Frelon, 1513-19).

21. Philip the Chancellor, *In psalterium davidicum CCXXX sermones* (Paris, 1523), vol. 2.

22. The first studies and publications of the supporters of the movement of the Free Spirit were the works of Protestants: Gottfried Arnold, Mosheim, Bayle and Beausobre in the eighteenth century; Preger, Jundt, and Döllinger in the nineteenth. They were seen as antisacramental mystics, hostile to Rome and slandered by the Church. Hartmann, Eloi (hostile to Luther) and Quintin (hostile to Calvin) alone

were judged to be dishonorable. The passion for discovering unpublished material and for compilation (as in the cases of Baluze and Bouquet) should also be noted.

23. The articles of the accusation were read to the accused at their first appearance before the court. The *Capitula Inquisitionis* summed up, point by point, the facts that had been the subject of the *diffamatio*.

24. d'Alverny, "Un fragment," pp. 331-32.

25. The first point pushes the specious logic of the theologians to the point of parody. This is not an exposition, it is the notes of an interrogation, perhaps put into order by Garnier. The questions are not recapitulated by the notary of the officiality but develop in the succession and repetition of the arguments and quotations. The uneven rhythm marks a process of flight, deviation and then attack by the accused when he is cornered, as the council's hunt forces its quarry to give himself away in a final confusion. The beginning, which bases the omnipresence of God on everyone's fear of its denial, gives the tone of this corrupt irony, and the proto-atheism *avant la lettre* of its pantheistic philosophy: if God is everywhere, he is also nowhere. Like God and the devil, good and evil have no meaning in comparison with living things. Everything here fades away before the importance the Amaurians attribute to their own existence.

26. Having only a rather poor knowledge of biblical texts, and not having been able to overcome a sense of repugnance toward a compilation of all the most ignoble opponents of the entitlement to life, I cannot guarantee that the quotations will conform to the version, which is falsified, of the ecclesiastical agents.

27. Scholastic jargon, of course, but scarcely more ridiculous than the sententious nonsense of Heidegger, Sartre and other jargonmongers.

28. Apart from the intellectual verbosity in the first point, section two explains, in the language of simple people, the practical truth that "whatever you do, there is no sin." Thus the priests of La Celle-Saint-Cloud, Vieux-Corbeil and Ursines should be in agreement with their

parishioners, as the interrogation of John confirms. The same John said that he had not completely understood some other points of the schedule, probably the first section.

29. The term, tinged with contempt, designates the simple search for amorous pleasure. For Gratian husbands who wanted pleasure in their sexual relationships without concerning themselves with procreation were fornicators. It sometimes happened that the “sin against nature,” a term reserved for sodomy and bestiality, was used to designate the use of “poisons of sterility,” which remove all fear from sexual pleasure.

30. Knowledge here gives the freedom of nature a good conscience. It permits animality to be transcended by freeing it from fear and blame.

31. God here seems to be rather like George Groddeck’s id. The key to what they call “truth” is, in fact, in the lived authenticity of “Become what you are.” The same idea appears in Quintin of Tournai.

32. The parish priest philosopher succeeds the theologian here to guide simple people toward knowledge. The strikes against rationality by Christian mythology cast doubt on the notion that it was not until Meslier or the libertines of the seventeenth century that any atheism is found in ancien régime mentalities. Beneath the claim of the Amaurians to be the enlightened intellectual guides of simple people can be seen the popular feeling that there is no heaven or hell, just a life to lead in the best way possible, while warding off the bad.

33. Whoever becomes aware that he is by nature divine and cannot sin learns to remove the obstacles to sexual pleasure until he attains “paradisiacal serenity.”

34. The diversity of belief is abolished in the consciousness that God fulfills himself in man. Similarly rites, sacraments, sin and penance lose their currency.

35. The laughter of the living, as opposed to religious morosity and its macabre excitements, justifies the reproach of Angela of Foligno. Denouncing those who demanded the spirit of freedom, the blessed Angela stated: “True love does not incite to laughter, nor to uncontrolled

eating or drinking, nor to any other vain elation” (Angela of Foligno, in Michele Faloci Pulignani (ed.), *L’Autobiografia e gli scritti della beata Angela da Foligno*. Cited in Romana Guarnieri, *Il Movimento del libero spirito* [Rome: Edizioni de Storia e Letteratura, 1965], p. 411). “Uncontrolled” and “vain elevation” mean: pleasure rather than necessity.

36. Notably, the theologians trying the case.

37. There is no resurrection, for Christ or anyone else; all life is here, and to create yourself free of all restraint and blame is to actually exist better than God.

38. He was aware only that he was God.

39. Amaury of Bène’s thesis, the weakness of which is in marked contrast to the other propositions, is adequate proof that it is part of an enterprise designed to discredit him as a thinker. Thus, John Gerson accused poor Jan van Ruysbroeck of belonging to the movement of the Free Spirit, when, in fact, the latter ceaselessly denounced the “false mystics.”

40. Paragraphs nine and ten concern the doctrine of Master Godin, a philosopher whose ideas are similar to those of David of Dinant and to pantheism, which, in its reduction of divinity to nature, is the atheism of the Middle Ages. Admittedly what is meant by nature here is not the object-nature of science, the inert material from which capitalist exploitation profits. It is a living nature, a process of energies that are nothing if not absolutely materialized, by which I mean they operate concretely.

41. According to Godin, God would therefore not escape natural destruction.

42. The idea of a god who is not the cause of evil belongs to the Cathar theology of the good god and the bad god (the Demiurge).

43. The sovereignty Godin believed he incarnated as an individual is here expressed in Christian jargon.

44. The philosopher’s rationalism rejects the Trinity and argues that if God – as Father and Spirit – became man in Christ, he did the

same thing for every human being. The Spirituals have the advantage over the common man, blinded by the Church, of having become aware of such a presence. This is a radical version of Joachism.

45. Point eleven amalgamates several conceptions so they can be condemned as a whole under the name “Amaurian”: thinkers close to David of Dinant; philosophers who make reference to the “natural books” of Aristotle, which the Church had condemned; even Cathars like the Ortliebians of Strasbourg, a little-known group who practiced ascetism and who, according to the *Determinatio* of Albertus Magnus, made a distinction between internal and external bodies (Albertus Magnus, *Determinatio de novo spiritu*; see Herman Haupt, “Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sekte vom freien Geiste und des Beghartentums,” in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* [Gotha, 1885], vol. 7). The development that follows stems from the Inquisitors’ concern to understand the possible directions of the interrogation.

46. Garnius von Rochefort, in Clemens Baeumker (ed.), “Contra amaurianos,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte zur Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1926), vol. 24.

47. William the Breton, “Gesta Philippi Augusti.”

48. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum*, ed. Josephus Strange (Cologne: H. Lempertz, 1851).

49. Denifle and Chatelain, *Chartularium*, vol. 8, pp. 70–71.

50. Abbot of Saint-Victor in Paris from 1203 until his death in 1229.

51. The criticism of hypocrisy relates to ordinary anticlericalism, which could not tolerate priests using their sacred mission as a cover for their debauchery (acknowledged, admittedly, as sins). The Church cleverly turned this against the heretics – the “foxes,” as Bernard of Clairvaux called them, who had no alternatives beyond dissimulation or the stake.

52. The identification with God, as the Abbot of Saint-Victor understands it, implies the pretense of assuming in oneself the perfection of survival. This is what a good number of heresiarchs did, who, like

the pope, founded their tyrannical power on a religion that was their own property (Tanchelm, Nicholas of Basel, Conrad Schmidt, Martin of Mainz, John of Leiden, David Joris, among others). The process of transcending a God who rules over the survival of men in a denatured nature is radically incomprehensible – beyond understanding – for a henchman of religion.

53. Joseph de Guibert, *Documenta*.

54. This is probably the period of Eckhart’s first visit to Paris.

55. Hence, the pointlessness of theology and its bitter quarrels.

56. This is what the very Christian Menéndez y Pelayo calls “giving the soul to God and the body to the devil” (Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles* [Madrid: V. Suarez, 1929], p. 526).

57. This proposition implies not only the rejection of a hereafter to be feared, but also a critique of fear, that inheritance from the animal kingdom that both spiritual and temporal power perpetuate in their socialized form.

58. Jundt, *Histoire*, p. 35.

59. Jules Frederichs, *Robert le Bougre, premier inquisiteur général en France (1<sup>ère</sup> moitié du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, University of Ghent, collection of works published by the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters (Ghent, 1892), fasc. 6.

60. If the latter was a Beguine, her condemnation marked the beginning of the repression of the movement of the Free Spirit, which was spreading in the beguinages.

61. Hadewijch, *Vision 13*, in *Hadewych: Visioenen*, ed. Jozef van Mierlo (Louvain: Vlaamsche Boekenhalle, 1924–25), p. 179.

62. Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum universale de apibus* (Douai, 1627).

63. The prevalence of subversive ideas among weavers, frequently noted by historians, is further confirmed by the doctrine of John Hartmann, called “the Weaver.”

64. Aleydis was burned in Cambrai around 1235. In 1239 Guyard

presided over the execution of the Cathars of Mont-Saint-Wimer.

65. A letter of 1257 published by Frédéricq indicates that the diocese was in debt as a result of the costs involved in the pursuit of heretics. This was not an isolated case: in 1247, Pope Innocent III made the Dominicans of Besançon responsible for suppressing heresy in Burgundy and Lorraine. In 1255 they asked Alexander IV if they might be released from their mission, as they were experiencing financial difficulties and other obstacles, the nature of which was not stated (Paul Frédéricq, *Corpus documentorum Inquisitionis haereticae pravitatis Neerlandicae* [Ghent: J. Vuylsteke, 1889–1900], vol. 1, pp. 128–29).

66. Frédéricq, *Corpus*, vol. 1, p. 144.

67. Like most voluntary poverty movements, William's was opposed to the sale of indulgences. "Before death," writes Colette Braeckman, "man had four means of redeeming his soul from hell. Gratian's decree cites prayers for the dead, masses celebrated by priests, alms and legacies to ecclesiastical institutions. In the course of the thirteenth century there were great changes in the services surrounding the dead. Cumulative and anniversary masses were said for the soul of the dead person. They were no longer provided by the Church, but financed by a sum the dying man left for that purpose. This means of salvation was, from then on, for the rich only. In remission of his sins, the sick man would distribute alms. If he did not, the living would do so after his death, a practice that brought with it abuses that were condemned by the councils from the thirteenth century on.... At Lateran IV, Innocent III was worried by the extension of commercial activities, and took measures to limit the duration of indulgences.... The Council of Béziers, in 1246, condemned money collectors who promised liberation from hell at bargain prices" (Colette Braeckman, "Guillaume Cornelisz," in *Bulletin de la société d'histoire du protestantisme belge* 9.4 [1982], pp. 76–91).

68. Almsgiving was criticized as being the least costly way of ensuring the rich a clear conscience. When it came from their surplus it did

not reduce their wealth. Another proposition declared that "no one who has two coats of the same sort can be saved." The Church, of course, rebelled against a theory in which scorn for possessions was a guarantee of spiritual wealth, and the acquisition of possessions entailed the impoverishment of human status. "At the University of Paris, in 1256, the regent defended the traditional theory of the secular Church against an adept of voluntary poverty, Master T... With examples drawn from the lives of Saint Thomas and Saint Ambrose, he reminded his audience that the sharing of goods with the poor was an act of mercy rather than a total renunciation of worldly possessions" (*ibid.*).

69. Unlike the Church, which draws a distinction between the permitted possession of wealth and the mortal sin of avarice.

70. Stealing from the rich is not theft, as long as it provides the poor with subsistence they are otherwise denied. The same defense of theft turns up frequently among the Beguines and Beghards.

71. The idea of damnation seems to imply, as the Amaurians believed, that hell exists only here on earth. It is reserved for those who remain ignorant of the possibility of paradise, an ignorance which, according to Cornelius, stems from private ownership.

72. This proposition, like the ones that follow, bears the mark of the movement of the Free Spirit. The end of the world of possession implies the end of sin.

73. It must be remembered that *fornication* is the clerical translation of "the art of loving," the refinement of which seems to have been a fundamental preoccupation of the thirteenth century. The songs of the troubadours and trouvères were later eclipsed by the songs of death, which gradually proclaimed the triumph of Christianity on the eve of its desacralization by the Renaissance.

74. The critique of money is already beginning to give way to one of power, social representation and spectacle.

75. The prohibition against making love to a pregnant wife, apart from offering women a reason for refusing, takes on a further meaning

in relation to the proposition denying sins against nature, which, to the clerical mind of the thirteenth century signified not only homosexual or bestial relations, but any erotic relation not involved in procreation: mutual masturbation, *coitus interruptus* or *reservatus*, sodomy and so on. Here a politics of abortion is indirectly encouraged by William Cornelius, who must have been able to see the disastrous consequences of pregnancy for workers in the weaving trade and for the very poor.

76. The freedom of nature practiced in the lower class not only implies equal rights between the sexes, it also requires – in Cornelius’s conception – a real respect for women far removed from the misogyny of the bourgeoisie and the writers of fabliaux. It does not base itself on the worship of the object of seduction, but on a practical code of courtesy in which the woman – whether she comes from a poor background or whether she has embraced poverty voluntarily – has the right to give herself to, or refuse, whomever she likes. (There were many women workers exhausted by their jobs for whom the solicitations of exigent males were an additional burden.) Hence the restriction “three times a week.”

77. Frédéricq, *Corpus*, vol. 1, pp. 119–20.

78. Lust (*luxure*) is the term Thomas of Cantimpré used to designate freedom of love. The attempt to refine the promiscuity that reigned among the poor was senseless to Thomas, who, under the influence of his frigid God, could not conceive of anything except the deathly rigidity of chastity and its obscene release (*ibid.*, p. 120).

79. By allusion to the *Summa de catharis et pauperibus Lugduno*, attributed to the Dominican inquisitor Rainurius Sacconi, a Cathar from the North of Italy who converted to Catholicism in 1245 and started to persecute his former comrades with evangelical zeal.

80. Félix Vernet dates the text between 1262 and 1280 (“Les Frères du Libre-Esprit,” in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* [Paris: Letouzey, 1920], vol. 6, cols. 800–809); Raoul Allier puts it between 1259 and

1262 (“Les Frères du Libre-Esprit,” in *Religions et sociétés* [Paris: F. Alcan, 1905]).

81. In his *Formicarius* the Dominican John Nider (1380–1438) claims, around 1435, that he possesses a *Manual* by Albertus designed for use against “a plague that seeks to adopt the guise of liberty.” These people teach doctrines so blasphemous and so contrary to the Church and the social order that the chronicler does not dare to relate them. He is probably talking about a fuller version (now lost) of the notes outlined in the *Determinatio* (John Nider, *Formicarius* [Strasbourg, 1517], vol. 3, ch. 5, p. 45).

82. Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen in Mittelalter* (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Emil Ebering, 1935; repr. Hildesheim, 1961), p. 400.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 388.

84. Martin Crusius, *Annales suevici* (Frankfurt, 1595), vol. 3, ch. 2, p. 14.

85. Martin Crusius cites the case of the convent at Kircheim unter Teck in Swabia, where, in 1214, eighty-six women were living without observing any precise rule. They asked the bishop of Constance several times to institute the Augustinian rule for them, but he did not accede to their request until 1247.

86. “New spirit,” “spirit of freedom,” “freedom through the spirit,” “free spirit” all designate, in the wake of Albertus’s *Determinatio* and with the ecclesiastical desire to catalog them as specific heresies, movements that, from the starting point of the freedom of nature, wanted either to demand it for its own sake – as the permitted release of repressed desires – or to refine it into a system of socialized love-making, experienced as permanent creation. (Examples of these can be seen in their desacralized and mechanistic form, first in the projects of Sade, and second in Charles Fourier.) The Church, which recognized only the existence of the spirit, saw perversion in Saint Paul’s statement: “Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” In his biography of Thomas Aquinas, William of Tocco gives one chapter the title:



“On the Error of the Free Spirit and the Third State of the World.” There he condemns the new spirit examined by Albertus, the spirit of freedom of the Spirituels and the Fraticelli, and the third age of Joachim of Fiore.

87. The response indicates a desire on the part of the inquisitor to bring the accused back into the framework of Christian mythology. Belief in angels, devils, hell and the Fall is current only among those who do not recognize God in man.

88. This proposition belongs to Catharism, not to the movement of the Free Spirit.

89. The idea of God as a God of justice and fear is rejected and realized instead as a principle of bounty and natural gratuity. This is the sentiment that Francis of Assisi tried to disseminate within the Church, and which his dissolute followers, the Fraticelli, attributed to nature.

90. Compare with the refusal of work in the group William of Saint-Amour describes.

91. Compare with the confession of John of Brünn.

92. A Cathar, Waldensian or Apostolic proposition.

93. The prosecutor continues to use the notion of sin, although it is rejected by the accused. The fatalist argument, as in Quintin of Tournai, justifies the incitement to “follow nature.”

94. Freedom from guilt, and self-love, creating a feeling of plenitude in the individual, are expressed in the grace of incarnating God.

95. It is in the body as the site of pleasure and displeasure that the Holy Spirit, that is, God, is incarnate.

96. The Church tried to use the cult of the Virgin Mary to prevent the renewal of life expressed in the thirteenth century by the nascent (and temporary) supremacy of women. The patriarchal contempt for feminine existence was responsible for this. It is revealing that one of the most enthusiastic devotees of the Virgin, Jacopo of Todi, wrote fiercely misogynistic poems and, after the death of his wife, devoted

himself to the cult of Mary, this mother purified to the point of virginity by divine adultery.

That devotion to Mary was ridiculed from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century is confirmed by the constant repression that occurred during that period. Two cases, out of many, will illustrate this: on April 1, 1275, Mathilde Billarde “for the villeness she uttered and the words against the Mother God . . . was banished and placed into exile and pilloried at Tournai” (Frédéricq, *Corpus*, vol. 1, p. 140); and Jacob Acarin, from Chaussé-Notre-Dame in Hainaut was sentenced to three years in prison in 1451 for saying: “Why be ashamed? Our Lady had no shame. She had feelings just like other people, for she was married as we are. Do you think she was a virgin? Nay” (*ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 231).

An attempt at a feminine Church appeared after the death of Wilhelmina of Bohemia (1282), venerated as an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, and founder of the group known as the Family of Love. The Church put an end to that competing enterprise, with its female hierarchy and its own rites, by burning the Wilhelminites.

97. Cited in Haupt, “Beiträge.” The statements of the nuns and lay members of the New Spirit in Swabia – and perhaps in those convents “that enjoyed the freedom of the Fraticelli” – is adequate demonstration of the source of those “effusions of divine love” praised by devout commentators. Even if the intellectualism of figures such as Beatrice of Nazareth and Mechtild of Magdeburg (Mechtild of Magdeburg, *Offenbarungen der Schwester Mechtild von Magdeburg oder das fliessende Licht der Gottheit*, ed. Gall Morel [Regensburg: G.J. Manz, 1869]) transcends a vague sensual experience, there were, nonetheless, companions around them whom the movement of the Free Spirit had made God or Christ and who “knew carnally” their female companions, simultaneously virgins and mothers, offering the milk of their ardor until they fainted.

98. Stephanus Axters, *Geschiedenis van de vroomheid in de Nederlanden* (Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1953), p. 27.

99. Beatrice of Nazareth, *Seven manieren van minnen*, ed. Ruypens and van Mierlo (Louvain: Vlaamsche Boekenhalle, 1926).

100. Van Mierlo, "Hadewijch," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 5 (1924), p. 269.

101. Hadewijch, *Vision 3*, trans. Columba Hart, in *Hadewijch: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 272.

102. Hadewijch, *Vision 7*, in *ibid.*, p. 281.

103. This is an old tradition, since the first ecclesiastical exegetes competed pathologically with each other to transform the epithalamium of the Song of Songs into a cerebral flirtation between divine Husband and the virginal Church.

104. Similarly the English translation of Margaret's *The Mirror of Simple Souls* (Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà, 1968) goes straight from verse 2 to chapter 126.

105. *Dit sijn die volmaete gheeleeft ghelijc minnen die Hadewych sach elc met sinen seraphinen.*

106. Minor friars, or Franciscans.

107. In 1304 the Franciscan Jacopo of Bevagna was denounced to the Inquisition by Clare of Montefalco. Oliger has published the Latin text of their exchange.

– "Clare, for four years I enjoyed the greatest peace and rest, for in no situation did I experience trouble or change, and I attained such a level, found such perfection, that I seemed to recognize God in all things, and I was ceaselessly under his spell.

– Take care, my brother! You think you are in an exalted position? Take care how you come down, watch out for your fall!

– Let God ascend, for I care neither for what he raises up nor for what he gives [Oliger, *De Secta*].

108. *Ibid.*, pp. 115–16.

109. Ignoring the killing of the pope, which is within the logic of the victim (even for Ubertino of Casale), raping women and girls, included on the agenda of soldiers of all periods and of those who ape

their behavior, is less in accord with the movement of the Free Spirit than with the mentality of its detractors.

110. Compare with Margaret Porete: "The soul has no discomfort about its past sins, nor about the sufferings God suffered for it, nor for the sins and discomforts in which those close to them remain."

111. Ubertino of Casale, *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu* (Venice, 1485).

112. Frédéricq, *Corpus*, vol. I, p. 166 and vol. II, p. 37.

113. Probably Philippa of Hainaut.

114. Margaret, in Guarnieri, *Il Movimento*, p. 617.

115. Master of theology at the University of Paris from 1265, and Canon of Paris, Tournai and then Liège, where he died in 1306.

116. Margaret, in Guarnieri, *Il Movimento*, p. 586.

117. William of Nangis, in H. Géraud (ed.), *Chronique Latine* (Paris: J. Renouard, 1843).

118. The order to hasten death was accorded only in return for an attitude of contrition. Stephen Dolet, who had unconvincingly demonstrated his repentance at the stake, was invited by the executioner to hold forth more loudly; otherwise, he would not be strangled, but would perish in the flames.

119. "The fact that Christ is blessed will not render me blessed, as long as I myself do not become Christ, as long as I am not myself born the Son of God" or "Why was God made man? So that I could be born God, in his likeness." Eckhart must have heard of Margaret during one of his stays in Paris.

120. Margaret, in Guarnieri, *Il Movimento*.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

122. *Ibid.*, pp. 590–91.

123. *Ibid.*, pp. 630–35.

124. Van Mierlo, "Bloemardinne," in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique* (Paris: Letouzey, 1926).

125. H. van den Bogaert (Henricus Pomerius), in de Smet (ed.), *De origine Viridisvallis una cum vita B. Joann. Rusbrockii*, in *Annalecta*

*bollandiana* (Paris and Brussels, 1885), vol. 4.

126. The throne of silver recalls the magnificence of Walter, and the silk garments that the nuns of Schweidnitz wore under their hair-shirts. In the *Book of Two Men*, Rulmann Merswin also speaks of Beguines who “before accomplishing the praise of God through the mediation of the senses, dressed themselves in wonderful clothes.” He describes, elsewhere, the alchemical magisterium in which the union of the king and the queen forms the androgynous egg, the site of sexual pleasure in which separations are abolished under the double symbol of the elixir of youth and the universal stone of transmutation.

127. Frédéricq, *Corpus*, p. 186.

128. Similarly, around 1529, the Spanish Inquisition did not dare proceed against the Alumbrados of Seville because of the number of influential families belonging to the movement.

129. Jan van Ruysbroeck, *The Spiritual Espousals* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952).

130. Article 16 of the Bull of Condemnation of Eckhart: “God does not himself order any outward act.”

131. Franz Pfeiffer (ed.), “Swester Katrei, Meister Ekchartes Tohter von Strasburc,” in *Deutsche mystiker des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: G.J. Göschen, 1845–1857), vol. 2.

132. Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, *De Beghardis et Beguinabus commentarius* (Leipzig, 1790), p. 147.

133. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

134. Giovanni Domenico Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum novas et amplissima collection* (1759), vol. 23, p. 997.

135. By “illiterate” they meant simple people, but also anyone who was not a cleric or who did not know Latin.

136. Grundmann, *Religiöse*, p. 401.

137. In other words, for competing materially and spiritually with the mendicant orders. The archbishop of Cologne, who later prosecuted the Dominican Eckhart, supported the Franciscans, who supported the

Emperor, against the Dominicans, who were loyal to the pope.

138. That is, depending on the context: God is subject to the corruption of nature (Godin, the New Spirit in Swabia); God has been betrayed by the Church, its dissolute morals and its lust for profit (the argument of the advocates of spiritual poverty and the Spirituals, such as Michael of Cesena and Ubertino of Casale); God is abolished for those awakened to the divine spirit within them.

139. Moral perfection as understood by Pelagius, or the consciousness of being God and no longer being able to sin, whatever one does.

140. A proposition of heresiarchs like Segarelli or Nicholas of Basel.

141. A proposition implying the right to sexual pleasure.

142. The Church praises this sort of detachment whenever it concerns membership of a recognized monastic order.

143. A Cathar proposition, or at any rate one deriving from an ascetic movement (Jundt, *Histoire*, p. 48).

144. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

145. In the same year the Council of Mainz mentions secret meetings in secluded locations or in caves.

146. C. Baronius and O. Raynaldus, *Annales ecclesiastici una cum critica historico-chronologica* (Lucca, 1738–59), in *Annales ad annum 1311* 66.

147. The pope decided on the total suppression of the institution of the Beguines, a decree too severe, since it included the innocent as well as the guilty. He rescinded this decision himself, in a document published shortly afterward, in which he grants permission to orthodox Beguines of irreproachable morals to “serve God according to the inspiration of the Lord.”

148. These propositions do not appear to have been published immediately. It was only under John XXII that the edicts of the Council of Vienne came to the attention of the bishops, who thereafter vied with each other in the zeal of their repressiveness (Jundt, *Histoire*, pp. 50–51).

149. Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the later Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 209-10.

150. Johannes Heidenberg, known as Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516), Abbot of Sponheim.

151. A term used to designate the Beghards.

152. Membership in the Dominican order protected John against any other actions by the Inquisition, and made any potential revenge by the Beghards more difficult.

153. The Moravian city of Brno.

154. John hereby lends credence to the clerical attitude toward simple people, who put their trust in priests but are misled by a false friend.

155. The decision is, therefore, collective, not magisterial.

156. This initiation period (which lasted twelve years, according to John) is no different externally from the apostolic behavior of the Waldensians, but its meaning is quite different. After having experienced the Passion of Christ as a deprivation of the old world, the initiate gradually accedes to the divinity of the masters, to whom everything is due.

157. These ruses and compromises with discipline are characteristic of the second stage of initiation.

158. The recourse to asceticism in order to purge oneself of the solicitations of dominant society and to encourage the incarnation of God in the body was practiced primarily by Beghards and Beguines. Giles of Canter, Francisca Hernández, Eloi Pruystinck and Quintin of Tournai start from the freedom of nature and refine that by means of more complete pleasure.

159. That is, to the mendicant orders.

160. By conforming to apostolic doctrine, the novitiate stage offers three advantages: the Inquisition cannot obtain any admission other than the testimony of orthodox devotion from a novice; mendicancy supports the idleness and luxury of the masters; and, inured to society's

contempt for him, the initiate can yield, unreservedly, but not without some cunning, to the violence of release.

161. The individual claim postulates that everything belongs to us, because we have been dispossessed of everything. It is interesting to find this justified here in theological terms. As soon as man has become God by renouncing money he hastens the realization of God in society each time he deprives an owner of his goods and annihilates them by spending them. The opinion of William Cornelius that the poor have the right to steal from the rich is echoed in the idea that becoming God entails the end of *having*, which hinders the realization of *being*.

162. Money "sent into eternity" by being spent counterposes a consumer ethic to the rules of capitalism, six centuries before consumption inscribed itself into economic necessity.

163. The Trinity is resolved in the unity of man become God. According to the Beghards of Cologne the Father was incarnate in the Son, who, by being stripped of his earthly goods, was united with the Holy Spirit to become God on earth. Quintin of Tournai's idea that the death on the cross was purely a symbol suggests that Christ continued to live in accordance with the free life of men who have become God.

164. Lived experience is superior to all forms of dogma and to the impostures of reality reduced to an object.

165. He is no longer a creature of God, but God himself.

166. If "freedom of nature" is indeed the basis of the movement of the Free Spirit, there are different and divergent options depending on the individual's choice either to indulge in the release of oppressed nature or to transcend God and denatured nature by creating a human nature based on the free gift and on sensual pleasure.

167. This passage refers explicitly to the alchemical path. But, for the Beghards, God is not transcended. He is incarnate in the individual as the supreme release of the nature he oppresses. This is Sade's all-powerful tiger of nature.

168. An abortive method used in all the orthodox religious com-

munities. The only difference here is the rejection of guilt.

169. Because a priest, not living in freedom of spirit, believes in sin.

170. Or “until she is completely satisfied (*perficiet*).” As in Cornelius, and in courtly love, it is the woman who takes the initiative. The three signs reinstate the Trinity in the unity of sexual enjoyment. The sign of the cross is undone in a sign of life that aligns the nose (that is, the sex), the head and the heart.

171. The detail about Communion is probably a response to a question from Gallus, the inquisitor. The sentences that follow, indeed, show how little importance was accorded confession and Communion.

172. That is, when he ceases to be a created being and becomes the Creator.

173. Compare with Dolcino, as well as the Anabaptist tendency of the Münsterians and the supporters of Battenburg.

174. The perfection of the poor here takes an elitist turn. The asceticism of the initiation has paid for the right to enter a community that identifies with the tyrannical God of survival.

175. Potlach, or the consumption of goods, is an accelerated form of mercantile destruction. The annihilation of the earthly economy refers to the eternity of the celestial economy. The mentality of the Beghards of Cologne finds modern expression in suicidal hedonism, encouraged today by the pressure to consume, among those condemned to survival.

176. Compare with the Amaurian notion of charity.

177. The confession stops here. Gallus adds annotations taken at random from commentaries not indexed by the official notary.

178. John’s brother did not join the Dominican Order.

179. An argument taken up later by atheists.

180. When he rids himself of the preoccupations dictated by society and identifies his will with that of God, which he bears within him. This false will, which the movement of the Free Spirit encour-

aged people to break, is what Christianity calls “free will.”

181. In himself, who is its unity. The lived experience of subjectivity is opposed to the cleric’s abstraction.

182. Wilhem Wattenbach, “Über die Sekte der Brüder vom freien Geiste,” in *Sitzungsberichte der königlichen preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin, 1887), vol. 29, pp. 529–37.

183. Chemnitz, in Silesia. Today, temporarily, known as Karl-Marx-Stadt.

184. Probably after the name of its foundress.

185. The first witness. The mistresses, also called Marthas, were usually particularly careful to keep a distance between themselves and the novices. The novices’ reports of their secret activities derive mostly from imprudence or indiscretion.

186. Literally, “in a tunic that left her legs bare.” Compare with the ragged tunic described by John of Brünn.

187. Hedwig is here repeating one of the articles of the *Clementines*. There is no doubt, though, that, like Margaret Porete, Heilwige Bloemardine and Sister Katrei, the nuns of Schweidnitz behaved as though perfect.

188. The mistresses made the novice work every day, including Sundays and religious festivals.

189. Literally, “if any impurity befell her.”

190. Gertrude of Civitatis later admitted to having spent twenty-four years in the community. “Interrogated by the inquisitor, she answered in a tortuous, almost cryptic manner.” The novices considered her the principal spiritual authority of Schweidnitz.

191. The second witness.

192. The pseudo-Eckhartian lampoon *This Was Sister Katrei* was circulating there at this time.

193. The third witness.

194. Perhaps Gleiwitz, in Silesia.

195. The meaning given to the word *charity* by the movement of the

Free Spirit refers to sexual pleasure (*Fac mihi caritatem, conjaceas mihi*).

196. Painter, novice and fourth witness.

197. Either to attain the indifference of libertinism, or to reach a stage at which desire would be irrepressible and, to a certain extent, pure.

198. Compare with Francisca Hernández.

199. Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954).

200. Menéndez y Pelayo, *Historia*, p. 530.

201. John Hartmann shares with John of Brunn the idea that identification with God is identification with denatured nature, with the cruelty of release deceptively presented as liberation.

202. The consciousness in which God is perceived as a permanent flux of the being identified with the being of God, and released from all imperatives not proceeding from such an incarnation. Contrary to the refinement of love, which achieves transcendence of God and denatured nature, Hartmann chooses to identify with the God of inverted, economized life.

203. The detail of the altar, first mentioned by Kerling, reflects the fantasies of the ecclesiastical libido.

204. This misogynistic vulgarity, and the scholastic exploitation that follows reveal that a tacit agreement exists between the executioner and his victim about the God of patriarchy.

205. To “lose his way” means to conform to the demands of survival (appropriation, power, submission, guilt...), in contrast to strengthening subjectivity, which is meant to render him indifferent to the external world.

206. To take pleasure in each thing and opportunity – even in the bread and wine of Christian mythology – clears a path to the God one bears within oneself. With the possibility of all divinity ruled out today, it may be wise to consider such an option.

207. Walter Kerling, however, was not in a position to understand

that the richness of life is superior to money.

208. The inquisitor is being ironic about the effects of prison. However, torture does not seem to have been used.

209. Wattenbach, “Uber die Sekte,” pp. 538–43.

210. L.W. Az, “De ketter Willem van Hildernissem,” in Frédéricq, *Mélanges*, p. 259.

211. J. Latomus, *Corsendonca* (Antwerp, 1664).

212. Frédéricq, *Corpus*, pp. 266–67.

213. Lerner notes another version of the trial. He claims that William was once again a reader in the Carmelite monastery at Tirlemont in 1422 (Lerner, *Heresy*, p. 158 n.82).

214. Giles is presented here as a heresiarch and a seducer. He is more likely to have been the originator of a method of self-realization according to which God is achieved in the individual by means of an inspiration that Giles calls the Holy Spirit, and Groddeck calls the id.

215. This thesis was already to be found among the Amaurians. Everyone ensures his own salvation by acceding, through conscience, to the quality of being.

216. The state of childhood was the sign of Adamic innocence as manifested in Joachim’s third age. It also expressed the stripping off of the shell of survival from which emanated the being of pleasure, represented by the child, before society became locked into the economic mold. Re-created innocence was identified with amorous relations, as the foundation of a new society. It is the emanation of life, as opposed to the God of justice, exchange and sacrifice, the basis of states and religions. In his retraction, William had to repudiate the following proposition: “Those who judge sinners or criticize them sin more than those whom they judge and criticize.”

217. God ceases to exist as an external object. He is denied and transcended in the impulse of life.

218. Compare with the Beghards.

219. This is a proposition of the Amaurians. The imposition of sur-

vival constitutes a penance in itself, of which it is more appropriate to dispose.

220. Questioned about this, William declared, "I have never heard of her." Why should a young woman remain in a group where she is an object of scorn? It seems more likely that this was an initiation, a novitiate phase members go through before attaining the revelation of the mystery of love. Articles 8, 11 and 12 emphasize the different forms of (possibly hierarchized) behavior: chastity, libertinism, and a consecration of love as natural as eating or drinking. At the highest level is Bloemardine's conception of seraphic love, in which the divine is annihilated in sexual pleasure.

221. As innocence implies the end of fear and guilt, Giles must have practiced either the tantric technique of using orgasm to achieve illumination, or *coitus reservatus* so that the woman could come without fear of pregnancy. Sexual pleasure, assimilated to God's penetration into the self (or what John of Brunn called "melting into eternity"), abolishes the sense of wrongdoing. Neophytes thus pass from the innocence of chastity to the innocence of guiltless pleasure.

222. This is the "seventh heaven" of popular speech. It is an example not only of a secret language, as used by some nuns, but also of an appropriation of theological language dissolved into its carnal reality, as God is abolished in the absolute pleasure of love.

223. Seraphine is reminiscent of Bloemardine, who identified seraphic love with carnal love. The old woman may have known some of Bloemardine's disciples. The popular sentiment that lovemaking was as natural as eating and drinking should be to seen here not as an effect but as a beginning, as raw material subject to a process of refinement, as crude pleasure clarified and purified until it becomes seraphic love, in which each individual being perceives itself in the becoming of the amorous flux – in the sense that physicists speak about the flux of uncreated matter – in the attraction of universal sexual pleasure. There is an echo of this in one of the articles abjured by William: "The act

of love may be performed according to nature and with an intention such that it is just as valid as a prayer addressed to God" (Frédéricq, *Corpus*, p. 277).

224. William's defense was that he claimed to be unaware of the sexual initiation practiced by Giles. (He also abjured a proposition reminiscent of the theses of William Cornelius of Antwerp: "A depraved woman who has neither husband nor means of subsistence is as worthy as a virgin.") His role seems to have been to teach the novices the distortion of the Scriptures so that each of them, washed of her sins through Giles's erotic initiation, could justify her choice and persuade others of it. Paragraph 20 suggests that, unlike in some Gnostic sects, the recruitment of new members was left to the women.

225. Although William initially allowed some doubt to remain about the sincerity of his repudiation, he was later forced to state that he repudiated each of the articles without reservation. But it is clear that the followers of the movement of the Free Spirit did not regard abjuring and lying to an inquisitor as a lie in itself. Abjuring was not a commitment to anything, but corresponded only to the anxiety to escape punishment. (Compare with Hartmann.)

226. William declared that he had been to the tower once, three years before, but only to try to discover the source of the rumors circulating in Brussels about Giles of Canter. He would not have gone there, he stated, if he had realized that he would find himself in a gathering of women. The tower seems to have been a sort of semisecret lodge, where both ordinary and notable people with a common desire to "return to innocence" could meet. The same phenomenon of social mixing is evidenced among the Loyists of Antwerp. In "paradise" members of the upper classes, dissatisfied with the pleasures that money brings, joined with the deprived and underprivileged, who discovered that their absence of possessions gave them a right to free enjoyment of pleasure.

227. The Joachist element, still current, is also seen among the

Picards and Adamites of Bohemia, and later among the Anabaptists of Münster.

228. In addition to the resolution to obey his impulses the Adamic nakedness is here mingled with a comic parody of Christ offering his flesh to men.

229. It is difficult to say whether the relation between the agapetae and some of the Gnostics is a question of resurgence or influence (the latter implying the transmission of a secret doctrine). If this were the case, the one they called wisdom, who was a virgin, would be the Sophia. But this may merely be a malicious way of referring to the only virgin in the group, mentioned in paragraph 8.

230. See also the Amaurians.

231. Frédéricq, *Corpus*, pp. 266–67.

232. Lawrence of Březová, “De gestis et variis accidentibus regni Boemiae,” in *Fontes rerum bohemicarum* (Prague, 1893), p. 431.

233. Some have argued that the word *pikarti* is a translation of *begardi*. However, Aeneas Silvius talks about a “Picard who came originally from Belgian Gaul” (Aeneas Silvius, “De hortu et historia Bohemorum,” in *Omnia opera* [Basel, 1551]).

234. Latomus, *Corsendonca*.

235. Karl Adolph Constantin Höfler, “Geschichtsschreiber der husitischen Bewegung in Boehmen,” in *Fontes rerum austriacarum* (Vienna, 1856–66), sec. 1, vols. 2, 5 and 7.

236. Lawrence of Březová, “De gestis,” p. 475.

237. I. de Beausobre, “Dissertation sur les adamites de Bohême,” in J. Lenfant, *Histoire de la guerre des hussites* (Amsterdam, 1731), vol. 1.

238. Lawrence of Březová, “De gestis,” p. 475.

239. *Ibid.*, p. 495.

240. *Ibid.*, p. 517.

241. At the other extreme of social alienation the same attitude feeds the arrogance of the rulers, who recognize no limits to their will to power.

242. Whereas a supporter of the movement of the Free Spirit believed that, being God, he was part of the eternity of life (God dissolved in the attractive power of love), a supporter of atheism disposed with God by placing his eternity within the world. This is the objective, scientific expression of the pantheist philosophy of the Middle Ages.

243. The elitism of the better life demanded by the movement of the Free Spirit here becomes the superiority of the lucid mind. Herman's case must be paralleled with that of Thomas Scoto (Frédéricq, *Corpus*, p. 452).

244. Marcel Bataillon, *Erasme et l'Espagne: Recherches sur l'histoire spirituelle du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: E. Droz, 1937), p. 73.

245. The phrasing is attributed to Father Alcázar, a friend of Isabel.

246. Whence their rejection of sacraments, prayers and good works.

247. Compare with Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: “Will of my soul, whom I call destiny. . . , preserve me from all petty victories, keep me and save me for a great destiny.”

248. Menéndez y Pelayo, *Historia*, p. 526ff.

249. Bataillon, *Erasme*, p. 190.

250. *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique* (Paris: Letouzey, 1930), vol. 2.

251. Compare with the “annihilated soul” of Margaret Porete and the *totaliter liquefactus* of John of Brunn.

252. Connections have been made between the Alumbrados and the Guerinites, Illuminati, supporters of the Abbot Guérin, priest of Roye, who were subject to persecution in Picardy and Flanders in 1634.

253. Emanuel van Meteren, *Historien der Nederlanden* (Amsterdam: J.J. Schipper, 1623).

254. Papebrochius, *Annales Antwerpienses* (Antwerp, 1845).

255. Roland Herbert Bainton, *David Joris Wiedertäufer und Kämpfer für Toleranz in XVI Jh* (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1937).

256. Matthew, 5:3.

257. Jules Frederichs, *De Secte der Loïsten* (Ghent, 1891).



258. Disregarding, for the moment, questions of State, it is interesting to compare the attitude of Henry VIII with that of the heresiarch Nicholas Frey, who wrote to his mistress, "I have seen in the Trinity that I must break the head of my first wife, so that the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments may be fulfilled" (Jundt, *Histoire*, p. 198).

259. Two years after his death, his body, identified as a result of a denunciation, was exhumed and burned.

260. Kolde, "Zum Prozess des Johann Denck und der drei glotlosen Maler von Nürnberg," in Theodore Brieger and August Reuter (eds.), *Kirchen geschichtliche Studien Herman Reuter Gewidmet* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrich, 1890).

261. Jundt, *Histoire*, pp. 122-23.

262. The notary Bertrijn seems to be describing a different letter, for he ascribes to Luther a phrase that appears nowhere in the epistle to the Protestant reformers. In it Pruystinck is described as a "snake hiding among the eels" (Geeraard Bertrijn, *Chronijck der Stadt Antwerpen* [Antwerp: P. Kockx, 1879]).

263. Martin Luther, *Werke (Kritische Gesamtausgabe)* (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-1908), vol. 18, p. 99.

264. Dunin-Borkowski, "Quellen zur Vorgeschichte der Unitarier des 16 Jh.," in *75 Jahre Stella matutina* (Feldkirch, 1931).

265. In 1530 Melanchthon refused to have anything to do with Campanus and ordered his arrest. He was imprisoned for twenty years, and then burned by Calvin after the Michel Servet affair.

266. The trial was conducted, however, by Ruward Tapper, future purveyor of stakes, whom Erasmus's friend Nesen, in his diatribe against the teachers at the University of Louvain, called "the wickedest of men, despite the lisplings of his viperous tongue."

267. Van Meteren, *Historien der Nederlanden*.

268. None of these has ever been found. It is probable that, like the spiritual treatises denounced by Calvin, their subversiveness was less

in their literal than their cryptic meanings, which readers could discover at their will.

269. Within the group, the rich found a kind of innocence of pleasure that all the gold in the world could not bring them while they remained under the control of the Church, paying for the redemption of their sins with remorse and expiatory masses

270. J. Frederichs, "Un Luthérien français devenu libertin spirituel," *Bulletin d'histoire du protestantisme français* 41 (Paris, 1882), pp. 250-69.

271. The ideas of Niclaes's Family of Love resurfaced among the English Ranters who, around 1650, were propagating the movement of the Free Spirit by proclaiming the innocence of desires. "No one" said Lawrence Clarkson, "can be freed from sin until having committed it in complete purity, as not being a sin."

272. Louis Prosper Gachard, *Correspondance de Philippe II* (Brussels: Librairie Ancienne and Moderne, 1848-1960).

273. See *Summa doctrinae*, p. 210.

274. *Croyants et sceptiques au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle: Le Dossier des épicuriens*, Proceedings of the Strasbourg Conference (Strasbourg: Librairie Istra, 1981).

275. Jundt, *Histoire*, p. 147.

276. Marnix van Saint Aldegonde, in Lacroix and Willem (eds.), *Correspondance et mélanges* (Brussels, 1860; reprinted Brussels: University Press, 1990).

277. Georges Eekhoud, *Les Libertins d'Anvers: Légende et histoire des loïstes* (Paris: Mercure, 1912).

278. Eloi's activities, in fact, date from 1525.

279. An error on Emanuel van Meteren's part.

280. Actually, in 1544.

281. Frederichs, *De Secte*.

282. Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9.

283. Galatians 3:10.

284. Romans 2:12–13.
285. Jeremiah 31:31, 33–34.
286. Mark 13:31; also, Matthew 24:25 and Luke 21:23.
287. Romans 8:9.
288. Genesis 6:3.
289. Romans 8:8.
290. 1 John 3:9.
291. 1 John 1:8.
292. John 2:19.
293. Romans 7:24.
294. I. von Döllinger, *Beiträge zur Sektengeschichte* (Munich, 1890), vol. 2, no. 62, pp. 664–68. The Latin text can be found in Frederichs, *De Sekte*.
295. Frederichs, “Un Luthérien.”
296. Also called Quintin of Tournai, Quintin of Picardie, Quintin Thierry, Quentin Tieffry and Quentin Couturier.
297. On September 13, 1542, at Valenciennes “Hughes Lescantelier, brewer, native of Maire les Tournai and Caso Hocq, native of this city,” were sentenced to have “their heads severed” for having supported a “new sect called libertine.” Hugues Lescantelier in particular had affirmed that “after men are washed . . . of their sins, they sin no more,” while his companion had denied the Resurrection of Christ and declared “that Jesus Christ was not hung on the cross, but the Devil in a fantastic body” (Bibliothèque municipale de Valenciennes, ms. 699, *Régistre des Choses communes*, folio 44).
298. Jean Leconte, originally from Arras, was a sayette-weaver; Jean Hugo, also from Arras, was a cobbler; Nicholas Scrabe, known as Magret, from Tournai, was a carpenter; nothing is known about Jean Marliere, called Brevin, neither his trade, nor his origins. These four libertines can be identified from archival sources. The stocking maker Pasquier Caudron, however, is not mentioned anywhere except by Pasquier de la Barre (Gérard Moreau, *Histoire du protestantisme à Tournai*

[Paris: Les belles lettres, 1962], p. 285).

299. From here on, Pasquier is summarizing Calvin’s treatise against the libertines. From Calvin we learn that Quintin of Tournai was “convicted” by his book, “by which justice . . . was served.”

300. Gérard Moreau, *Le Journal d’un bourgeois de Tournai (Pasquier de le Barre)* (Brussels, 1975).

301. In effect, the movement of the Free Spirit teaches nothing except to listen to and learn from the self.

302. For the Church, divine law and human reason are inseparable.

303. Antoine Pocques of Lille tried to obtain Calvin’s testimony, so that he could claim to be working with a degree of consent. Calvin claims that he had taken advantage of Bucer in this way, but the author of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, forewarned by his spies, did not let himself get caught.

304. From the Latin *cogitare* “to think.” The *cuider*, for Quintin, is the representation of the world as falsely imposed by myth. He calls for it to be rejected in the name of nature.

305. Similarly, Margaret Porete describes the soul detaching itself from the world and being annihilated in God as accomplishing the divine will in the freedom of nature.

306. Compare with the Beghards of Cologne.

307. This is to turn everything that denies life into its opposite.

308. The same idea occurs among the Amaurians.

309. Compare with Giles of Canter.

310. The end of the mystified conscience, with its concept of evil, sin and penance, gives innocence to the freedom of nature.

311. This is the Calvinist translation of amorous passion, in which lovers, like children, dream of creating a world of innocence, without wrong or restraint.

312. John Calvin, *Contre le secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertins qui se nomment Spirituels* (Geneva, 1547).

## PART FOUR: OUTLINE FOR AN ALCHEMY OF THE SELF

1. Several popes and Church dignitaries have been interested in alchemy: John XXI, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, the Franciscan Jean de Roquetaillade. . . .

2. As Charles Fourier's intuitive genius suggested.

3. Experiments on harmony between reputedly hostile animals and man indicate that animals have, much of the time, been stimulated by the aggression of human predators.

4. In Hyppolytus of Rome's clerical mentality, the term *promiscuousness* carries the pejorative meaning of *more ferarum*, "undifferentiated coupling." But what it in fact means is sexual union freed of guilt and its counterpart, payment, as the alchemy of the living claims to achieve purification through the reconciliation of man, woman and nature. Likewise, the word *communion* is the Christian caricature of harmony, the universal attraction that Margaret Porete calls "Love."

5. Contrary to Mikhail Bakunin's proposition, that the passion for destruction is a creative passion, it is only the passion to create, and to create oneself, that breaks the chains without forging new ones.

6. For orthodoxy the refuges of insubordination are cathedrals of infamy, rededicated to forbidden cults: paradises of Cologne, *skolae*, *Busskeller*, *Heidenlöcher*, *Erdstölle* down to *escrennes* or weavers' graves, sites of evening gatherings where, amid all the sprightly and irreverent gossip, amorous adventures were begun.

7. Likewise the underground is the inverse of the excrescences that make up the supporting pillars of heavenly power: tumuli, standing stones, pyramids, temples, crosses and cathedrals.

8. Also Nicholas of Basel, who granted sanctity and impeccability to those who swore obedience to him, among other heresiarchs who drew the elements of their power from the movement of the Free Spirit.

9. Today, the importance of doing away with fear is not sufficiently emphasized. Fear is worse than danger, which it both attracts and arouses. Survival is just socialized fear. Life has been so thoroughly consumed

by survival that many believe they will lose everything if the means of survival are threatened. They forget that there is a happy way of ridding themselves of the "necessity" of survival, which is to dissolve it in life.

10. Margaret Porete: "And desire neither resentment, nor poverty, nor martyrdom, nor tribulation, nor masses, nor sermons, nor fasting, nor prayers."

11. It is in this sense that the statements of the Amaurians and the Men of Intelligence should be understood: that the devil himself, the negative image of God, would be saved. The dominant negativity (that of God and the devil) gives way to a radically different movement.

12. The "nahmlose Wilde" of which Suso speaks, and which the dominant world corrupts into the will to power.

13. This is evident in the absolute power of caresses but also in the signs used by the Beguines of Cologne, or in the popular gesture of inserting two phallic fingers into the vaginal folds of the other hand.

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