

SINFUL CATHOLICS AND REPENTANT PROTESTANTS? THE PENITENTIAL PROCESS IN THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN TRADITION OF THE *TWELVE VIRTUES*

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ABSTRACT – *In the study of religious culture, a clear rupture between the ‘dark’ Middle Ages and the ‘glorious’ early modern epoch has often been presumed. Likewise Protestants, as initiators of a new Christian era, are sometimes still believed to have rejected traditions rooted in ‘medieval’ Catholicism. Although these assumptions have received general opposition, further nuance can be reached through renewed study of the penitential process. This paper investigates the penitential process in the long and widespread tradition of the Middle Dutch treatise Vanden twaelf dogheden (On the Twelve Virtues) and its various early modern translations and adaptations, used in both Catholic and Protestant milieus. New research reveals that both Catholic and Protestant compilers relied on this medieval tradition to compose their own treatises on virtuousness.*

INTRODUCTION

In her study on penitence and preaching, Anne Thayer argues “the penitential process as taught and practiced in the Late Medieval Period was to be severely criticized by the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century as well as passionately reasserted by Catholics”.¹ This statement belongs to a centuries-old tradition in the study of religious perceptions, practices, and texts. By disparaging

1 Anne T. Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching, and the Coming of the Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 92.

the late Middle Ages as a dark period of decline, sixteenth-century humanists, nineteenth-century Romantic historians, and modern scholars in the wake of Dutch historian Johan Huizinga contributed to the invention of a strict distinction between the ‘culturally exhausted’ Middle Ages and the ‘glorious’ early modern epoch.² Similar sentiments also gave rise to a black-and-white dichotomy between ‘spiritually inferior, sinful Catholics’ and ‘superior, repentant Protestants’.³

Recent research has shown that such divisions are too stringent and inconsistent with historical reality.⁴ Although the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation exerted radical modifications over Christian observance, similar changes and calls for reform already occurred before the sixteenth century.⁵ Furthermore, it has become clear that both Catholics and Protestants sometimes strove for conservation and even restoration of earlier medieval traditions. The depiction of Protestants as turning over a new leaf and criticizing anything rooted in the medieval Church is therefore largely exaggerated.⁶ However, these new insights have not yet reached all areas of research in the field. The study of the penitential process – the practices concerning sin, repentance, and penance – still suffers from a one-sided perspective. It is clear that the current discourse needs moderation, and opportunities for further discussion remain.

This article aims to show that, in the early modern period, both Catholic and Protestant authors used late medieval ideas on penance, and that they themselves did not see a clear rupture between the Catholic and Protestant ways of thinking. It adds nuance to generalizations about the penitential process from a literary-historical perspective by examining the reception of *Vanden twaelf dogheden (On the Twelve Virtues)*, a fourteenth-century Middle Dutch treatise on how to live virtuously, and how to behave after breaking God’s rules. This text was widespread in the medieval Low Countries and was later adapted by both Catholics and Protestants. The tradition of the *Twelve Virtues* thus serves as a good case study to examine how the process of breaking the

2 This misleading historiography is denounced in Robert W. Shaffern, *The Penitents’ Treasury: Indulgences in Latin Christendom 1175-1375* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2007), 5-17. The decisive role played by Huizinga in the modern interpretation of the late Middle Ages is discussed in John Van Engen, “Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church,” *Church History* 77 (2008), 257-59.

3 See, for example, John Foster, *An Accurate Report of the Speech of the Right Hon. John Foster* (Dublin: R. Parchbank, 1798), 17-18; Edmund Hepple, *The Great Question between Protestants and Catholics, Viewed in a New Light: With an Address to Both Parties; Suggested by the Signs of the Times, and Suited to the Present Momentous Crisis; Containing also an Easy and Practicable Plan for the Effectual Security of the Church* (Newcastle: W. Fordyce, 1829), 20.

4 Heinz Schilling, *Die neue Zeit: Vom Christenheitseuropa zum Europa der Staaten: 1250 bis 1750* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1999); Heiko A. Oberman, *The Two Reformations: The Journey from the Last Days to the New World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Brian

Cummings and James Simpson, introduction to *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, eds. Brian Cummins and James Simpson (2010; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-9, esp. 1-5.

5 Alastair Armstrong, *The European Reformation 1500-1610* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2002), 74-75; Rudolph W. Heinze, *Reform and Conflict: From the Medieval World to the Wars of Religion A.D. 1350-1648* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2006), 256-57.

6 Shaffern, *The Penitents' Treasury*, 5-17.

7 Recent publications consider Wevel the author of *Vanden twaelf dogheden*, for instance, Jean-Marie Gueullette, *Eckhart en France: la lecture des Institutions spirituelles attribuées à Tauler 1548-1699* (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2012), 14-15; and Bernard McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism 1350-1550* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2012), 76. Scheepsma believes that Wevel authored *Vanden twaelf dogheden*, however, he also mentions the objections to this hypothesis. Wybren Scheepsma, "Das Mittelniederländische Nachleben der Erfurter 'Reden' Meister Eckharts," in: *Meister*

rules and restoring the established order was perceived in the transition from the late Middle Ages to the early modern epoch. Studying this tradition offers insights into how Protestant reformers refuted Catholic explanations of the penitential process and whether a clear rupture between the two periods can be distinguished. A short introduction to the tradition of the *Twelve Virtues* is followed by a discussion of how this description of rule breaking and restoring order evolved depending on the context of its use. Furthermore, reviewing the text's sources sheds light on the establishment of the concepts of sin, repentance, and penance in the tradition of the *Twelve Virtues* by focusing not on the rupture between, but rather on the transition from the late medieval to the early modern period.

THE TWELVE VIRTUES: A FIRST ACQUAINTANCE

Although the anonymous *Vanden twaelf dogheden* was long attributed to the famous mystic Jan van Ruusbroec (d. 1381), scholars now agree that Godfried Wevel (d. 1396) wrote the text.⁷ Wevel was procurator, confessor, and scribe at the Brussels monastery of Groenendaal during Ruusbroec's priorate.⁸ Nevertheless, *Vanden twaelf dogheden* was probably not intended for the canons of Groenendaal. At the beginning of the 1380s, Wevel was solicited, possibly by Geert Grote (d. 1384), founder of the *Devotio Moderna*, to educate the novices of the just-founded monastery of Eemstein near Dordrecht. It is assumed that Wevel composed his *Vanden twaelf dogheden* to instruct the newly arrived monks in spiritual virtuousness.⁹ The treatise contains 12 chapters, each of which explains a virtue or a way to achieve virtuousness and illustrates this with concrete examples. The first chapters on humility, obedience, and patience are closely related to monastic spirituality. They are followed by explanations on typical Eckhartian themes, such as *gelâzenheit* (resignation) and *abegescheidenheit* (detachment). The last section is devoted to the different components of the penitential process: sin, repentance, and penance.

Little research has been done on the impact of the *Twelve Virtues*. Nevertheless, they were known in many monasteries in late medieval and early modern Western Europe. During the fifteenth century, *Vanden twaelf dogheden* circulated widely in monastic circles throughout the Low Countries and the western part of present-day Germany. Fifty manuscripts containing a full or partial version of the text survive, including a Latin translation of *Vanden twaelf dogheden*.¹⁰ In 1543, a certain Petrus Noviomagus – sometimes identified as the Jesuit Petrus Canisius (d. 1597) – composed an *opera omnia* of the German mystic Johannes Tauler (d. 1361), in which he integrated the *Tractat vonn Tügentten*, a German adaptation of *Vanden twaelf dogheden*. In this anthology, Noviomagus defended the interests of the Catholic reformers.¹¹ In 1548, the Carthusian Laurentius Surius (d. 1578) reworked Noviomagus' adaptation into Latin for his own anthology of Tauler.¹² These *Institutiones Taulerianae* became the basis for nearly all other vernacular translations. In this way, the tradition of the *Twelve Virtues* spread throughout Western Europe.¹³

It was, however, not only through the anthology of Tauler that people became acquainted with the *Twelve Virtues*. In 1552, Surius published his *opera omnia* of Ruusbroec with a Latin translation of the original *Vanden twaelf dogheden*, the *Tractatus de praecipuis quibusdam virtutibus*, which was also translated into nearly all Western European vernaculars.¹⁴ Creating those *opera omnia* with the perspective of the Catholic Reformation in mind, Surius, just like Noviomagus, wanted to ensure that everyone could benefit from the catholic belief and rousing teachings of the great medieval masters. However, not only Catholic readers found inspiration in those *opera omnia*. In 1685, the Protestant theologian Theophil Gottlieb Spizelius (d. 1738) published an anthology on penance, in which he integrated Surius' Latin translation of the chapter on penance.¹⁵ Furthermore, in 1701, the Protestant theologian Georg Johann Conradi (d. 1747) published a German adaptation of Surius' anthology of Ruusbroec.¹⁶ Both Spizelius and Conradi spread those teachings in the spirit of the Protestant Reformation.¹⁷

Eckharts Erfurter 'Reden' in ihrem Kontext, eds. Dagmar Gottschall and Dietmar Mieth (Mainz: W. Kohlhammer, 2013), 131-52.

8 *Obituaire du Monastère de Groenendael dans la forêt de Soignes, publié avec une introduction et des notes*, ed. Marc Dykmans (Brussels: Paleis der Academieën, 1940), 328; Jozef van Mierlo, "Uit de uitgave van het obituarium van Groenendaal," *Verslagen en Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde* 53 (1941), 432-34, 436.

9 Van Mierlo, "Uit de uitgave," 432-36; Geert Warnar, *Ruusbroec. Literatuur en Mystiek in de Veertiende Eeuw* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum – Polak & Van Gennep, 2003), 292.

10 In the context of my dissertation I compiled an updated inventory of the textual witnesses of *Vanden twaelf dogheden*. The Latin translation of *Vanden twaelf dogheden* was probably done by Geert Grote; see Jan Deschamps, "De handschriftelijke overlevering van Ruusbroecs werken," *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde. Nieuwe Reeks* 19 (1982), 192-93.

11 Petrus Noviomagus, *Des Erleüchten D. Johannis Tauleri, von eym waren evangelischen Leben, Göttliche Predig, Leren, Epistolen, Cantilenen, Prophetien* (Cologne: Jaspar von Genep, 1543), <http://objects.library.uu.nl/reader/index.php?obj=1874-21182&lan=n#page//14/43/52/144352763374190552904892351364212223165.jpg/mode/1up>. On the figure of Petrus Noviomagus and his identification with Petrus Canisius, see Rob J. M. van de Schoor, "Canisius als Herausgeber. Die Ausgaben van Tauler (1543), Kyrill (1546) und Leo dem Grossen (1546)," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 82 (2011), 161-86. John M. Frymire unproblematically identifies Canisius with Noviomagus in *The Primacy of the Postils: Catholics, Protestants and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 259.

12 Laurentius Surius, *D. Ioannis Thauleri, sublimis et illuminati theologi, saluberrimae ac plane divinae institutiones aut doctrinae, recens inventae, quibus instruimur, uti per spirituales exercitationes virtutesque, ad amabilem Dei unionem pertingat* (Cologne: Johann Quentel, 1548). About the activities of Surius, see Carlos M. N. Eire, "Early Modern

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The third thematic section of *Vanden twaelf dogheden* is entirely dedicated to the penitential process. In Chapter 9, Wevel explains how the faithful should behave after breaking God's rules: he should not regret his sins, for they oblige him to do penance and to humiliate himself.

Indeed, he who would be right should in a certain way not wish that those sins, in which he had fallen, had not happened ... that is: as far as the sins have brought him to penance, and he, through these sins, is abased and humiliated.¹⁸

In this way, the faithful will grow closer to God. He should not regret the act of sinning itself, but he should regret having displeased God. However, by accepting penance, humiliating himself, and turning towards God, all his sins will be forgiven. In Chapter 10, which deals with repentance, Wevel repeats that the faithful should regret having displeased God. This sincere repentance will arouse God's immediate forgiveness. The eleventh and twelfth chapters concentrate on true penance, which cannot be reached by performing exterior works, such as fasting and holding vigils. Genuine penance only results from interior efforts: rejecting one's sins and turning towards God. Nevertheless, because idleness is intolerable, it is important that the faithful continues to perform works in which he finds himself in the proximity of God. However, when the faithful performs an exterior work which inhibits him in striving for true penance, he may cease this work: "And if any exterior work hinders you [in doing] that, be it fasting or heavy penance, leave it freely without any concerns. And do not suppose that you neglect any penance that way".¹⁹

As one can imagine, statements such as not regretting breaking God's rules were not always favourably received. Wevel borrowed this argument from the

German theologian Master Eckhart (d. 1328-9): “A good man ought to conform his will to the divine will in such a way that he should will whatever God wills. Since God in some way wills for me to have sinned, I should not will that I had not committed sins; and this is true penitence”.²⁰ By repeating this concept, Wevel in fact defied *In agro dominico*, the papal bull in which Pope John XXII (d. 1334) not only pronounced 28 propositions of Master Eckhart heretical or suspect of heresy, but also forbade further distribution of those ideas.²¹ It is therefore somewhat surprising that the heretical idea of not regretting one’s sins also appears in *Vanden twaelf dogheden*. Moreover, the encouragement to leave exterior works behind, because they do not lead to true penance and can even hinder this ultimate goal, was also condemned by the Pope. It appears in the sixteenth to nineteenth of Eckhart’s propositions refuted by Pope John XXII’s bull:

16. God does not properly command an exterior act.
17. The exterior act is not properly good or divine, and God does not produce it or give birth to it in the proper sense.
18. Let us bring forth the fruit not of exterior acts, which do not make us good, but of interior acts, which the Father who abides in us makes and produces.
19. God loves souls, not the exterior work.²²

It can be concluded that *Vanden twaelf dogheden* contains some extraordinary statements concerning the breaking of rules, some of which were even condemned heretical at the beginning of the fourteenth century. However, this did not hinder the further distribution of the *Twelve Virtues*. It is therefore interesting to examine how Catholic and Protestant reformers dealt with this remarkable late-medieval heritage.

Catholic Piety in Translation,” in *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Peter Burke and Ronnie Po-chia Hsia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90-91; Kees Schepers, “Ruusbroec in Latin: Impulses and Impediments,” in *A Companion to John of Ruusbroec*, eds. John Arblaster and Rob Faesen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 269-70.

13 I inventoried these textual witnesses in the context of my dissertation. On the distribution of this Tauler print, see Albert Ampe, “Een kritisch onderzoek van de ‘Institutiones Taulerianae,’” *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 40 (1966), 167-240; Comité-Jan van Ruusbroec, ed., *Jan van Ruusbroec 1293-1381. Toonstellingscatalogus. Met als bijlage een chronologische tabel en drie kaarten* (Brussels: Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, 1981), 245-47; Jos Andriessen, “Ruusbroec’s Influence until c. 1800,” in *A Companion to John of Ruusbroec*, eds. John Arblaster and Rob Faesen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 290; 292-96.

THE PENITENTIAL PROCESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CATHOLIC REFORMATION

In 1543, the Catholic Petrus Noviomagus composed his *Tractat vonn Tûgentten* with a revised version of the *Twelve Virtues*. The changed sequence of the virtues immediately catches the eye. The themes of sin, repentance, and penance discussed at the end of *Vanden twaelf dogheden* constitute the opening chapters of Noviomagus' treatise. From this alteration, it can be hypothesized that Noviomagus wanted to emphasize different topics than Wevel. The penitential process had apparently grown more important in Noviomagus' view and thus deserved a more prominent place in his work. The revised heritage of the *Twelve Virtues* is included in the first chapter of the *Tractat vonn Tûgentten*, which begins with two general ideas issued from *Vanden twaelf dogheden*: firstly, it is impossible to live without sometimes breaking the rules; and secondly, by being repentant and practising penance, the faithful will again reach God's proximity. However, in the *Tractat vonn Tûgentten* those statements are followed by the explicit proclamation that sin is above all a malicious deed evoking only negative consequences.

Sin is an adoration of the idols, a renunciation of faith, an exaltation of the enemy, a sweet poison, a beginning of damnation, a cause for more sins, a short joy, a long pain, an eternal shame, loved by the world, hated by God and by all good people.²³

Probably fearing critique arising from misinterpretations, Noviomagus wants his readers to know that breaking the rules is wrong under any circumstances, even if the repentant could have his faults repaired eventually. This repentance has to result, as in *Vanden twaelf dogheden*, from the right attitude: the faithful should regret the displeasure he has caused God rather than the consequences he must face. Noviomagus explicitly mentions that those who show repentance because they are anxious about purgatory or hell will not be forgiven.

14 Laurentius Surius, *D. Joannis Rusbrochii Svmmi atqve sanctiss. Viri, quem insignis quem insignis quidam theologus alterum Dionysium Areopagitam appellat, Opera omnia* (Cologne: Johann Quentel, 1552).

For my dissertation, I inventoried the textual witnesses of this Ruusbroec print. Interesting overviews can already be found in Comité-Jan van Ruusbroec, *Jan van Ruusbroec*, 241-42; Thom Mertens, "Gescreven waerheit blivet staen": De receptie van Ruusbroecs werken," in *Een claeer verlicht man: over het leven en werk van Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381)*, ed. Egbert P. Bos (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993), 80-81; Schepers, "Ruusbroec in Latin," 269-74.

15 Theophil Gottlieb Spizelius, *Selecta Doctorum Veterum Scriptorumque Ecclesiasticorum, De Vera Sinceraqve ad Documenta, cum Praefaminibus Theophili Spizelii* (Augsburg: Theophil Goebel, 1685).

This you should know: that this repentance should neither come from servile fear of hell or purgatory, nor from a sensual regret with bitterness to commiserate oneself and one's own misfortune, but because one has dishonoured and angered God.²⁴

After all, such people do not act out of love for God, but out of self-concern. By making clear that such people would not obtain God's mercy, Noviomagus probably anticipated criticism for allowing people to insincerely express sorrow only on their deathbed foreseeing purgatory or hell. Furthermore, Noviomagus states that the sinner should go to a priest and confess his sins to show real repentance.

Therefore he ought to deplore his sins with bitter repentance, and guard against this with true sorrow and true intention, acknowledge guilt in confession before the priest in God's place (who has the power over [the sinner] to bind and unbind), and receive penance according to the ordinance of the holy church.²⁵

Vanden twaelf dogheden and the *Tractat vonn Tügentten* also differ in the importance they place on certain expressions of penitence. Wevel declares that exterior works will not lead to penance and that interior efforts are most important. The *Tractat vonn Tügentten* contains the same idea, but Noviomagus is more cautious and asserts that performing exterior works will effectively lead to penance.

Out of this reason flows the exterior works of penance, such as fasting, keeping vigil, praying, almsgiving and the like, which are much more pleasant to God as they imply a more loving turn towards God. That is why you should follow those works in which you experience God's goodness more closely, and become more ready to feel sorry for your sins, and to weigh [them] more heavily, and to put more trust in God.²⁶

16 Georg Johannes Conradi, *Des Ehrwürdigen Vaters D. Johannis Rusbrochii (...) Doctor Ecstaticus, bestehend aus allen desselben sehr gottseligen Schrifften* (Offenbach am Main: Bonaventura de Launoy, 1701). See also Comité-Jan van Ruusbroec, *Jan van Ruusbroec*, 250.

17 Peter C. Erb, "The Use of Ruusbroec among German Protestants," in *Jan van Ruusbroec: The Sources, Content and Sequels of His Mysticism*, eds. Paul Mommaers and Norbert De Paepe (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1984), 153-75; Dietrich Blaufuss, "Commercium epistolicum in der Reichsstadt: Gottlieb Spizel/ Augsburg (1639-1691) und seine Briefwechselsammlung im Umkreis von Orthodoxie und Pietismus," in *Stadt und Literatur im deutschen Sprachraum der frühen Neuzeit 1*, ed. Klaus Garber (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998), 411-24; Dietrich Blaufuss, "Gottlieb Spizel (1639-1691) – dreissig Jahre Pfarrer an St. Jakob," in *St. Jakob – 650 Jahre. Ein Kirche und ihr Stadtteil* (Augsburg: Wissner, 2005), 36-39.

18 "Ja, die recht waer, hi en soude niet willen na eenre wijs die sonde, daer hi in ghefallen was, dat die niet gheschiet en waeren ... mer also verre

als hem die sonde ghebrocht hebben ter penitencien, ende hi overmids die sonden, ghenedert ende gheoetmoedicht is". Jozef van Mierlo, *Werken: 1. Vanden XII Beghinen. 2. Vanden XII Dogheden* (Mechelen: Het Kompas, 1932), 294 (trans. Guido de Baere and Ine Kiekens).

19 "Ende ist dat uu enich uutwendich werc hier-toe hindert, het si vasten of grote penitencie, dat laet vrilic sonder alle sorghe. Ende en waent niet, dat ghi daer-mede versumet enighe penitencie". Ibid., 303 (trans. de Baere and Kiekens).

20 "Bonus homo debet sic conformare voluntatem suam voluntati divine, quod ipse velit quicquid deus vult. Quia deus vult aliquo modo me pecasse, nollem ego quod ego peccata non commissem". Satoshi Kikuchi, *From Eckhart to Ruusbroec: A Critical Inheritance of Mystical Themes in the Fourteenth Century* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 43. This edition includes both the original Latin and the English translation.

21 Interesting studies on In agro dominico and its influence include Josef, Koch, "Kritische Studien zum Leben Meister Eckharts. Zweiter Teil – Die Kölner Jahre, der Prozess und die Verurteilung," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 39

According to Noviomagus, God appreciates exterior works when they permit the repentant to ponder his sins and to turn towards God. Nevertheless, both Wevel and Noviomagus consider penance in the same way: works conducted from the right interior attitude are primary. However, Wevel's statement can lead to the assumption that some people do not need to perform any penance at all. Possibly, Noviomagus wanted to avoid such misinterpretations by accentuating the importance of exterior works.

For the *opera omnia* of Tauler, Surius reworked Noviomagus' *Tractat vonn Tügentten* into Latin. The passages concerning the penitential process were faithfully integrated into the first chapter of the *Institutiones Taulerianae*: breaking the rules is considered reprehensible although unavoidable, true repentance only emanates from true love for God, and exterior works are encouraged in the striving for penance. For his edition of the oeuvre of Ruusbroec, Surius must have consulted a version of *Vanden twaelf dogheden* itself. Surius repeats that sins cannot be avoided and that the faithful should not regret them. Nevertheless, the first part of the new title of this chapter shows a shift in emphasis. "That the gifts of grace must be referred to God, who has not only forgiven us the sins but also preserved us for many mistakes" encourages the faithful to be thankful since God has also saved him from sins he has not committed.²⁷ Although this idea also appears in *Vanden twaelf dogheden*, it occupies a more prominent place in Surius' work. The descriptions of repentance and penance are precisely copied from *Vanden twaelf dogheden*. Again it is stated that the repentant should reject his sinful behaviour and turn towards God. The faithful can perform works as acts of penance, but they have to arise from the right attitude in order to not distract him from his love for God.

Both Noviomagus and Surius wanted to spread the Catholic faith by making useful teachings of the past available to a broad audience. Nevertheless, the descriptions of the penitential process in their *opera omnia* suggest different attitudes in their distribution strategies. Noviomagus probably worried about

the content of the *Twelve Virtues*. In the turbid times of the sixteenth century, he must have feared that his readers would misunderstand his explanations. This was not peculiar considering the condemnation of the same ideas in Eckhart's oeuvre by the papal bull *In agro dominico*, two centuries before Noviomagus composed his anthology of Tauler. Noviomagus was in any case very careful in adapting his source text on the *Twelve Virtues* by adding qualifications and changing some passages so as not to mislead his readership. Concerning exterior works, for instance, he made his message very clear: God expects both interior and exterior efforts of the repentant. Noviomagus' contemporary, Surius, seemed less worried about possible misinterpretations by his readers. From his perspective, respecting the authority of his sources must have been the most important element to reckon with. Although he made shortened versions of his source texts, his main concern in the editions of Tauler and Ruusbroec was to transmit the teachings of the great masters faithfully.

THE PENITENTIAL PROCESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

In 1685, Spizelius created a Latin thematic anthology on penance, based on the teachings of great religious authorities. He considered Ruusbroec as one of the eminent teachers and used the Ruusbroec edition of 1552 for his chapter 'De Vera Poenitentia'. Interestingly, Spizelius did not hide the fact that he was using Surius' edition, which was initially distributed in the spirit of the Catholic Reformation. Although Spizelius does not mention Surius' name, he refers in his introduction to the corresponding pages of the edition of 1552 and copied the whole chapter precisely.²⁸

So, this true displeasure is the serious will to never commit sins, and the true trust together with the true love for God [is] the true penance. From this, the exterior signs of penance originate, such as confession, keeping vigil, fasting, praying, almsgiving, and other

(1960): 5-52; Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart. The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense* (Toronto: Paulist Press, 1981); Rob Faesen, "Ruusbroec at the Charterhouse of Herne. How Did the Carthusians React to the Eckhart Shock?" in *A Fish Out of Water? From Contemplative Solitude to Carthusian Involvement in Pastoral Care and Reform Activity*, eds. Stephen J. Molvarec and Tom Gaens, (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 107-25; Kikuchi, *From Eckhart to Ruusbroec*, 37-47.

22 "16. Deus proprie non precipit actum exteriorem. 17. Actus exterior non est proprie bonus nec divinus, nec operatur ipsum Deus proprie nec parit. 18. Afferamus fructum actuum non exteriorum, qui nos bonos non faciunt, sed actuum interiorum, quos pater in nobis manens facit et operatur. 19. Deus animas amat, non opus extra". Kikuchi, *From Eckhart to Ruusbroec*, 43-44.

23 "Die sunde ist ein anbettung der abgötter / eyn verleugnung des glaubens / eyn erhebung des feyends / ein suss vergifft eyn anfang der verdamnuss / eyn vrsach zu mer sunden / ein kurtz freud / ein lange pein / ein ewige schande / geliebt vonn der welt / gehass von got / vnd von allen guten menschenn". Petrus

Noviomagus, *Des Erleuchten D. Johannis Tauleri*, r.cclxxix (trans. de Baere and Kiekens).

24 “Dis ist zu wissen / das diser reuw sol niet kommen vs knechtlichem forchten fur die hel oder fegfeur / noch aus einem sinlichen leitwesen mitt bitterheit / vmb sich selber vnd seinen eygen schaden zu beklagen / mer / dann das er got enteret vnd verzornet hat”. Ibid., r.cclxxix (trans. de Baere and Kiekens).

25 “Da fur muss er mit bitteren reuwen sein sund beweinen vnde mitt warem leitwesen vnd warem auffsatz sich for der zu hutenn für den priester in gottes stat (der macht hat über in zu binden vnde entbinden) in der beicht schuldig geben / vnd buss entfangen nach insetzung der heiligenn kirchenn”. Ibid., r.cclxxix (trans. de Baere and Kiekens).

26 “Aus disem grunde fliessen die auswendige werck der penitentz / als vasten / wachenn / betten / aelmoesen geben / vnd der geleich / die gott so vill angenemer seyn / so sey diss lieblichen zuckerens in gott mer haben. Darumb in woelchen wercken du die gütigkeit gottes naeher beyndes / vnde du geschickter werdes deyn sunden zu beklagen / vnd grosser zu wygen / vnd gott mer zu betrauenn / soelche werck folge”. Ibid., r.cclxxx (trans. de Baere and Kiekens).

similar godly works which please God much more insofar as they are more vigorous and accurate and more united to love.²⁹

Although all chapters are modelled on the 1552 edition, the chapter on penance is changed and completed with descriptions from the adaptation of 1548. It is clear that Conradi knew both versions and considered it necessary to emphasize the importance of exterior works.

Both Spizelius and Conradi were part of the Protestant tradition, but followed different distribution strategies. Spizelius wanted to adhere to the letter of the teachings of the past’s virtuous masters. By rendering his source text precisely, he probably wanted to avoid making mistakes or encouraging misinterpretations concerning Ruusbroec’s authority and spirituality. Conradi, on the contrary, must have been more worried about the right interpretation of the texts he spread. Concerning his descriptions of the penitential process, he was not satisfied with one source, but compiled two versions of the *Twelve Virtues*, to make the exact content clear. It can be assumed that he was, just like Noviomagus, cautious not to actuate wrong interpretations of his sources.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I investigated the penitential process – a *leitmotiv* in late medieval and early modern thinking – in the long tradition of the *Twelve Virtues*. Versions of this treatise on virtues were read and copied in the sixteenth to the eighteenth century for both Catholic and Protestant purposes. While previous scholarship has emphasized a dramatic rift between the Middle Ages and early modern period, and between Catholic and Protestant perspectives, none of the four early modern compilers of the *Twelve Virtues* – two Catholics and two Protestants – reflected such division in their work. They all valued the late medieval works of Tauler and Ruusbroec as stirring teachings for the faithful. Furthermore, this case study shows that neither Spizelius nor Conradi found it problematic to

use Catholic editions to compose their writings for a Protestant audience. The compilers did not see ruptures nor drew borders between the Catholic and Protestant ways of thinking. Concerning the penitential process, their objective was to spread clear explanations on how to behave after breaking God's rules. For Surius and Spizelius, the correct explanation must be loyal to the words of earlier theologians. They respected the masters' authority by faithfully rendering the contents of their texts. Noviomagus and Conradi were more concerned with their own readers. By adding differentiations and alterations or by using different versions of one and the same textual tradition, they wanted to ensure that their readers would grasp the right meaning of their expositions. It can be concluded that the pursuit of virtuousness was above all the main aim of the *Twelve Virtues*, for which both Catholic and Protestant compilers relied on the late medieval tradition on how to deal with breaking the rules.³⁰

27 "Ut Deo gratiae referendae sint, qui nobis non solum peccata dimiserit, sed etiam à multis nos praeseruavit vitijis". Laurentius Surius, *D. Ioannis Tauleri*, 245 (trans. de Baere).

28 Ibid., 303.

29 "So ist nun dieses wahre misbehagen der ernste wille niemahlen zu suendigen / und das wahre zutrauen sambt der wahren liebe zu Gott / die wahre busse. Hieraus aber entstehen die aeuserlichen bussmercke / als da sind beichten / wachen / fasten / baeten / allmosen geben und andere den gleichen Gottselige wercke / welche Gott so vielmehr gefallen als kraefftiger / genauer und mehr sie mit liebe verknuepffet sind". Ibid., 100 (trans. de Baere and Kiekens).

30 The findings presented in this article emanate from my research project 'Vanden twaelf dogheden: An Exemplary Study of the Sources, Functions, Distribution and Impact of Middle Dutch Spiritual Writings' (Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO), 2012-2016). I would like to thank Lieke Smits (Leiden University) for her useful comments and suggestions and Professor Emeritus Guido de Baere (Ruuwbroec Institute, University of Antwerp) for his help with the translations.

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