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**Leken trekken tot Gods Woord. Dirc van Herxen  
(1381-1457) en zijn Eerste Collatieboek**

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# Summary

As an important figure of the *Devotio Moderna* and second rector of the devout male community of the Gregoriushuis in Zwolle, Dirc van Herxen (1381-1457) has an honoured place in the chronicle of his contemporary Jacobus de Voecht. In this *Narratio*, which provides the most detailed information about Dirc van Herxen, the period around 1415, when he had just started his rectory, serves as an example for later times. De Voecht does not give an exhaustive account of the more than fifty years that Dirc van Herxen spent in the Gregoriushuis. He only mentions a number of remarkable characteristics of Dirc van Herxen, such as his austerity, peacefulness and desire for knowledge. At the same time, De Voecht does not conceal that his behaviour at times encountered resistance. Examples are the Grabow case, the uncontrollable problems with one of his fellow brothers and the dispute with the parish priest and the Chapter of Deventer, which eventually led to his excommunication. To be able to appreciate the portrait that the *Narratio* sketches, a thorough analysis of the chronicle and a comparison with other source material on the devout communities is desired.

A second historical source that throws light on the life of Dirc van Herxen is an anonymous biography, written in both Latin and Middle Dutch, which dates from the second half of the fifteenth century. In this biography, Dirc van Herxen's exemplary youth is described and his spiritual qualities and inquisitiveness are praised. However, the resistance is not mentioned. The Latin version provides an elaborate list of the works by Dirc van Herxen; apparently, a similar survey for the Middle Dutch readership was not deemed necessary.

In her dissertation from 1926, Ph.H.J. Knierim attaches considerable importance to the influence of Florens Radewijns on the development of Dirc van Herxen's personality, in which she points out the parallels between the two devout leaders, as the *Narratio* does. Recently, Ingrid Wormgoor particularly has stressed the difference between Dirc van Herxen and the other rectors of the Gregoriushuis. Due to his great emphasis on a life separate from secular society, Dirc van Herxen could not count on much respect from the citizens of Zwolle. Instead of narrowing the gap between the worldly and the devout norms, he chose to emphasize the differences between them. This fundamental attitude, which earned him much admiration among the devout, on the contrary caused resentment among his fellow citizens.

Apart from biographical information, De Voecht's *Narratio* also provides many bibliographical data. In several chapters Dirc van Herxen's writing activities, among which the Latin and the Middle Dutch *collationale*, are mentioned. The anonymous Latin biography contains a book register with an elaborate, but incomplete enumeration of titles. As more manuscripts by Dirc van Herxen have been discovered in recent years, the German scholar Theo Klausmann characterizes his oeuvre as the most extensive and the most versatile of the Brothers of the Common Life.

Works in Latin make up the principal part of the oeuvre and are first connected to the apologetic literature of the first generation of modern devout. After that, Dirc van Herxen shifts the emphasis to the development of the devout communities itself. His pedagogical treatises and songs show a commitment to the spiritual welfare of people outside his community: students, devout women and laymen. The *collationale*, originally written in Latin and later translated into the vernacular, and the Middle Dutch translations of the treatises about the Lord's Prayer and the Ave Maria are intended for this group as well.

Dirc van Herxen's works were not only received in the circle of the devout communities; his audience included Canons Regular, Benedictines and Canons Regular of the Order of the Holy Cross. As yet, nothing indicates that his work was read outside these religious institutions. The position of the Canons Regular of the Order of the Holy Cross of Cologne is remarkable: they owned various works of the rector of Zwolle at an early stage. The geographical area in which the writings of Dirc van Herxen are handed down, extends from the IJssel region to the east and south in particular, with Cologne as its centre. Most of the texts were kept in Latin codices containing theological work. Various works were printed.

Zwolle, the city in which Dirc van Herxen lived and worked for more than fifty years, was a strictly organized community. Everything was controlled by the city magistrates, and this especially holds true for new religious congregations. Six new female communities were established in the city after 1380. Nearly all of them started as a devout community and after a while transformed into houses for Sisters of the Common Life. In 1384, initiatives were taken to set up a male community in Zwolle. Soon, this new community moved to the Nemelerberg. In 1395 it was transformed into a monastery of the Canons Regular. In 1394, a second attempt followed, organized by Meynold van Windesheim, an uncle of Dirc van Herxen, who was strongly influenced by Geert Grote. After his conversion, he left his position at the Episcopal court in Utrecht, gave up worldly pleasures and tried to live a withdrawn life.

Tension about the new communities increased in the city and in 1415 things took a dramatic turn. After the Bishop of Utrecht's military intervention, the city council was forced to retract its drastic measures against the new religious communities. A couple of turbulent years followed, partly due to the dispute about the succession of the Bishop of Utrecht.

The Gregoriushuis, which had emanated from the second attempt to establish a male devout community, had a more strict character than its predecessor. It was or-

ganized on the model of the Florenshuis in Deventer and had fewer lay brothers. Soon, new communities were founded out of the Gregoriushuis, which accommodated eleven brothers in 1409. During the rectorship of Dirc van Herxen, the brothers acquired a number of important privileges. In 1418 the parish priest gave the priests among them permission to not only hear confessions of the citizens, but also of clergymen and students. And the Gregoriushuis was allowed to organize meetings for religious instruction (collations) for students and interested lay people.

The Gregoriushuis gradually developed into the guiding community of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life and became the meeting place of the so-called Colloquium of Zwolle, the umbrella organisation, which was set up to maintain discipline and unity. From the very start, the Gregoriushuis was actively involved in pastoral care and providing hostel accommodation for students of the Latin school of Zwolle. The students copied books for the brothers for a small fee. For the brothers themselves, copying of manuscripts was the main activity to earn a living. In the second half of the fifteenth century, the Gregoriushuis developed into a well known publishing house.

Soon, the absence of the Church's approbation of the devout communities became an important matter of dispute. The monastic orders were particularly critical, as the devout way of living showed strong parallels with the monastic life, but did not include the monastic vows. In this struggle for acknowledgement, the apologetic writings, which originated in the circle of the Brothers of the Common Life, were of great importance. Gerard Zerbolt van Zutphen, the librarian of the Brothers of the Common Life in Deventer, wrote the influential treatise *Super modo vivendi*, a compendium in which all questions about the devout way of life were discussed. All later treatises relating to this issue, including the writings of Dirc van Herxen, refer to this text.

Modern scholars have struggled with the questionable status of the religious houses of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life. Their conclusions were often influenced by their view of the *Devotio Moderna* as an orthodox movement deeply rooted in the medieval Catholic Church or as a kind of precursor of modern times. R.R. Post strongly emphasizes the Catholic character of the movement and attaches much importance to the Brothers of the Common Life. In his opinion, in spite of their low regard of knowledge, they had contributed substantially to the education of a new generation of clerics. After all, churches and monasteries recruited appropriate candidates from the hostels run by the devout communities.

Kaspar Elm has emphasized that the Brothers of the Common Life did not consider their way of life as something new. Moreover, it is inadequate and a-historical to dispute whether the brothers were mainly monastic, lay, traditional or modern. Instead of considering the *status medius* in the light of the emerging Modernity, it is more beneficial to view the community of brothers as an ancient movement which prospered at a time when traditional authorities lost control. This is also the opinion of the American historian John Van Engen. He does not want to isolate the *Devotio Moderna* from other devout movements, but he connects it to the religious revolution which emerged

in thirteenth century urban Italy. The great commitment of laymen spread across Europe and gained influence in the cities of the Low Countries as well. Many beguinages were established under supervision of city councils and parish priests. The devout made use of the same local networks which were dependent on local help and profited from the existing latitude between laymen and the monastery. In the midst of their fellow townsmen, they lived a solitary life, in which they developed their own world with special rules of conduct and clothing.

According to Nikolaus Staubach, the *via media* of the brothers was not meant to remove the strict division between the Church and the world, but primarily served to save the world by winning it for the monastery. With this view, he stresses the monastic side of the brothers and consequently under-stresses their contribution to the spiritual education of laymen in the city. The brothers did not want to interfere with the world, but they had their influence by organizing meetings like the collation, without trying to immediately convert society to the monastic ideals.

With their collations, the Brothers of the Common Life gave their own interpretation of an old and established tradition. The practice of the collation can not easily be summarized; as time passed by, every circle developed its own interpretation of the collation. Explorative research by Thom Mertens has shown that the word 'collatio' was used as a kind of collective term for various meetings and discussions within the several branches of the *Devotio Moderna*. In the rule of life for the Brothers of the Common Life, the collation had its most elaborated and institutionalised form. Their *consuetudines* distinguish the *collatio mutua*, which was meant for the brothers among themselves and was held at Sundays and holy days during the afternoon and evening. One of the brothers was the chairman; he read an introduction and supervised the discussion that followed. The *admonitio* was meant for an audience from outside the community. Students and interested citizens gathered after the vespers on Sundays and holy days as well. One of the brothers gave an introductory lecture in the vernacular. Only plain topics were discussed and the brothers spoke with the visitors in order to convince them to do the good thing.

The *consuetudines* of the *Gregoriushuis*, which was the most influential rule of the Brother movement, dedicate a separate chapter to the *collatio mutua* and the *admonitio*. Several passages about the *admonitio* are exactly similar to the regulations which were registered in the agreement made with the parish priest in 1418. This document gives a clear description of the audience, and of the time and the way the brothers organized the *admonitio*. For 'scolares et alii boni viri', a part of the Holy Scripture was read, followed by a spiritual discourse. The brothers were not allowed to preach, but they had permission to give a speech in which a sound doctrine was taught. To prevent competition with the parish church, it was not allowed to organize the *admonitio* during church services.

It is not clear to what extent the practice of the *admonitio* in Zwolle was adopted elsewhere. But it is known that the Brothers of the Common Life in Gouda organized public collations for lay people, although this situation is not representative for other

houses. Apart from rules, biographies from the circle of the *Devotio Moderna* give some information about the collations practiced by the brothers. They give a picture of the intimate character of the meetings and the popularity of the theme of the Four Last Things. The presence of people from outside is mentioned as well.

A type of text that is directly related to the collation practice is the *collationale*, a collection of texts especially composed for the introductory lecture of the meeting. In its ideal form, a *collationale* exists of a collection of texts to be read aloud, opened up by a key based on the Church calendar. The best known example is the *collationale* by Dirc van Herxen. There must have been similar text collections, but it is hard to determine whether a specific manuscript actually functioned as a *collationale*.

Dirc van Herxen composed his *collationale*, written in the vernacular, in two sizeable volumes. Since the discovery by J. Deschamps, we know that the *Eerste Collatieboek* is preserved in its entirety in the codex Utrecht, UB 3 L 6 (abbreviated U). The first part of the *Eerste Collatieboek* is also preserved in manuscript Leiden, UB BPL 2231 (L). Manuscript L is the oldest and was copied in the first half of the fifteenth century, possibly in the second or third decade. It has a provenance mark which shows that it belonged to the Canons Regular of Gaesdonck near the city of Goch. Manuscript U was completed in 1445 and was owned by the Tertiary convent of Sint-Agatha at Amersfoort. At the beginning of the codex a key can be found. It also contains the Middle Dutch version of Dirc van Herxen's treatises about the Lord's Prayer and the Ave Maria.

L and U prove to be closely related and are possibly copied from the same document. The first part of the *Eerste Collatieboek* is preserved in both L and U and constitutes one coherent entity. This is remarkable, considering copyists could easily omit or add new texts in this type of collection. As yet, it is not possible to associate the dialect of L and U to a specific region like the area along the IJssel or the region around Goch. But a closer analysis shows that L has more (north)eastern Middle Dutch language characteristics than U.

We have to be careful with the statement of Deschamps that excerpts from the *Eerste Collatieboek* are also recorded in several other codices, mainly collections of sermons. Dirc van Herxen used a lot of sources and when an excerpt from the *Eerste Collatieboek* is also recorded somewhere else, it does not necessarily have to be taken from this book. Even when the excerpts have an identical translation, they could have been taken from another source than the *Eerste Collatieboek*. That seems to be true for the four sermons in the *Eerste Collatieboek* which appear in a number of related homily collections. Thus far, only one example is known of a text compilation from the *Eerste Collatieboek* which, in a revised version, is recorded in an other manuscript.

Deschamps also tried to trace manuscripts in which the *Tweede Collatieboek* was handed down. We are informed about its contents by the key of U, which does not only refer to sections from the *Eerste Collatieboek*, but also to those of the *Tweede Collatieboek*. From this it can be derived that it consisted of texts specifically related to the Church calendar, and that it was subdivided into two parts: a *temporale* and a *sanctorale*. According to Deschamps, the codex Amsterdam, UB I G 47, a homily collection related to the

collections mentioned above, contains many sermons and *exempla* from the *Tweede Collatieboek*. As there is no clear evidence for this argumentation, one has to be careful. More research on this codex and the homily collections is needed.

As a handbook for the collation, the *Eerste Collatieboek* comes close to the *florilegium*. It definitely does not provide standardized patristic texts, nor is it a *rapiarium* brought about by a personal process of reading and meditation – two types of text which often appear in the circle of the *Devotio Moderna*. The American scholars Richard and Mary Rouse have shown that the anthology is a goldmine for researchers, because the contents, structure and physical appearance clearly mirror the intellectual milieu in which the writings originated. Hence, the *Eerste Collatieboek* provides exceptional evidence for the reception of the Church fathers and later authors in the circle of the *Devotio Moderna*.

In the *Eerste Collatieboek*, Dirc van Herxen uses plenty of new methods, developed since the thirteenth century, to organize text material. The complete work is divided into two books (of which the second one has not been handed down), and each book consists of two parts: the *Eerste Collatieboek* deals with sin and virtues and the *Tweede Collatieboek* contains a *temporale* and a *sanctorale*. The part about sin as well as that about virtues consists of 25 sections, which together makes the symbolic number 50. A number of sections are divided in subsections. Within the sections and subsections, the sixth and seventh level consist of excerpts and paragraphs.

As usual in the tradition of the *florilegium*, the *Eerste Collatieboek* has an advanced system of subdivisions. However, for users of L and U it is not always easy to detect the different levels; obviously not all of these levels were useful. In particular, the distinction between subsections is not easily made. Apart from that, the key in U does not provide a specification for subsections. This level evidently functioned only to organize the huge amount of material. Within the sections, the countless number of *exempla* are of great importance. The variety in theoretical or less theoretical explanations and *exempla* in which the theory was visualized, forms the outline of the *Eerste Collatieboek*.

The Latin *collationale*, which is preserved in two manuscripts, has a structure and order comparable to its vernacular counterpart. The codex Brussels, KB IV 124 (B), probably written in the 1450s or 1460s, consists of two volumes of considerable size and was supposedly owned by the Gregoriushuis itself. The codex Utrecht, UB 8 E 29 (U-lat), which contains other texts besides the *collationale*, is probably copied after 1440 and has a provenance of the Windesheim monastery of Frenswegen. In this manuscript, Dirc van Herxen is explicitly mentioned as the author.

Not all seven levels are clearly distinguished in the Latin *collationale*. It is divided into two books, but these are not clearly separated in *partes*. In the first book, a subdivision is not mentioned, however, it roughly has the same classification of sin and virtues as the *Eerste Collatieboek*. But in the second book a *temporale* and a *sanctorale* are indicated. The level of the subdivision appears only sporadically. B, like the *Eerste Collatieboek*, has a pattern of theoretical texts alternating with *exempla*: in U-lat hardly any *exempla* are given. Both Latin codices have a different number of sections. U-lat has two sections which do not appear in B, while B has, mainly at the end, thirteen sections which are left out of U-lat. The

shared sections show great similarities. In the differences a pattern can be discovered: the sections in B have in general more excerpts and in U-lat the excerpts are shortened.

Dirc van Herxen, in his first book, clearly was inspired by Florens Radewijns' *Libellus*, but he chose a less strict internal coherence. He made a division between sin and virtues, but there is no close connection between the themes. In between the passages about sin, the Four Last Things and themes about the practice of virtues are dealt with, which are only mentioned in the second part of the *Libellus*. The *Libellus* opens with the topic of perfection, but Dirc van Herxen puts this theme nearly at the end. His primary goal does not seem to present a systematical doctrine about perfection as given in the *Libellus*, but rather to provide appropriate themes for spiritual conversations.

When writing the *Eerste Collatieboek*, Dirc van Herxen was inspired by the Latin *collationale* for its structure and contents. But the *Eerste Collatieboek* is more strictly arranged with two parts of 25 sections. The recorded excerpts are more fixed; the Latin codices B and U-lat have internal variations, which is not the case with the Middle Dutch manuscripts L and U. The latter books moreover do not contain space to insert extra excerpts, whereas B and U-lat do have these spaces. The variety in theory and *exempla* is more dominant in the Middle Dutch version as well. When putting together the *Eerste Collatieboek*, some sections were left out. In a number of cases it is clear that it deals with matters too difficult for laymen (e.g. the dark judgements of God). For them Dirc van Herxen particularly added a number of sections (e.g. the reading of religious literature in the vernacular and marriage).

Dirc van Herxen's primary goal was to provide appropriate material for the collations, which can be seen in the presence of keys attached to the text material. The manuscripts B, U-lat and U all contain liturgical keys which mention one or more appropriate sections matching with the Church calendar. This shows that the text collection was not meant to be read integrally or to arbitrarily highlight specific themes. The key of B, which can be found at the end of volume one, is concerned with the *temporale*. For all Sundays and holy days, one or two sections are mentioned and sometimes a specific part of a section is referred to. On the first pages of U-lat, a two-piece key can be found: one for the *temporale* and one for the *sanctorale*. The key deals with many more themes than the key of B and has a number of themes which do not refer to any section at all. It seems to be a general list of appropriate themes for the collation, as was often used in the communities of the *Devotio Moderna*.

The vernacular key in U also contains a part for the *temporale* and a part for the *sanctorale*. As mentioned before, it refers to sections of the *Eerste Collatieboek*, but also to themes from the *Tweede Collatieboek* which is not preserved. The sections are not equally divided over the year: some sections are referred to only once, whereas others are mentioned over fourteen times. The section about 'verduldicheit' (patience) is mentioned most often and is mainly mentioned during Passiontide. Themes about death and hell are dealt with mainly on holy days. To prevent themes from not being discussed at all, every theme is followed by a folio reference, to indicate where the section concerned starts. The choice of sections in the key is not binding but rather optional: the mentioned section is often far too extensive to be read and discussed completely.



In every key a relation can be discovered between the sections mentioned at a specific occasion and the Epistle and Gospel reading for that day. Yet, the key in B refers a number of times explicitly to the Gospel reading. This relationship should be investigated in further research. Yet, it is clear that the sections are not randomly chosen. During the collation, themes had to be brought up which suited the Bible pericope of the day to deepen the Bible reading. Besides, the similarities between the chosen sections in the Latin and the Middle Dutch *collationale* are too striking to be coincidental. This emphasizes once more the close relation between the Latin and the vernacular collation practice.

Within the *Devotio Moderna*, the reading of religious texts in Latin and the vernacular was clearly marked out. In his reading instructions, Geert Grote named simple material like the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Apostolic epistles and 'libri devoti'. The programme for spiritual exercises advised intensive reading of a limited number of texts. Additionally, a number of texts in the vernacular was recommended: the Gospels, hagiographical texts and the more accessible works of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard of Clairvaux.

Most sources used by Dirc van Herxen in his Latin *collationale*, correspond with the instructions given by Geert Grote. But he does not restrict himself to Geert Grote's advice and makes his own choices. Sometimes the literature for his fellow brothers was more difficult than strictly necessary for their spiritual education. For example, he used the works by Thomas Aquinas and some difficult works of Augustine. He also referred to authors like Smaragdus, Heinrich von Friemar and Petrarch. But their works were used more often in the devout circles; Petrarch's *De vita solitaria* was in fact very popular.

The contents of the *Eerste Collatieboek* can be divided into three categories. Dirc van Herxen used excerpts and treatises by other authors, in particular Bernard of Clairvaux, Gregory, Augustine, Henricus Suso and David of Augsburg. The many *exempla* often come from the *Vitaspatrum*, the *Dialogus miraculorum* by Caesarius of Heisterbach or the *Bonum universale de apibus* by Thomas of Cantimpré. The *Eerste Collatieboek* also contains treatises which Dirc van Herxen composed out of a large number of quotations from works of others.

The sources used in the first category are quite common. From his own circle Dirc van Herxen used Gerard Zerbolts *De vestibis pretiosis* and the sixth and seventh chapter of *Super modo vivendi*. Surprisingly, Dirc van Herxen does not make use of the contemporary hagiographical tradition in his *exempla*. In the texts composed by Dirc van Herxen himself, Augustine, Gregory, Bernard, Jerome, John Chrysostom and David of Augsburg are quoted most often. Of the numerous texts by authors from the circle of the *Devotio Moderna*, Dirc van Herxen only uses Geert Grote's *De matrimonio*. Most striking is the impressive number of Bible quotations. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job, the Wisdom books, the Psalms, the Acts of the Apostles, the epistles of St Paul and St John and the Apocalypse are popular. That is a much more extended repertory of Bible books than was used by Geert Grote. In the *Eerste Collatieboek*, Dirc van Herxen does not draw on the more profound books which he does quote in his Latin *collationale*. This is connected to

the fact that in the *Eerste Collatieboek*, sections which were deemed less appropriate for students and interested citizens were left out.

The relation between the Latin *collationale* and the *Eerste Collatieboek* has not yet been researched thoroughly. A preliminary comparison regarding the contents of four Latin sections and their equivalent in the vernacular, shows that Dirc van Herxen used his collection of Latin excerpts as a reservoir to write the *Eerste Collatieboek*. For the public of the *admonitio*, the Latin sections are slightly modified from a collection of incoherent excerpts into a coherent entity with a clear message for an audience of laypersons.

The orientation on the laypersons can clearly be recognized in three out of eight sections from the *Eerste Collatieboek*, which do not have an equivalent in the Latin *collationale*. In the section ‘Van Duytsche boeken te lesen’ (‘About the reading of religious literature in the vernacular’), Dirc van Herxen goes back to a fundamental treatise from his own circle, *Super modo vivendi* by Gerard Zerbolt, but he gives this section a different structure. As he writes, his aim is to equip the readers of the *admonitio* for questions from outsiders about reading, possessing and discussing the Holy Scripture. Although Gerard Zerbolt gives extensive instructions for reading, Dirc van Herxen omits a number of them. He does not say anything about inappropriate books of the Old or New Testament or about Eckhartian treatises. Thus far, it can not be stated that Dirc van Herxen had broader opinions than Gerard Zerbolt, but this would be an interesting topic for further research.

In the section ‘Vander echtscap’ (‘About marriage’), Dirc van Herxen gives a strong argument and again uses a text from the circle of the *Devotio Moderna*. His argument has two main points: people without ties and with the ability for abstinence, should not get married. He possibly had in mind the young men who had completed the city school and prepared themselves for entering a religious community, or may have tried to persuade students who had not yet chosen for a religious community. The argument of the first point leans strongly on Geert Grote’s *De matrimonio*, but Dirc van Herxen omits a number of Grote’s harsh rules. He neither describes negative characteristics of women, nor agrees with Grote’s interpretation that the sexual act as a remedy for impurity, is sinful.

The second part of the section about advice concerning marriage is less influenced by the interpretations of Geert Grote. The concrete suggestions of Dirc van Herxen do not contain any of the ideas of Geert Grote about spiritual marriage and abstinence. More advice about marriage can be found in the section ‘Sunte Jheronimus epistel tot Celanciam’ (St Jerome’s Letter to Celantia’). This contains a translation of the pelagian letter *Ad Celantiam* with a rule for rich ladies who want to lead a Christian life in their marriage. Strikingly, the *Eerste Collatieboek* does not contain the final part of the letter about abstinence. Again, it seems that Dirc van Herxen deliberately refrains from recommending abstinence for married couples. Probably, he was more pragmatic than people thought he was.

Apart from being a skilful compiler, Dirc van Herxen was an adept translator. The *Eerste Collatieboek* contains a number of sizeable passages from the *Horologium* by Henricus Suso. He adapts the existing translation as he desires because this edition had too many inaccurately translated passages. In the case of Lotharius of Segni's *De miseria humanae conditionis*, Dirc van Herxen's translation deviates considerably from the Latin source. That Dirc van Herxen freely interprets the original text can be explained by the intended readers who were mainly laypeople. The text would have been too complicated for them. To edify them, a simple, concise reproduction of the importance of the argument was more appropriate than a literal translation.

Also with *De vestibis pretiosis*, a small treatise in which Gerard Zerbolt writes against luxurious clothing, Dirc van Herxen rephrases the text according to the needs of his audience. In his Latin *collationale*, he used this treatise as well, omitting the third and longest part because it was not relevant for the brothers. For the *Eerste Collatieboek*, he does not use this shortened Latin version, but he goes back to the original extended version and faithfully follows the source, which he divides over the three subsections. This time, he does not change the third part because for the audience of the *admonitio* it was important to know why they as ordinary citizens were expected to wear simple clothes. At the end, Dirc van Herxen adds two texts: an excerpt that possibly comes from his book *De vita cristiana* which has not survived, and as extra illustration material an *exemplum* from the *Dialogues* by Gregory to which Gerard Zerbolt had also referred.

The excerpts from the *Dialogues*, which appear in the *Eerste Collatieboek*, are translated and rewritten by Dirc van Herxen. He primarily wanted to mention the wonderful events, and the embedding of the excerpts in the *Dialogues* is of little importance to him. However, he strictly follows the word-order and grammatical structure of the original text, but he sometimes simplifies long-winded constructions. Most likely, this was a pragmatic approach rather than for any fundamental reasons. A great deal of text material for the *Eerste Collatieboek* was collected from Latin sources and translated immediately. This was easier than looking for a translation in the vernacular and adapting this in the way Dirc van Herxen desired to use it.

The brothers of the *Gregoriushuis* continuously came in touch with uplifting literature: during meals, collations, individual study and meditation. We often do not know exactly how a text was used for a specific activity. This is also true for the use of texts during the *admonitio*. The manuscripts of the *Eerste Collatieboek* hardly contain traces of use. Moreover, these traces do not lead primarily to the readers in Zwolle, but to the communities in Gaesdonck en Amersfoort. Yet, the study of the contents and structure of the sections make it possible to gain insight into the way the *Eerste Collatieboek* was used. Most likely, the sections with well-organized and not too extensive material were read integrally. Sections with many enumerations were probably meant to help people memorize the text. As shown by the *consuetudines*, the way *admonitio* was used was mainly a one-way traffic: one of the brothers read an uplifting text, followed by a short speech. Next, the members of the audience were addressed individually. Sometimes though, the *Eerste Collatieboek* gives indications for an interaction with the audience. For example,

the section about peace contains a number of questions that may arise, with the appropriate answers. Possibly, this helped the chairman of the collation to anticipate some questions.

It is difficult to accurately explain why the *Eerste Collatieboek* appeared in Gaesdonck. One will have known about the compiler of the text collection and the context in which it functioned originally. During the time that L was copied, Dirc van Herxen was a key figure within the *Devotio Moderna*. At this time, Gaesdonck had frequent contacts with Zwolle. Obviously, the *Eerste Collatieboek* was used by the lay brothers. No lay statutes have survived for Gaesdonck. Presumably, as we can see in Eemstein and other monasteries of the Chapter of Windesheim, considerable attention was given to their spiritual education by collective readings at meals and collations and through private reading. The *Eerste Collatieboek* may have been used in Gaesdonck without a key.

That the *Eerste Collatieboek* also appeared in Amersfoort, is not remarkable at all. As procurator of the Brothers of the Common Life in Amersfoort, Dirc van Herxen had close connections with the city, which played a major role in the history of the *Devotio Moderna*. The convent of Sint-Agnes, which had a copy of Dirc van Herxen's *Eerste Collatieboek* in 1445, was established in 1399 as a community of devout women. In 1404 they followed the rule of the Third Order and in 1415 the *clausura* was introduced. The pastoral care was provided by the Brothers of the Common Life. Hardly any details are known about the books that were read in the convent of Sint-Agatha.

Recent research has shown that religious texts were of great importance in the spiritual education of Tertiaries. A text, composed especially for the sisters of the Third Order, was written in the convent of Sint-Agnes early in the sixteenth century. Rector Jan de Wael in his *Informieringheboec*, a text intended for the spiritual growth of novices, developed a special programme for reading with booklists for the different stages of spiritual development.

Unfortunately, manuscript U gives few direct clues for use in the convent of Sint-Agatha. The text collection was not primarily meant for individual reading, but was mainly used for a kind of collational practice. The manuscript introduces itself explicitly as *collationale* and also the enclosed key, which is indicated as a tool for the readings on Sundays and holy days, refers to the collation. The texts were read by the father confessor, for whom the Latin reading instructions were possibly intended.

Normative sources from the circle of Tertiaries do not give information about whether or not the collation practice existed, but there are other documents which lift a corner of the veil. Jacobus de Voecht mentions in his *Narratio* a brother of the Gregoriushuis, who, as father confessor of the convent of Sint-Caecilia, the main convent of the Chapter of Utrecht, organized collations for the sisters and for secular people. The convent of Sint-Catharina of Alkmaar organized collations with open doors as well. The collations were practiced in the chapel of the convent which was open for people from outside. Presumably, similar meetings were organized in the convent of Sint-Agatha in Amersfoort. This may be a good explanation for the presence of the section about marriage, the contents of which was of little importance to the sisters themselves.

A comparison with text collections related to the *Eerste Collatieboek*, gives a better focus on the *Eerste Collatieboek* and its function. The codex Brussels, KB 2259-62 is a composite manuscript, of which the third part contains over 40 sections with excerpts from Augustine, Jerome, Gregory, Bernard of Clairvaux and others. Occasionally it contains *exempla* as well. It is not an arbitrary collection of themes, but the sections together give a brief overview of a life following Christ. As in the *Eerste Collatieboek*, themes like confession, penance and repentance are dealt with, albeit less exhaustively. Themes especially written for laymen, are left out. But the 40 sections of the third part address beginning clergymen, laymen or sisters. The origin (the monastery of the Canons Regular at Groenendaal near Brussels) and the owner (the Windesheim convent of Galilea in Ghent) of the codex, suggest that it was meant for this audience. It could have been used as collection of texts for the collations, but in that case the chairman had more freedom to choose his readings due to the absence of a key. He probably had more influence because the sections contain less text material than the *Eerste Collatieboek*.

The codex Leuven, Maurits Sabbe Bibliotheek MS 5000 12 B I, which dates from the first half of the fifteenth century, contains two books about marriage and widowhood in which a number of texts are indicated as a collation. This is not a collection of excerpts like the *Eerste Collatieboek*, which was intended as introductory reading for the *admonitio*. Yet, this manuscript was probably used in a comparable situation by a spiritual leader from the *Devotio Moderna*, who was involved in the lay apostolate. The first book about marriage contains thirteen collations, of which the first three deal with the reading of religious literature in the vernacular. On the request of laymen, the self-confident author gives an account of his attempt to write down a number of pieces of advice about morality. In order to do so, he starts with a counterattack against his opponents, who believe that it is not allowed to read the Holy Scripture in the vernacular. In the subsequent collations he discusses a number of aspects of secular marriage. His final aim is to persuade his audience to a life of abstinence – an ideal not promoted by Dirc van Herxen.

The codex Brussels, KB 19549 is a simple paper booklet from the second half of the fifteenth century containing 30 sections with excerpts from authors such as Augustine, Jerome, Gregory, John Chrysostom, Bernard of Clairvaux and David of Augsburg, followed by a revised version of *Des coninx summe*. In the sections, themes like the Four Last Things, the imitation of Christ, patience, dancing and playing dice are dealt with. Other important themes of the devout, such as marriage, sober clothing and reading the Holy Scripture in the vernacular are mentioned as well.

This codex, as well as the *Eerste Collatieboek*, contains a revision of *De vestibus pretiosis* by Gerard Zerbolt, but they both are written independently. The Brussels codex is freely revised. The main structure of the text was changed and the contents were shortened. For the theme about religious literature in the vernacular, Dirc van Herxen used chapters six and seven of *Super modo vivendi*, while the Brussels manuscript used a revision of Zerbolt's *De libris teutonicalibus*, though both give attention to the right of Christians to admonish one another. Possibly, the intention of the Brussels text was to legitimize the collation practice. Also in the section about marriage, the *Eerste Collatieboek* is written in

a more systematic and detailed manner. The Brussels manuscript contains an explicit call for a life retired from the world, either in a beguinage or in a monastery without any private property and without entering a specific religious community. These text collections must come from the circle of the *Devotio Moderna*, probably from the *Collatiebroeders* in Gouda.

The comparison between these three codices shows that the *Eerste Collatieboek* is not an isolated phenomenon in the Middle Dutch religious literature of the fifteenth century. However, it differs in its systematic structure, the extended and often detailed elaboration of themes and the presence of a key to guide its use. However, for an audience of benevolent laypeople there were plenty of texts for education. This gives a plausible explanation for the fact that the *Eerste Collatieboek* has survived in only two manuscripts, in spite of its abundant and useful text material.