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Seeing beyond Signs: Allegorical Explanations of the Mass in Medieval Dutch Literature

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The year 1477 marks the start of the career of one of the most productive and original printers in the fifteenth-century Low Countries – Gerard Leeu († 1492).^{*} ¹ On August 6 of that year he published the first edition of *Die vier uterste* (*The Four Last Things*), a Dutch translation of the *Cordiale [siue] de quatuor novissimis* by Gerard van Vliederveen († 1402).² The text considers Death, Judgment, Hell, and Heaven, and according to the prologue, everyone who wishes to be united eternally with God must possess this book and contemplate its contents.³ The preliminary page closes with a statement that introduces the reader to an entirely different yet equally important text:

Oec so staet int eynde van desen selven boec ghescreven die virtute, die doghet ende die bedudenisse vander missen, dat oec een yghelic mensche van node is te weten.⁴

Also, at the end of this same book the efficacy, virtue and significance of the Mass are discussed, which is likewise necessary for everyone to know.

At the close of *Die vier uterste*, the reader does indeed find a text that sums up the main parts of the Mass and links the priest's actions to the history of

* I wish to thank Charles Caspers, Rijcklof Hofman and Geert Warnar for critical readings of earlier versions of this text.

1 On Leeu, see Hellinga W. Gs. – Hellinga-Querido L., *The Fifteenth-Century Printing Types of the Low Countries* (Amsterdam: 1966) 36–38, 69–73; and Goudriaan K., *Een drukker zoekt publiek: Gheraert Leeu te Gouda 1477–1484* (Delft: 1993).

2 *Die vier uterste*. Add: *Bedudenisse der missen* (Gouda, G[erard] L[eeu]: 6 August 1477), ISTC no. ico0902000. Consulted copy: Washington, Library of Congress, Rosenwald 462. Digital reproduction: <https://www.loc.gov/item/65058917/>. On the author, see Byrn R., “Gerard van Vliederveen”, in Stammeler W., Langosch K., Ruh K., Illing K., Stöckinger-Löser Ch. (eds.), *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon, Bd. 2* (Berlin – New York: 1980) 1217–1221.

3 Washington, LC, Rosenwald 464, fol. 1r: ‘Ende hem minnende ghebrucken inder ewicheit. Welke boeken een yghelijc mensche van node is te hebben, ende dicwijl over te dencken’.

4 Washington, LC, Rosenwald 462, fol. 1r.

salvation and to Christ's Passion in particular. This text, which also survives in manuscript form, is allegorical: it explains the Mass symbolically and also interprets it as a remembrance of Christ's life and death.⁵ The Introit is said to express the desire of the fathers of the Old Testament (Moses, David, Isaiah) to see the human nature of Christ.⁶ Other readings can be found later in the text. The author observes, for instance, that the priest consecrates the sacrament with five powerful words, which Jesus spoke to his disciples when he gave them his holy body during the Last Supper (the words themselves – 'hoc est enim corpus meum' – are not mentioned in the text); furthermore, he asserts that the priest elevates the sacrament in order for the congregants to see it. This latter action signifies the elevation of Christ on the cross to which he was nailed. And after the cross had been raised up, the soldiers roughly dropped the cross into the hole where it was to stand. As a result, the Lord's veins were ruptured. At that moment, all the bystanders could see him hanging on the cross, just as all parishioners can now see the host.⁷ At this point the text not only provides a symbolic interpretation of the ritual action of elevation during Mass by linking it to the Passion, but also resolutely guides the readers' thoughts, stating: 'Dat selmen dencken als die priester op heft dat heylyghe sacrament' ('This one should think when the priest elevates the host').⁸ Although this instruction is quite brief, I nevertheless believe that in its directive mode of address, it exemplifies one of the crucial characteristics of the allegorical interpretations of the Mass, as these would develop in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

At the very end of the text, Leeu printed the *dictum* of 'a teacher', which reveals his primary motivation for publishing this text:

Een leraer beschrijft:

Het tis den mensche saligher ende god liever dat hi *devotelic* misse hoert dan of hi al soe veel lants om gode gave den armen als hi binnen dier tijt dat hi misse hoerde soude moghen overgaen ende betreden.⁹

5 London, British Library, Harley 2444, fols 7^r–18^r: 'Dit is dat beduytnisse vander heylger missen'. The manuscript dates to the 2nd or 3rd quarter of the 15th century; see the online *Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts*, <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/welcome.htm>; and Cologne, Historisches Archiv, GB Oct. 69, fols 51^r–64^r, see http://historischesarchivkoeln.de:8080/actaproweb/archive.xhtml?id=Vz+++++90003410PPLS#Vz_____90003410PPLS. On the text as printed by Leeu, see Goudriaan K., "Een kerkelijk catechese-offensief? Misverklaringen op de drukpers rond 1500", in Abels P. H. A. M. – Jacobs J. – Veen M. van (eds.), *Terug naar Gouda. Religieus leven in de maalstroom van de tijd* (Zoetermeer: 2014) 73–95, esp. 85 and 89.

6 Washington, LC, Rosenwald 462, fol. lix^v–lx^r.

7 Ibidem, fol. lxiii^r–v.

8 Ibidem, fol. lxiii^v.

9 Ibidem, fol. lxvi^r.

A teacher pronounces:

It is more profitable for an individual and preferable to God that he hear Mass *devoutly* than that he give as much land to the poor as he might walk across during the time that he heard Mass.

This text therefore invites readers to understand what happens during Mass – to access the spiritual meaning embedded in the ritual. More importantly, however, it was designed to offer a set of spiritual guidelines, helping congregants to take part in the ritual of the Mass in such a way that their devotion was stimulated and their consciousness of the significance of ritual made more acute and *responsive*. One of the five known copies of Leeu's 1477 edition provides evidence that the text did indeed reach lay readers. The copy belonged to a lay noble woman, Catharina van Oppendorp, married to the knight Jan van Bulloys; we may assume that she used the book for her own spiritual growth and to deepen her devotional life. In 1513, she converted her Louvain dwelling into a community of Rich Clares, to whom she ultimately bequeathed her copy of the book.¹⁰

During the later Middle Ages, attending Mass was one of the key ways for lay people to participate in religious ritual and to partake of the divine mystery. Not surprisingly, the short text published by Leeu in 1477 was neither the first nor the last of its kind. This essay aims to provide a first exploration of this kind of allegorical explanation of Mass ritual in Middle Dutch.¹¹ These vernacular texts were widely disseminated; the largely lay audiences they addressed consulted them to gain access to the spiritual meaning of the Mass. Hitherto, however, they have been little studied. How did such texts offer material that could stimulate readers to respond to what they heard and saw, and to see beyond surface ritual, beyond signs and symbols? In other words, how did these explanations of the Mass – at first purely textual, but later supplemented with

10 Washington, LC, Rosenwald 462, front fly-leaf verso: 'Desen boeck heeft toe ghehoert der edelre vrouwen my vrou van bloys saligher ghedachten ons alder eerweerdichste ende liefste moeder ende sy heeffen ons [sinte claren tot loeven] beset in haer testament dat wien niet wech gheven en moeghen noch vercopen'.

11 The standard work on Eucharistic devotion in the Low Countries is Caspers C. M. A., *De Eucharistische vroomheid en het feest van sacramentsdag in de Nederlanden tijdens de late middeleeuwen* (Leuven: 1992). Chapter three contains an important, if concise, general overview of sermons and other devotional literature concerning the Eucharist. On the Mass as a series of ritual acts, see Lukken G., *Rituals in Abundance. Critical Reflections on the Place, Form, and Identity of Christian Ritual in our Culture* (Leuven: 2005), passim. For the German equivalent of the Middle Dutch allegorical explanations of the Mass discussed in the present article, see the chapters by K. Illing, in Stammeler W. – Langosch K. – Ruh K. – Illing K. – Stöllinger-Löser Ch. (eds.), *Die Deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, Bd. 6 (Berlin – New York: 1987) 443–451.

images – seek to shape the understanding and experience of Eucharistic ritual in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries?

The texts discussed in this essay are vernacular versions of a way of thinking that goes back to a Latin tradition codified in the ninth century by Amalarius of Metz († 853).¹² Amalarius developed the so-called allegorical-rememorative interpretation of the liturgy of the Mass, in which its every part is seen allegorically to evoke biblical history.¹³ This tradition culminated in the *Rationale divinorum officiorum* by William Durand of Mende († 1296), completed in 1286.¹⁴ The *Rationale* remained popular throughout the late medieval period and may have been one of the most frequently printed incunabula and post-incunabula.¹⁵ From the early fourteenth century onwards, the tradition was elaborated and disseminated in the Dutch vernacular. These allegorical explanations familiarized lay people with a form of hermeneutics that was intended to shape not only their understanding and experience of the Mass, but also their perception of ritual and art in general, and to heighten their sensitivity to complex structures of meaning. With regard to the material presented here, in addition to the fundamental question, ‘Quid est sacramentum?’, the corollary questions are: ‘How were devotees *informed* about the sacrament of the Eucharist?’, and ‘How did the allegorical-rememorative structures employed in these texts influence their *mentalité*, their manner of thought, in ways that proved generative for subsequent developments in the history of religion and culture?’

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- 12 By far the most important study on the impact of allegorical, analogical, typological, and historical interpretation of the Bible and theology in the Middle Ages and beyond still is Lubac H. de, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'écriture*, T. I.1–2; II.1–2 (Paris, 1959–1964), esp. T. II.2. The application of these four senses to the Mass is discussed in Jungmann J. A., *Missarum sollemnia. Eine genetische Erklärung der römischen Messe. Bd. 1, Messe im Wandel der Jahrhunderte, Messe und kirchliche Gemeinschaft, Vormesse* (Wien: 1962) 137–168.
 - 13 Faupel-Dreves K., *Vom rechten Gebrauch der Bilder im liturgischen Raum. Mittelalterliche Funktionsbestimmungen bildender Kunst im Rationale Divinorum Officiorum des Durandus von Mende (1230/1–1296)* (Leiden – Boston – Köln: 2000) 40–45. The term ‘rememorative’ was coined by A. Franz in *Die Messe im deutschen Mittelalter. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Liturgie und des religiösen Volkslebens* (Freiburg im Breisgau: 1902; reprint ed., 1963).
 - 14 Faupel-Dreves, *Vom rechten Gebrauch*, esp. 59. Also see Holmes S. M., ‘Reading the Church: William Durandus and a New Approach to the History of Ecclesiology’, *Ecclesiology* 7 (2011) 29–49, esp. 35–39.
 - 15 On the printing history of Durand, see White, J. F., ‘Durandus and the Interpretation of Christian Worship’, in Shriver G. H. (ed.), *Contemporary Reflections on the medieval Christian Tradition: Essays in honor of Ray C. Petry* (Durham, N.C.: 1974) 41–52. Holmes, ‘Reading the Church’ 37; and Faupel-Dreves, *Vom rechten Gebrauch* 23, 36–37. Also see the chapter by Lee Palmer Wandel in this volume.

1 Before Leeu's 'Appendix' to *Die vier uterste*

The diffusion of allegorical explanations of the Mass amongst the laity in the Low Countries starts with *Der leken spiegel* (*The Layman's Mirror*), a text written by the Antwerp clerk Jan van Boendale († 1350) in the 1320s. In the second book of his extensive didactic poem – which is also strongly catechetical – Boendale includes one chapter on the interpretation of the church building, the priest's vestments, and the liturgical paraments.¹⁶ The cross on top of the church tower symbolizes the key to Heaven (Christ's death), and the glass windows through which the sun illuminates the church interior signify the enlightenment of the mind through Scripture.¹⁷ The priest-celebrant signifies Christ's presence at the cross ('Die priester oec die den dienst doet / Bediedt christum die ant cruce stoet'), his amice the cloth with which Christ was blindfolded (Lk 22:64, Mt 26:68), and the maniple on his left arm the rope that bound Christ's hands.¹⁸ The chalice stands for Christ's grave, and the paten for the large stone with which the grave was closed.¹⁹ As Boendale put it: 'Thus as you see here / the Mass is nothing else / than a remembrance and teaching / of the holy Passion of Our Lord' ('Aldus als ghi hier siet / En es die messe anders niet / Dan ghedinken ende leren / Vander heilegher passien ons heren').²⁰

A second chapter discusses the ritual of the Mass.²¹ Boendale manages to discuss the entire ritual of the Mass in 136 lines by attending only to the major prayers and ritual actions, and by restricting himself to what he sees as the bare necessities a layman needs to know in order to attend Mass in a profitable way.²² In addition to practical instructions,²³ Boendale also expounds the priest's movements. The fact that he turns around five times during Mass,

16 Boendale Jan van, *Der leken spiegel*, ed. J. J. Mak – H. A. C. Lambermont, in Instituut voor Nederlandse Lexicologie (samenstelling en redactie), *Cd-rom Middelnerlands* (Den Haag – Antwerpen: 1998) fols. 92^{vb}–93^{vb}.

17 Boendale, *Der leken spiegel*, fol. 93^{ra}, lines 49–52 and 69–94.

18 Ibidem, fol. 93^{rb}, lines 89–92, fol. 97–102 and 127–132.

19 Ibidem, fol. 93^{va}, lines 143–154.

20 Ibidem, fol. 93^{vb}, lines 173–176.

21 Ibidem, fols. 93^{vb}–94^{va}. On the relationship between these two chapters and Durand's *Rationale*, see Mak J. J., "Boendale-studies", *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 75 (1957) 241–290, esp. 241–257. His conclusion is that Boendale must have used a sloppy and incomplete excerpt (in lecture notes) from the *Rationale*. In passing, he also provides a comparison with the *Bedienisse van der missen*, discussed below.

22 Mak, "Boendale-studies" 251, calls this a 'model of superficiality' ('toonbeeld van oppervlakkigheid') because many elements of the Mass are missing.

23 Boendale, *Der leken Spiegel*, fols. 93^{vb}–94^{ra}, lines 9–42; 49–53; 59–62; 94^{rb}, lines 63–78.

for example, signifies that Christ was seen five times on Easter Sunday;²⁴ the Offertory symbolizes Christ's sacrifice on the cross on Good Friday;²⁵ and in the elevation of the Host we should bear witness to the Ascension.²⁶ Boendale underscores his pragmatic approach at the end of this chapter:

¶ Men vint vele meer leringhen
 Van desen seluen dinghen
 Dan ic hebbe ghenoeft nu
 Doch hebbic gheseecht v
 Dbeste ende dprincipale
 Daer vte altemale
 Dese vorseide dinghen ruren
 Alsmen vint inder scrifturen

¶ Men vint leringhen menegherhande
 Die deen ende dander achter lande
 Op dese dinghen vinden
 Soudemen dat al ontbinden
 Men mocht cume ouerliden
 Ic wille tandren dinghen tiden²⁷

Regarding these matters, many more instructions could be adduced than I have given; however, I have stated in full the principal and most important ones. The aforementioned things are reported as they are to be found in written texts. One finds manifold instructions about what everyone everywhere thinks about these matters; were one to expound it all, one would barely move forward. I wish now to turn to other subjects.

The emphasis on 'scripture' may point to Boendale's preference for codified interpretations; he did not want to rely on oral traditions in his treatise.²⁸ In any case, Boendale's words provide valuable evidence for the apparently wide availability of allegorical interpretations of the Mass in the first half of the fourteenth century.

24 Ibidem, fol. 94^{rb}, lines 79–84.

25 Ibidem, fol. 94^{rb}, lines 85–90.

26 Ibidem, fols. 94^{rb}–94^{va}, lines 91–103.

27 Ibidem, fol. 94^{va}, lines 123–136.

28 Mak, "Boendale-studies" 254.

A more detailed account, the *Bediedenis van der missen* (*Explanation of Mass*), was written by an anonymous priest (a 'pape') at the request of a laywoman around the middle of the fourteenth century.²⁹ A manuscript copied by the layman Romment van den Riele in 1461 contains a prose adaption of the first 150 lines, which confirms reception amongst the laity.³⁰ The 'pape' wishes to enlighten lay people about the virtues and meaning of the Mass, as hardly any people realize why it is important to attend the sacred rite, and nor do they dwell on its true meaning:

Ic woude elc mensche wiste,
 Of liete hem wisen met liste,
 Wat ghenaden, welke salicheit
 Ane die heileghe misse leit.
 Ic wane sise dan dicke sochten,
 Dat sise hoerden als mochten;
 Want wi moghen weten ghewisse,
 Dat alsoe vele ane die misse
 Ghenaden ende salicheiden leit,
 Als in die sonne stoues geit.
 Want menech luttel weet,
 Waer omme hi te missen geet,
 Ende in sijn herte niet en dreghet,
 wat ane die heileghe misse leghet,
 Soe willic, bider helpen ons Heren,
 .I. deelken den menschen leren,
 Alsoe verre als ane die dude,
 Gheweten moghen leke lude.³¹

29 Leiden, University Library, LTK 191, fols 95^r–103^v. Edition: *Die bediedenis van der missen, met ophelderende aantekeningen voorzien en van wege de Maatschappij van Nederlandsche Letterkunde uitgegeven*, ed. A. C. Oudemans (Leiden: 1852) 53, lines 1272–1276: 'Ghi heren, vrouwen ende cnapen, / Bidt vor den ermen pape, / Die desen boec in rimen vant, / In .i. wel bekent lant, / Doer ere goeder vrouwen bede.' (You, men, women and youngsters, / Pray for the poor priest, / Who wrote this book in verse, / In a well-known country / At the request of a good woman). Also see Warnar G., "Biecht, gebod en zonde. Middelnederlandse moraaltheologie voor de wereldlijke leek", in Mertens Th. a.o. (eds.), *Boeken voor de eeuwigheid. Middelnederlands geestelijk proza* (Amsterdam: 1993) 36–51, 372–380, esp. 46–47. The text is probably based on Berthold of Regensburg, on which, see Daniëls L. M., "Die bediedenis van der missen' in de middeleeuwen", *Studia catholica* 18 (1942) 257–291.

30 The Hague, Royal Library, KA 35, fols 94^r–95^v.

31 *Die bediedenis van der missen* 11–12, lines 11–28.

I would wish that everyone knew or agreed to be taught competently how much grace and salvation are comprised by the Holy Mass. I am sure that they would then attend it often, that they would do so whenever they could; for we can know for certain that there is as much grace and salvation contained in Mass as there are dust motes in sunshine. For few people are aware of why they go to Mass, and nor do they truly realize what Mass is all about; so, with the help of Our Lord, I want partly to teach the people about it – as far as lay people are capable of such interpretation.

Compared with Boendale, the most striking characteristic of the *Bediedenis*, apart from its completeness, is the provision of multiple interpretations that lend the ritual a certain polysemy and allow the laity to discern various layers of meaning. For example, one can understand the amice as the cloth used by the soldiers to blindfold Christ, but it also signifies Christ's meekness in covering his godly nature with a human body.³² The stole signifies Jesus' grief on earth ('bediet Jhesus verdriet, dat hi in ertelike [erterike] liet'), but it is at the same time the rope with which Christ was bound to the column.³³ The *elevatio* calls to mind the raising of the cross, but simultaneously it refers to the Last Judgment.³⁴

Other texts provide different allegorical readings: the priest's fascia or sash is often seen as Pilate's whip, but it can also be the whip with which Christ drove the moneychangers from the temple, as one of the passages in a fragmentary manuscript (c. 1450) at Leiden University Library attests.³⁵

In his encyclopaedic *Tafel van den kersten ghelove* (c. 1404), written in prose, the Dominican theologian Dirc van Delft († 1404) likewise explains allegorically the priest's vestments and other objects connected to the Mass: 'The garb of the priest is derived from the clothing of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and it signifies many godly virtues' ('Die ghewade des priesters sijn ghenomen uut der cledinghe vander passien ons Heren Ihesu Chri ende beteykent vele godliker duechden').³⁶ He clearly distinguishes between

32 Ibidem 16, lines 161–178.

33 Ibidem 17, lines 193–208.

34 Ibidem 38, lines 820–839.

35 The fragments seem to contain two different texts: Leiden, University Library, LTK 307 III, fol. 7^v, 'Dat gordel bediet die geesel daer hi mede dreef uten tempel allen die daer in comenscap hadden'; and fol. 8^v, 'Die gordel bedietet die geesele daer Pylatus onsen heer met geeselde'.

36 Delf Dirc van, *Tafel van den kersten ghelove*. Dl. 3A en 3B *Somerstuc*, ed. L. M.Fr. Daniëls (Antwerpen – Utrecht: 1938) 455–457, quoted 455, 131–456, 133. The editor notes that Dirc may have derived his considerations on the paraments from the *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*. Also see Caspers, *De Eucharistische vroomheid* 202.

the allegorical-rememorative and tropological meaning (which relates to morals): the amice *is* the cloth that was bound before Christ's eyes; this *signifies* ('beteykent') the belief that adorns our head.³⁷ His wording even seems to point to his understanding of the allegorical-rememorative meaning of the priest's garb as a discrete mode of understanding. After his detailed account of the priest's garb, Dirc summarily enumerates the parts of the Mass; only the burning of incense during the Offertory receives somewhat fuller treatment. According to Charles Caspers, his readings of the Mass largely derive from Hugo Ripelin of Strasbourg's (c. 1205–1270) *Compendium totius theologiae veritatis*.³⁸ The absence of descriptions of priestly ritual often shifts the interpretative focus to the tropological, moral meaning: the Introit, for example, is seen exclusively to signify the commencement of a good life or good works.³⁹

While the authors of the texts discussed so far limit themselves to enumerating and interpreting the objects, acts, and/or words of the Mass ritual, in the course of time, and especially in the fifteenth century, the focus seems to shift toward guiding believers' visualization, and as such, to stimulating meditation and exploiting the emotional potential of the scenes one was to see mentally during Mass.⁴⁰ A manuscript that originated in a Franciscan milieu around 1470–1480 contains a text having as its incipit 'Hier beghint die bedudenisse vander heiligher missen' ('Here begins the explanation of Holy Mass'). At the start the reader is presented with an allegorical explanation of the priest's garb in nine points, in the order in which the priest dresses himself as he prepares for Mass, but the text quickly turns into an elaborate allegorical explanation of the Mass itself, with instructions for meditation.⁴¹ The text states, for instance, that after the priest has read the Confiteor, he kisses the altar, which signifies ('beteykent') the crucified Christ. The symbolism is further elaborated by the statement that the priest truly touches Christ's wounds with his lips in this manner. In imitation of this, anyone attending Mass should kiss the crucifix in his prayer book and make a cross in his hand, kiss it ('ende maken een cruus in zijn hant ende cussent'), and contemplate the cross together with the priest.⁴²

37 Van Delf, *Tafel* 456, lines 133–136: 'Die amicte is dat cleet dat onse Heer voor die oghen ghebonden was. [...] Ende beteykent dat ghelove daer ons hooft mede gheciert wert'.

38 Ibidem 458–460. Caspers, *De Eucharistische vroomheid* 202.

39 Ibidem 202.

40 Cf. Newman B., "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture", *Speculum* 80 (2005) 1–43, esp. 15.

41 Leiden, University Library, LTK 340, fols. 93^v–116^v. On the manuscript and its historical context, see Dlabáčová A., *Literatuur en observantie. De Spieghel der volcomenheit van Hendrik Herp en de dynamiek van laatmiddeleeuwse tekstverspreiding* (Hilversum: 2014) 136–144.

42 Leiden, University Library, LTK 340, fol 95^{r-v}.

Before the elevation, the bells are rung in order that believers may prepare themselves to engage in fervent prayer.⁴³

The other directions given in this text can also be taken as spiritual guidelines stimulating private devotional experience within the collective setting of the Mass. During the consecration of the chalice, for instance, the priest makes the sign of the cross. When seeing this, the believer should meditate on Christ carrying his cross and on his disrobing. The devotee should imagine the stations of Christ's Passion: how he fell due to the weight of the cross, how he dragged it behind him while being mocked by the crowd, how he was undressed before everyone and stood there before so many people, bleeding for their sins. The section concludes with the remark, 'Every good Christian shall give thought to this [allegorical meaning] when the chalice is raised' ('Dit sal een yghelijc guet kersten mensche overdencken als men die kelc opheft').⁴⁴ Similarly, at the start of Mass, during the Introit, the reader was to imagine Christ being born after nightfall, ponder the tears that he wept on our behalf, and consider how Mary wrapped him in poor swaddling and laid him to rest in the cold manger.⁴⁵ Elsewhere, the reader should observe with the eyes of his heart Jesus crying miserably. He is admonished not to look away from his weeping, but rather, to direct his gaze at Christ's face in order to intensify empathetic devotion.⁴⁶

2 Manuscript and Print

In the opening paragraphs of this essay, I focused attention on the 'appendix' to *Die vier uterste*. This text marks the gradual transition of allegorical explanations of the Mass in Dutch from manuscript to print and the start of an important and dynamic tradition of publishing such texts in print. With the exception of the 'appendix', the printed texts were generally speaking *not* the ones that already circulated in manuscript. In a fine and stimulating overview, the historian Koen Goudriaan rightly stresses that the introduction of the

43 Ibidem, fol. 109^v.

44 Ibidem, fol. 110^{r-v}.

45 Ibidem, fols. 95^v–97^r.

46 Ibidem, fol. 103^v: 'Aenmerke dan mitten oghen dijns herten Ihesum screyende ende en keer niet dijn aensicht van sinen suchten, mer sich in sijn aensicht ende ghi selt devocie crighen is dat ghi mit vlijt aenmerct die tranen die hi storte voer di.'

printing press in the Low Countries had a significant impact on the dissemination of this kind of text, and that it led to a radical renewal of the genre.⁴⁷

Approximately two years after the publication of *Die vier uterste* and its 'appendix', on 20 July 1479, Leeu published a second explanatory text on the Mass, initially anonymously: the *Boecxken van der officie ofte dienst der missen* (*Booklet on the Office or Service of Mass*).⁴⁸ In later editions by Leeu the text is published together with a prologue, which mentions Simon van Venlo as the author (about whom we know little more than that he studied in Cologne from the late 1420s until the middle of the fifteenth century). From 1488 onwards, yet other editions of the text were sandwiched between a treatise on confession and penance (*Spiegel der volcomenheit*, not to be confused with the mystical manual by Hendrik Herp († 1477)), and a dialogue in which Christ teaches the soul how to prepare for Communion.⁴⁹ At least three manuscript copies of the *Boecxken* survive, testifying to its popularity.⁵⁰

As in the previous texts, the author is more preoccupied with the life of Christ than with a detailed exposition of Mass ritual, or the mystery of *presentia realis* in the Host and wine.⁵¹ In order to hear Mass devoutly, the reader must set aside all worldly worries, and all external thoughts and fantasies,⁵² and to

47 Goudriaan, "Een kerkelijk catechese-offensief?" 90. On the same page, he claims that few Mass explanations, whether allegorical or not, have survived in manuscript form; in the light of what I have listed so far, this claim should be modified.

48 Venlo Simon van, *Boecxken van der officie ofte dienst der missen* (Gouda, Gerard Leeu: 20 July 1479). 4°, ISTC no. is00529000. The only extant copy, Washington, Library of Congress, Rosenwald 467, is bound together with a copy of the *Spiegel des eeuwigen levens* (Delft, [Jacob Jacobszoen van der Meer]: 30 October 1480). The text has been edited on the basis of the second edition of 1481, a reprint of Leeu's edition; see Venlo Simon van, *Boecxken van der officien ofte dienst der missen. Naar de druk van Mathias van der Goes verschenen te Antwerpen in 1481 en bewaard in de Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek te Darmstadt (Inc. II 801)*, ed. Ludo Simons – intr. Jos Andriessen et al. (Antwerpen: 1982).

49 Goudriaan, "Een kerkelijk catechese-offensief?" 85–86. For an elaborate treatment of Simon van Venlo, the complex printing history of his *Boecxken*, parallels in Latin sources and an overview of the contents see Smits van Waeberghe M., "De misverklaring van meester Simon van Venlo", *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 15 (1941) 228–261; 285–327; 16 (1942) 85–129.

50 Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 131 H 29 (Hoorn, female tertiaries, St Clara, 1487); Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 131 H 19, fols 57^r–129^v (Leiden, tertiaries, St Barbara / Bethanië, c. 1500); Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent, BMH 96, fols 3^r–57^r (15th century). The first manuscript was copied from an early printed edition (Dlabačová, *Literatuur en observantie* 147–148). In view of the date of confection of the other manuscripts, they may well have been copied from an early printed edition as well.

51 Van Venlo, *Boecxken van der officien* 69: 'Want die passie Cristi bider missen beteykent is'.

52 Van Venlo, *Boecxken van der officien* 78: 'van u setten selt ende algeheel u ontcommeren selt van allen vremden gedachten ende fantasien ende uutwendige ende tijttelike sorgen'.

convince himself that Jesus is present as perfectly in the holy sacrament as he was when lying in his crib, hanging on the cross on Calvary, and as he now sits at his Father's right hand.⁵³ Only when we sincerely believe what our corporeal eyes do not see nor our reason fully comprehends, will we receive the rewards of true faith, for in that which can be seen with bodily eyes, or understood with human reason, there is neither belief nor profit:

Want in dat gheen dat wi mitten oghen sien ende mitten verstande moghen begripen, daer en is noch ghelove noch verdienste in gheleghe.⁵⁴

For in that which we see with our [physical] eyes and understand intellectually, in those things lies neither faith nor merit.

Indeed, in the dialogic text appended to the treatise by Leeu in his 1488 edition, Christ confirms this point when he reassures the soul that she should simply honour his sacrament. For 'what you cannot understand nor comprehend with your senses, that you should simply believe' ('wat ghij niet verstaen en moecht, noch metten sinnen niet begripen en moecht, dat suldi simpelijck gheloven').⁵⁵

When the priest kisses the altar after the Confiteor, the believer should consider that the grace of inspiration he receives must be experienced as if it were the kiss of Christ touching the lips of our soul (a direct reference to the affective mysticism inspired by the *Cantica canticorum*).⁵⁶ During the Canon of the Mass, the devotee should imagine that he stands with Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, and he should observe all the events happening there with a compassionate heart.⁵⁷ When the sacrament is elevated, he should fall to his knees, and think about Christ shown to the crowd by Pilate.⁵⁸ Furthermore, during the consecration of the chalice he should identify himself with the suffering of Christ being crucified. The elevation is described as follows:

53 Van Venlo, *Boexken van der officien* 76–77.

54 Van Venlo, *Boexken van der officien* 85. Cf. Bynum C. W., "Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of St. Gregory in the Fifteenth Century", in J. F. Hamburger – A.-M. Bouché (eds.), *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: 2006) 212, note 30, with a reference to Alger of Liège's *De sacramentis*.

55 Venlo Simon van, *Die spiegel der volcomenheit* (Antwerp: Gerard Leeu, 1488), copy used: Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 1084 D 4, fol. 13r: 'dat ghi niet curioselic ondersoecken en sult mijn heymelike verholentheyden maer simpelijc mijn heylighe sacrament eeren sult, ende wat ghij niet verstaen en moecht, noch metten sinnen niet begripen en moecht, dat suldi simpelijck gheloven'.

56 Van Venlo, *Boexken van der officien* 88

57 Ibidem 106.

58 Ibidem 113.

Ende als die pryester den kelc mitten bloede aenbedet ende op heft, soe seldi u laten duncken dat men hem mitten cruce op boert ende neder schiet inden berch, dat sijn wonden op scoerden ende bloeden als springhende fonteynen. Ende dan bidt aldus: O goedertieren hemelsche vader, siet aen dat bloet uwes liefs soens [...]. Dit seldi met alsulker devocien doen ende dencken als of ghi opten berch van calvarien voer sinen heilighen cruce lacht, want niet min hier en gheschiet.⁵⁹

And when the priest venerates and elevates the chalice full of blood, you should imagine that Christ is elevated upon the cross, and that the cross is slammed down into the mountain, and that his wounds are torn open and bleed like fountains. And then pray as follows: O, merciful, heavenly father, observe the blood of your dear Son. [...] This you should do and imagine with such devotion, as if you were lying there on Mount Calvary before his holy cross, for nothing less should happen here.

We here witness an allegorical and at the same time very visual interpretation of the Mass – not by means of an appeal to the intellect, but to spiritually motivated affective imagination. If this is what you see with your *inner* eyes, states Van Venlo, you will no longer be able to doubt the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. At the end of the *Boexcken*, the author stresses that guiding the faculty of visual meditation during the Mass is indeed his main concern: through practice, the devotee shall eventually come to experience Mass as if the Passion were taking place right before his eyes. Only then will he fully appreciate the sweetness of the Mass.⁶⁰

In another fifteenth-century text, transmitted in manuscript only, Christ himself addresses the reader directly, instructing her or him what s/he should see during each moment of the Mass. During the Consecration, for example, he tells the believer, ‘See me here, omnipotent and almighty, during the very moment when I died on the Cross for your sins’ (‘Siet mi hier, almachtich ende moghende als ic starf anden cruce om uwen sonden’).⁶¹

Through the increasing inclusion of meditative material, these late fifteenth-century expositions moved closer to the genre of meditative Lives of Christ in the tradition of the fourteenth-century *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. Early

59 Ibidem 115.

60 Ibidem 125.

61 Leiden, University Library, LTK 219, fols 127^v–129^v, esp. fol. 128^v (1476). A longer version of this text is transmitted in Bruges, Grootseminarie, 72/175 (c. 1400–1415), on which, see Gheldere K. de (ed.), *Dietsce rime: geestelijke gedichten uit de XIII^e, XIV^e en XV^e eeuw naar een hs. van het einde der XV^e eeuw* (Bruges: 1896) 42–43.

printed editions of these latter texts proved very popular.⁶² ‘Scripted visions’ similar to the ones contained in these meditative Lives of Christ came increasingly to be incorporated into the explanations of the Mass, inviting lay believers to meditate Christ’s life during the Mass, which they were encouraged to attend daily.⁶³ In this way, the rituals enacted by the priest and the texts he recited began to structure the spiritual exercises of lay people.⁶⁴

3 Gerrit van der Goude’s *Boexken*

The *Boexken vander missen*, published in 1506 by the Gouda Collaciebroeders and written by the Franciscan Observant Gerrit van der Goude, is for the Dutch vernacular tradition what William Durand’s *Rationale divinorum officiorum* is for the Latin one: both its highpoint and endpoint, as regards execution (the text is richly illustrated) and widespread circulation.⁶⁵ More than twenty editions had been published by 1529, and the text was translated into Latin (*Precatiuncule*), French (*L’interprétation et signification de la messe*), and English (*The interpretacyon, and sygnifycacyon of the Masse*).⁶⁶ This is also one

62 See, for example, Goudriaan K., “Middle Dutch Meditative Lives of Jesus on the Early Printing Press”, in Goudriaan K., *Piety in Practice and Print. Essays on the Late Medieval Religious Landscape*, eds. A. Dlabáčová – A. Tervoort (Hilversum: 2016) 219–239.

63 For the term ‘scripted visions’, see Newman, “What Did It Mean to Say ‘I Saw’?”. Cf. Smits van Waeberghe, “De misverklaring van meester Simon van Venlo” (1942) 117, who already ascertained a progressive focus on Christ’s life in explanations of the Mass.

64 Henkel M., *Deutsche Messübersetzungen des Spätmittelalters. Untersuchungen auf der Grundlage ausgewählter Handschriften und vorreformatorischer Drucke* (Wiesbaden: 2010) 228, uses the term ‘Taktung’.

65 Goude Gerrit van der, *Boexken van der missen* (Gouda, Collaciebroeders: 1506). I consulted the copy in Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 227 G 28. On the *Boexken* and the Collaciebroeders, see Goudriaan K., “Apostolate and Printing: The Collaciebroeders of Gouda and their Press”, in Hascher-Burger U. – Hollander A. den – Janse W. (eds.), *Between Lay Piety and Academic Theology. Studies presented to Christoph Burger on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Leiden – Boston: 2010) 433–452; and Roest B., *Franciscan Literature of Religious Instruction before the Council of Trent* (Leiden – Boston: 2004) 369–370. An English translation of the central section with a reproduction of the woodcuts was published in 1903; see Goude Gerrit van der, *Dat boexken vander Missen = “The Booklet of the Mass”*, trans. P. Dreamer (London et al.: 1903).

66 Troeyer B. de, *Bio-bibliographia franciscana neerlandica saeculi XVI. Pars biographica, de auteurs van de uitgegeven werken* (Nieuwkoop: 1969) 7–13; and *Pars bibliographica, de edities* (Nieuwkoop: 1970) 105–115 (nos. 173–193). On the Latin edition, see Goudriaan K., “Een Latijnse misverklaring met houtsneden uit 1512”, *Kunstlicht* 23.1–2 (2002) 53–59.

of the first illustrated allegorical explanations of the Mass.⁶⁷ Due to the development of this genre of guidebook, in which the allegorical explanation of the Mass goes hand in hand with calls visually to analogize the Mass and Christ's Passion, the insertion of images that could further assist the reader in his meditative spiritual exercises was the logical next step. But Gerrit's book is more than a visual aid to be used during Mass. It could also substitute for actual participation in the Eucharist for those who were sick, or otherwise unable to attend Mass. The book thus offered a kind of Mass on demand, an extreme form of 'domestication of the sacred'.⁶⁸

Just like the final versions of the book ascribed to Simon van Venlo (see above), the *Boexken* contains three sections. In the second, central section Gerrit divided the Mass into thirty-three 'articles' or 'scenes', reflecting the age of Christ during his Passion. The thirty-three articles are organized into three sections: from the Annunciation to Christ's Entry into Jerusalem; from the Washing of the feet to the Entombment; and from the Resurrection to the Ascension [Figs. 8.1–8.3]. Each article is illustrated on the left side of the opening with an analogous ritual taken from the Mass (this is what the reader literally sees if he attends Mass, or, in case he is absent, should see). Beneath each image a brief explanation of the portrayed ritual actions has been added followed by the allegorical 'rememoratio'. The significance of each of the scenes is developed on the right side of the opening: visually, in a woodcut with the corresponding scene from Christ's life, and textually in the form of a meditative prayer.⁶⁹ This second section of Gerrit's book thus consists of a dual kind of script in word and image that seeks to help readers visualize what actually happens during Mass and, at the same time, what they should envision mentally. This double visualization could be useful as well for churchgoers whose position in the pew made it difficult to see what was transpiring at the altar. Apparently, believers could conceive of the Mass as a sequence of *picturae* that would trigger mental images of, and meditative exercises on, Christ's life.⁷⁰

67 The *Verclaringe* (see n. 74) also contains a full set of woodcuts, but in comparison to the *Boexken* their design and execution is 'primitive'; see Goudriaan, "Een kerkelijk catechese-offensief?" 87.

68 Cf. Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'?" 33.

69 According to De Troeyer, there is a certain degree of dependence between Gerrit's prayers and the meditative treatises of Ludolf of Saxony and Jordan of Quedlinburg; see De Troeyer, *Bio-bibliographia franciscana neerlandica saeculi XVI. Pars biographica*, 8.

70 Cf. Goudriaan, "Een kerkelijk catechese-offensief?" 93, who notes a strong emphasis on the visible ritual. Other fifteenth-century texts work the other way round: their point of departure is Christ's life, thirty episodes from which – codified in the form of mental images familiar to readers – are then linked to representations of the Mass; see, for example, Leiden, University Library, LTK 222, fols. 144^r–149^r: 'Hier beghinnen XXX principael

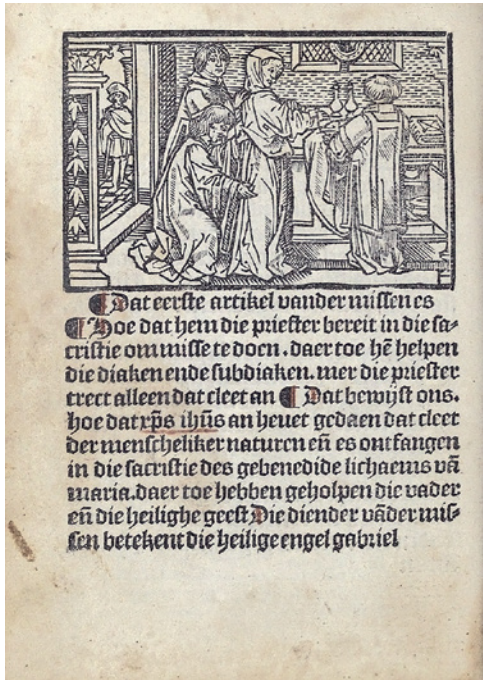


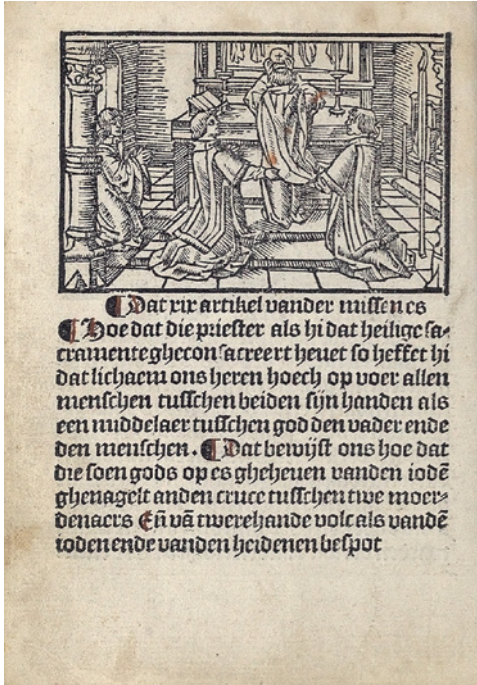
FIGURE 8.1 Anonymous Master, "The Priest's Preparation for Mass and the Annunciation", woodcut illustrations to Gerrit van der Goude, *Boexken van der missen* (Gouda, Collaciebroeders: 1506), 8°. Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 227 G 28, fols 43^v–44^r

PHOTO COURTESY OF EARLY EUROPEAN BOOKS ONLINE/ PROQUEST LCC,
[HTTP://EEB.CHADWYCK.COM](http://eeb.chadwyck.com)

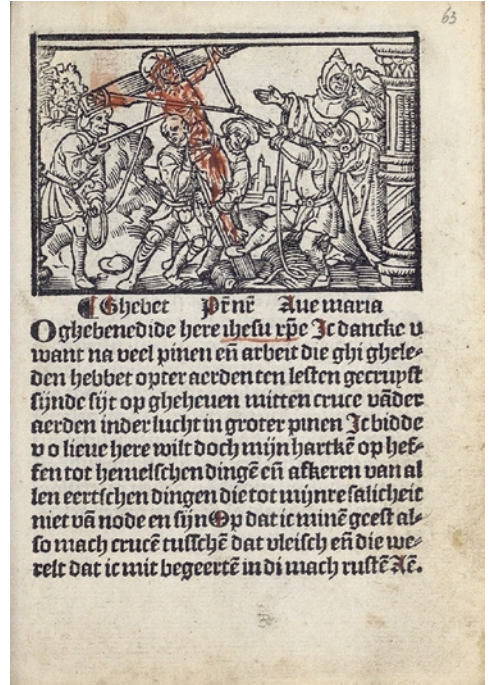
Van der Goude offered illiterate believers an alternative option also: it suffices for them to 'ponder devoutly' ('devoteliken overdencken') Christ's life and to pray a Pater Noster and an Ave Maria in response to each of the thirty-three 'articles' depicted in the images of his *Boexken*.⁷¹ In addition, illiterate believers

punten der werken die Ihesus Christus gebenedijt gedaen heeft op dese werelt beteykent inder missen mit vollen diensten'. Cf. Van Venlo, *Boexken van der officien* 76–77, who describes Christ's life as a Mass.

71 Van der Goude, *Boexken*, fol. 2^v: 'Ofte en can hi niet lesen, so mach hi devoteliken overdencken dat leven ons heren ende lesen op elcken artikel een Pater Noster ende Ave Maria ende dan so hevet die mensche gelesen so menigen Pater Noster als onse lieue here iaer hevet geleeft opter aerden in dancherheit van alle sijn swaren arbeyt in waken, in vasten, in bidden, in preken, in sijn passie ende pyn die hi geleden hevet voer ons arme sondige menschen'.



Dat rix artikel vander missen es
Hoe dat die priester als hi dat heilige sa-
 crament reghecon'accreert heuet so heffet hi
 dat lichaem ons heren hoech op voer allen
 menschen tusschen beiden sijn handen als
 een muddelaer tusschen god den vader ende
 den menschen. **D**at bewijst ons hoe dat
 die soen gods op es gheheuen vanden iode
 ghenageit anden cruce tusschen twe moer-
 denacrs **E**n vā twerehande volc als vandē
 iodenende vanden heidenen bespot



Ghebet **O**me **A**ue maria
Oghebenedide here ihesu xpe **I**c dancke u
 want na veel pinen en arbeit die ghi ghele-
 den hebbet opter aerden ten lesten gecruyft
 sijnde sijt op gheheuen mitten cruce vader
 aerden inder lucht in groter pinen **I**c bidde
 v o lieue here wilt doch mijn hartke op hef-
 fen tot hemelschen dingē en afheren van al-
 len eertschen dingen die tot mijnre salicheit
 niet vā node en sijn **O**p dat ic minne geest al-
 so mach cruce tussche dat vleisch en die we-
 relt dat ic mit begeerte in di mach rustē **A**e.

FIGURE 8.2 Anonymous Master, "The Elevation of the Host and the Raising of the Cross", woodcut illustration to Gerrit van der Goude, *Boeckken van der missen* (Gouda, Collaciebroeders: 1506), 8°. Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 227 G 28, fols 62^v–63^r

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[HTTP://EEB.CHADWYCK.COM](http://eeb.chadwyck.com)

could be made familiar with the allegorical meaning of the priest's vestments, and liturgical objects. Gerrit explains this in a separate chapter preceding the thirty-three articles:

Ten eersten dien outaer daer die priester aen staet betekent dat cruce ons heren. Item dye priester aenden outaer betekent onsen lieven here aenden cruce. [...] Item dat cruys dat daer staet opten casuffel op dye schoeren vanden priester ende achter neder ter aerden betekent dat swaer cruys ons heren [...] Item die crune vanden priester boven op sijn hoeft betekent die doernen crone ons here [...]. Item dat broot datter consacreert wart betekent ende es warachteliken dat gebenedide lichaem ons heren aenden cruce. Ende dye wijn nader consecracien betekent dat duerbaer bloet ons heren overvloedeliken uutghestort inden cruce.

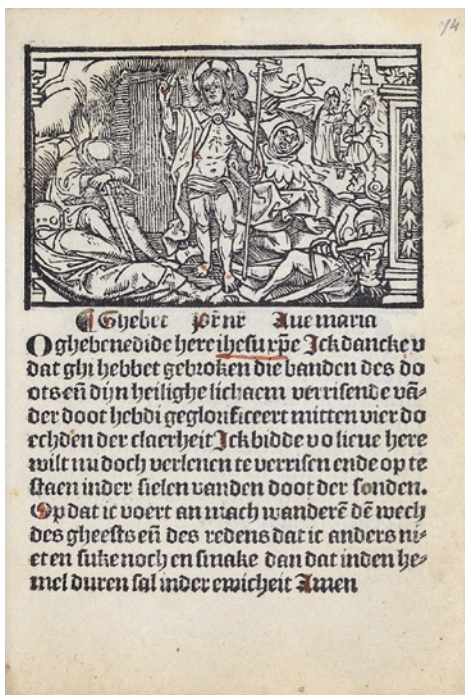
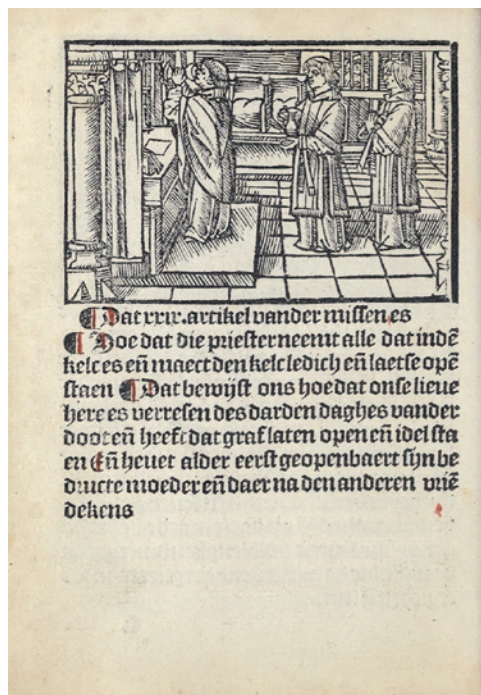


FIGURE 8.3 Anonymous Master, "The Priest 'Empties' the Chalice, and the Resurrection", woodcut illustrations to Gerrit van der Goude, *Boexken van der missen* (Gouda, Collaciebroeders: 1506), 8°. Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 227 G 28, fols 73^v–74^r
 PHOTO COURTESY OF EARLY EUROPEAN BOOKS ONLINE / PROQUEST LCC,
[HTTP://EEB.CHADWYCK.COM](http://eeb.chadwyck.com)

Dit mach een simpel mensche die niet lesen en can aldus overdencken onder der missen ende alsoe hem becommenen mitter passien ons heren Ihesu Christi.⁷²

First, the altar at which the priest stands signifies the cross of Our Lord. The priest at the altar signifies Our dear Lord on the cross. [...] The cross depicted on the chasuble on the shoulders of the priest and hanging earthward signifies the heavy cross of Our Lord. [...] The tonsure on the priest's head signifies the crown of thorns of Our Lord. [...] The consecrated bread signifies and truly is the blessed body of Our Lord on the cross. And the wine after consecration signifies the precious blood of Our Lord, which he shed abundantly on the cross.

72 Ibidem, fols. 38^r–39^r.

A simple person who cannot read may consider this during Mass, and in this manner he may occupy himself with the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Based on what they saw with their physical eyes (either in church or in the book), illiterate believers could thus visualize scenes from the narrative that is taken to be common knowledge – the Passion of Christ. The meditative, interiorized experience of Mass is thus more important than an actual *understanding* of the celebration of the Eucharist, let alone of the sacramental mystery of real presence. Gerrit deems this meditative experience superior to reading. Some people bring large bags full of books with them to church, he writes, as if they were planning to stay there all day and read during the whole of the Mass. They do not observe properly what they read, nor are they cognizant of how they read. Instead, it is preferable to read short prayers only, but with the greatest possible devotion.⁷³

Around the same time (c. 1510?) the Gouda Collaciebroeders published a booklet that contains a sequence of thirty images of the Mass, mirrored by scenes from Christ's life. A few explanatory lines clarify the relation between each pair of images, but they almost seem superfluous. Such picture-booklets would have been an ideal tool for (illiterate) believers to follow Mass in the way Gerrit recommended [Figs. 8.4–8.5].⁷⁴

The following quotation aptly summarizes the proper attitude of believers and parishioners during Mass, which Gerrit intended to teach and bring about with his book, and which, incidentally, ultimately was the effect which all of his fellow authors had in mind when writing their manuals:

73 Ibidem, fol. 29^r: 'Ende daer om sal een mensche arbeiden nyet om seer veel te lesen gheliken als sommige menschen doen die hebben grote boecsacken vol boeken ende grote lange Pater Nosters al souden si alle den dach inder kercken wesen, nochtans willen sijt al over lesen binnen eender missen ende en sien niet aen hoe ofte wat si lesen. Mer een mensche sal aensien uut wat harten dat hi biddet ofte leset, want dat ghebet sal syn vuerich, devoet ende cort van woerden [...].'

74 On the edition and date, see Kronenberg M. E., "Een verzamelband met enige onbekende Noord-Nederlandse Postincunabelen", in *Huldeboek pater dr Bonaventura Kruitwagen O.F.M.* (The Hague: 1949) 237–245; Mees L., "De datering van een nieuw-ontdekte "Misse-verclaringhe" uit het begin der 16^e eeuw", *Franciscana* 5 (1950) 27–31; and Nijhoff W. – Kronenberg M. E., *Nederlandsche bibliographie van 1500 tot 1540*, 111,1 (The Hague: 1951) no. 4287. Cf. Goudriaan, "Een kerkelijk catechese-offensief?" 86–87. The worn state of the woodblocks suggests that there were previous editions, although the scenes from the life of Christ may have been taken from an existing series of woodcuts.

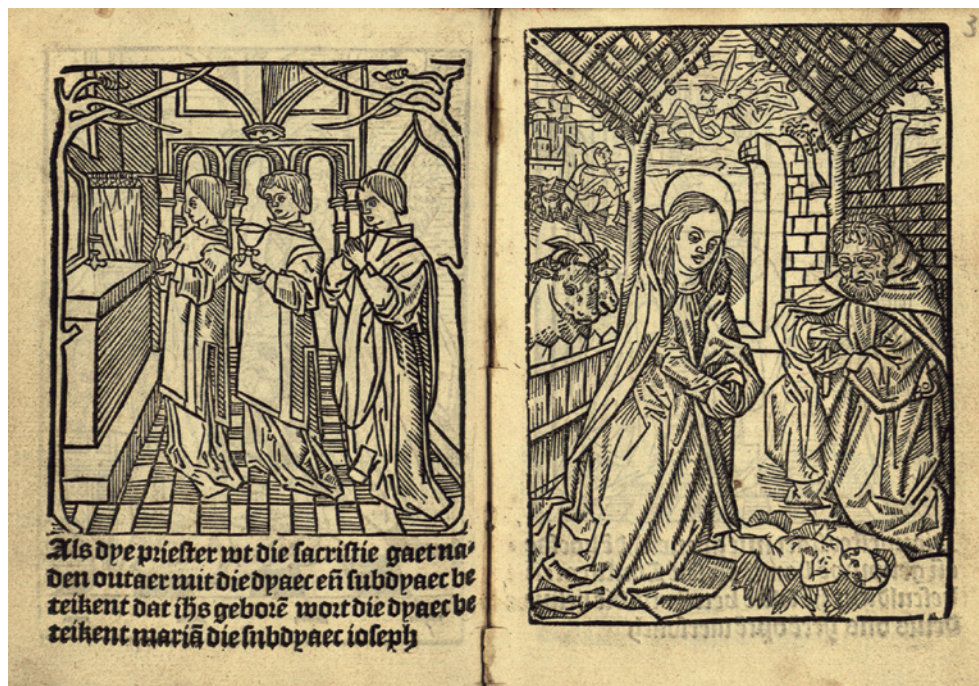


FIGURE 8.4 Anonymous Master(s), “The Priest Approaches the Altar, and the Nativity”, woodcut in *Verclaringe vander missen* (Gouda, Collaciebroeders: [c. 1510?]), 8^o
METTINGEN, DRAIFLESSEN COLLECTION, LIBERNA, W 788 A II, FOLS 2^v–3^r

Alle dat gene dat inder missen wert gedaen hevet een sonderlinge misterium ofte devocie in hem. Also dat die priester en leset niet een woert ofte en roert niet een hant inder missen het en betekent wat van dat leven ons heren. [...]

Hier om sal een mensche devoteliken mit vueriger harten misse horen ende mit groter eerwaardicheit hem daer hebben geliken ofte hi stont opten berch van calvarien ende saech aldaer onsen heren hangen aen den cruce. Och, mit wat groter devocien souden wi staen inder missen ende overdencken dat gebenedide bitter liden ons heren dat welc voer ons inder missen wert gepresenteert ende ghetoent.⁷⁵

75 Van der Goude, *Boexken*, fols. 23^v–24^v.



FIGURE 8.5 Anonymous Master(s), "The Priest Makes the Sign of the Cross over the Chalice, and Crucifixion Scene", woodcut in *Verclaringe vander missen* (Gouda, Collaciebroeders: [c. 1510?]), 8°

METTINGEN, DRAIFLESSEN COLLECTION, LIBERNA, W 788 A II, FOLS 20^v–21^r

All that is done during Mass has a special mystery or devotion in it, in such wise that the priest does not read a word or does not move his hand without signifying some event from the life of Our Lord. [...]

Therefore one must hear Mass devoutly with a fervent heart and act with great reverence, as if one were standing on Mount Calvary, and there saw Our Lord hanging on the Cross. Oh, with what great devotion should we behave during Mass, and ponder the blessed bitter Passion of Our Lord, which is presented during Mass and shown to us.

4 Public Celebration – Private Devotion – Cultural History

The central panel of the *Seven Sacraments* altarpiece attributed to Rogier van der Weyden († 1464) and his workshop, painted between 1440 and 1455,



FIGURE 8.6 Rogier van der Weyden, central panel of *The Seven Sacraments* (1440 and 1455). Oil on panel, 97 cm × 220 cm. Antwerpen, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten
COPYRIGHT: LUKAS – ART IN FLANDERS VZW,
FOTO HUGO MAERTENS

visualizes beautifully how believers were supposed to interiorize spiritual exercises complementary to celebration of the Mass [Fig. 8.6].⁷⁶ Mount Calvary is transferred to a late medieval church or, better, a church transforms into Mount Calvary as a direct reflection on the celebration of the Eucharist: Christ on the cross mirrors the priest at the altar, the cross on his chasuble, and his tonsure (which signifies the crown of thorns); most importantly, the Crucifixion is compared to the elevated host, which not only signifies, but *is* the body of Our Lord. Just like Gerrit van der Goude's 'diptychs in image and text', the painting simultaneously shows what is directly visible to the congregants and what they should see mentally. At the same time the viewer is also asked to take stock of how he must respond inwardly: the emotions he should experience are exemplified by the brightly dressed figures beneath the cross. The importance of the process of visualization is further emphasized by the size of Calvary; and the group of mourners tacitly invites the viewer to join them, to attend Mass as if he stood with them on Calvary, witnessing Christ hanging on the cross. Rogier's painting therefore conveys the same message as the explanations of the Mass, construing congregants as bystanders and inviting them spiritually to relive Christ's Passion while the priest celebrates Mass. The painting is not an illustration for Eucharistic doctrine; rather, in line with the allegorical-rememorative explanations of the Mass, it is an invitation to see beyond, to see in and through ritual to the spiritual significance of what the priest does at the altar.⁷⁷ Seeing through the material components of the Mass and accessing their spiritual significance stimulate a devout, interiorized, meditative religious experience, allowing the audience more fully to participate in salvation history by enhancing their awareness of the redemptive significance of 'ritual repetition'.

The allegorical explanations I have been examining do not try to convince the reader of the truth of real presence through elaborate theological arguments and reasoning; they instead encourage him to engage in spiritual exegesis. Readers are invited to access the spiritual meaning of the Mass and meditatively to reflect on the events of Christ's life as signified by ritual words

76 On the altarpiece, see Vos Dirk de, *Rogier van der Weyden. Het volledige oeuvre* (Antwerpen: 1999) 217–225 (cat. no. 11). The bibliography on the *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* is extensive; for a summary account of its form, function, and iconographical argument, see Koslow S.J., *The Chevrot Altarpiece: Its Sources, Meaning and Significance*. PhD thesis (New York: 1972). Also see the chapters by Lee Palmer Wandel and Elizabeth Carson Pastan in this volume.

77 Bynum, "Seeing and Seeing Beyond" 208–240, esp. 215–216, 227–228 and 231–232, argues against interpreting the image of the Mass of Saint Gregory as an illustration of Eucharistic doctrine. Cf. De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden* 220.

and deeds of the priest-celebrant, and the ritual objects he handles. This cultivates a more emotional, and thus more deeply felt experience, which, as we have seen, was considered the most important condition for fruitful attendance at Mass. The hermeneutics that underlie these allegorical explanations seem crucial for a correct understanding of other expressions of late medieval culture, and of art in particular. The layout of Gerrit van der Goude's thirty-three articles epitomizes the underlying hermeneutic paradigm, which is transferred from Biblical exegesis to the liturgy. In composition, the woodcuts are especially close to the *Speculum humanae salvationis* blockbooks: a close examination shows that every image in Gerrit's *Boexken* is framed by a pillar (in various architectural styles) which is fully visible either on the left of the image (in the case of the scenes from Mass) or on the right (in the case of scenes from the life of Christ). On the other side of each image (right for the scenes from Mass; left for those from Christ's life) we see another pillar, but here the pillar is only partially visible, sometimes even barely noticeable. It thus seems as though the 'middle pillar' between the two images was cut in half, almost as if one woodblock has been split into two. By placing two scenes side by side in a single architectural frame, (the structure of) the images already invites a typological reading [Figs. 8.1–8.3].

The very fact that these manuals, which invited believers, even illiterate ones, to see beyond outer signs, and to participate intensively in the celebration of the Mass, proliferated so widely and so variously, indicates that the way of thinking they sought to propagate became familiar to large sectors of the population. We may assume that people became ever more accustomed to this way of interpreting what they saw, i.e., of seeing past what was literally shown, and of describing complex layers of allegorical meaning.

5 Final Remarks

In conclusion, I propose to speculate briefly on the possible importance of these texts, and the practice to which they testify for the interpretation and understanding of art. In his analysis of the *Bladelin Triptych* (1445), Bret Rothstein has argued that the pictorial narrative establishes 'paired hierarchies of showing and seeing'.⁷⁸ Through a series of revelations or visions, the painting casts the mystery of the Incarnation as a kind of 'earthly showing' to which 'seeing' is central. This seeing in turn implies an intellectual

⁷⁸ Rothstein B., "Vision, Cognition, and Self-Reflection in Rogier van der Weyden's *Bladelin Triptych*", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 64 (2001) 37–55, esp. 37.

operation: 'the Magi, Augustus and the sibyl, the shepherds and the figures gathered around the Nativity all recognize *more than they view*, yet *what they view leads to that recognition*' (my emphasis).⁷⁹ Corporeal sight is the beginning of thought and leads to a second stage, a visionary experience, and eventually to spiritual understanding and redemption. It may well be that mystical and philosophical treatises, available in the vernacular but less widespread than the texts discussed above, may help to explain this deeper dimension of 'seeing',⁸⁰ but I would nevertheless suggest that the explanations of the Mass present us with a similar way of understanding how sight was mobilized initially to apprehend and ultimately to understand the sacrament – not primarily through the power of reason, but through vision, visualization, and emotive meditation. This path to 'understanding' leads to redemption.

Allegorical explanations of the Mass in Dutch offer insights into the manner in which the laity was invited to experience the Mass. Although the descriptions of the priest-celebrant's actions would sometimes have triggered a bodily response (e.g., kissing, kneeling), the main concern of the texts is to shape the believer's thoughts and inner experience. Due to the sometimes polysemic nature of the suggested possible meanings of the ritual signs, any one particular action, object, gesture, and/or textual fragment could have been diversely interpreted. This diversity of possible meanings makes it difficult to imagine a truly uniform communal experience shared by all attendants. A more personal, varied, and individualized reception of the ritual of the Mass was the more likely response. An emphasis on individual, meditative experience is also in keeping with the many warnings against chatting and walking around during the celebration of the Eucharist, coming late, or leaving the Mass early, which must have been a frequent problem and would have disturbed the personal devotions of fellow congregants.⁸¹ Moreover, the manifold prayers meant to be recited at various moments during Mass, which have come down to us in large quantities in both manuscript and printed source material, would also have been available to devotees, sometimes in combination with an allegorical interpretation.⁸² Nevertheless, it is safe to presume that the experience of roughly *similar* meditations and more or less parallel emotions may well

79 Ibidem 40.

80 In his analysis, Rothstein, *ibidem* 42ff., refers to Ruusbroec amongst others.

81 Van der Goude, *Boexken*, fols. 29^r–30^r. Other examples can be found in *Der sielen troest*, on which, see Schmitt M., *Der grosse Seelentrost. Ein niederdeutsches Erbauungsbuch des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Köln – Graz: 1959) 95ff.

82 On Eucharistic prayers, see Caspers, *De Eucharistische vroomheid* 187–191.

have created a (temporary) emotional or affective community.⁸³ While the priest was celebrating Mass, a multitude of parallel meditative acts took place amongst those present in the church, and possibly even amongst those who were unable to attend and who partook from home, using a guide such as the one written by Gerrit van der Goude.⁸⁴

Biographies of female adherents to the Modern Devotion testify to the fact that many sisters shed tears during Mass; about the Modern Devout Hendrik Mande († 1431/1432) it is said that he wept so much during Mass that he had to bring a face cloth – and even then a puddle would form beneath his seat.⁸⁵ Whether the allegorical explanations sparked similarly vehement reactions is difficult to say. It is interesting to observe, however, that these texts often include meditative material intended to direct the imagination of readers; they were clearly designed to assist them in their efforts to meditate the Mass in an affective yet disciplined fashion.⁸⁶ The explanations created a ‘discipline of seeing beyond signs’, of ‘trained allegorical imagination’, which helped their readers to see the sacred encompassed in the present world, and thus made visionary experiences accessible to almost everyone, even to the illiterate.⁸⁷ True faith and fruitful attendance resulted not mainly from a mastery of theological argument; rather, they arose from a truly interiorized and vividly visualized engagement with the ritual of the Mass.

The collective celebration of Mass became an increasingly interiorized form of private devotion, thanks to the allegorical explanations of the Mass, paradoxically achieved most effectively through the mass medium of the printing press. The majority of the authors of these allegorical manuals were members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy (Boendale is a notable exception), who in the later period happily collaborated with commercial printers. This implies that the Church supported their message. On the other hand, these texts demonstrate

83 Rosenwein B., “Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions”, *Passions in Context* 1 (2010) 1–32. On the creation of temporary affective communities in early modern Dutch theatre, see Steenbergh K., “Compassion and the Creation of an Affective Community in the Theatre: Vondel’s *Mary Stuart*, or *Martyred Majesty* (1646)”, *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 129 (2014) 90–112.

84 See Henkel, *Deutsche Messübersetzungen* 213–239.

85 Examples in Hanselaer A. – Deploige J., “‘Van groeter bannicheit hoers herten’. De conditionering van de alledaagse gevoelswereld in vrouwelijke gemeenschappen uit de laat-middeleeuwse Moderne Devotie”, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 126 (2014) 480–499; and Busch J., *Des Augustinerpropstes Iohannes Busch Chronicon Windeshemense und Liber de reformatione monasteriorum*, Vol. 1, ed. K. L. Grube, Historische Commission der Provinz Sachsen (Halle: 1886) 123–124. I owe this reference to Thom Mertens.

86 Cf. Newman, “What Did It Mean to Say ‘I Saw’?” esp. 15–16.

87 Cf. *Ibidem* 16 and 23.

that realms of private devotion (whether in the private or public sphere) were affected by and interacted with the liturgy.⁸⁸ This interplay between individual and collective life, private and public experience, and between the processes of mass production and of personalization was a key element of devotion in the late Middle Ages.

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88 On the notion of the ‘liturgization’ of privacy, see Lentjes Th., “As Far as the Eye can See [...]: Rituals of Gazing in the Late Middle Ages”, in Hamburger J. F. – Bouché A.-M. (eds.), *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: 2006) 366–370.

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