

THE BOOK OF
SUPREME TRUTH
OF
JOHN OF RUUSBROECK

PROLOGUE

The prophet Samuel mourned for King Saul, though he knew well that God had rejected him and his issue from being kings in Israel: this was because of his pride, and because he did not obey God and the prophet who spoke in His name. We may also read in the Gospel, that the disciples of our Lord pleaded with Him for the Gentile woman of Canaan, to send her away, that is, to do unto her that which she desired; for she cried after Him. So likewise I might say that we must mourn for all such deceived men as think themselves to be kings in Israel; for they believe themselves to be lifted up above other good men, into a lofty and God-seeing life. And yet they are proud and wittingly and willingly disobedient to God and the law and the Holy Church and every virtue. And like as Saul rent the mantle of the prophet Samuel, they endeavour to rend asunder the unity of the Christian faith, and all true doctrine and virtuous life. Whosoever persist herein, they are separated and shut out from the kingdom of eternal contemplation, even as Saul was shut out from the kingdom of Israel. But that humble little woman of Canaan, though she was Gentile and a stranger, had faith and hope in God, and acknowledged and confessed her littleness before Christ and His apostles: and so she received grace and health and all that she desired. For God exalts the humble, and fills them with grace and all virtues; and He resists the proud, and these remain empty of all good.

CHAPTER I

WHEREFORE THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN

Certain of my friends have desired and besought me, that I should show and make plain in a few words and according to my best cunning, shortly and clearly, how I understand and feel the truth of all the highest teachings that I have written before; so that none should take offense at my words, but everyone should profit by them. And this I willingly consent to do. I will, with God's help, teach the humble who love virtue and truth; and, with the same words, I shall inwardly vex and darken the false and the proud: for to these my words will be displeasing and contrary, and this the proud cannot endure, but it provokes them to anger.

CHAPTER II

A SHORT REPETITION OF ALL THE HIGHEST TEACHINGS WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR

Behold, I have said this: that the contemplative lover of God is united with God through means, and also without means, and thirdly, without difference or distinction; and this I find in nature, and in grace, and also in glory. Further I have said that never creature may be or become so holy that it loses its created being and becomes God; even the soul of our Lord Jesus Christ shall ever remain creature, and other than God. Yet, none the less, we must all be lifted up above ourselves into God, and become one spirit with God in love; and then we shall be blessed. And therefore mark my words and my meaning, and understand me aright as to what is the condition and the way to our eternal blessedness.

CHAPTER III**OF THE UNION THROUGH MEANS**

And next, I will say that all good men are united with God through means. These means are the grace of God, and the sacraments of Holy Church, and the Divine virtues, faith, hope and charity, and a virtuous life according to the commandments of God; and to these there belongs a death to sin and to the world and to every inordinate lust of nature. And through these, we remain united with Holy Church, that is, with all good men; and with these, we obey God, and are one will with Him, even as an orderly convent is united with its Superior: and without this union none can please God nor be saved. Whosoever keeps this union through these means unto the end of his life, he shall be one of those of whom Christ says unto His Father in heaven in the Gospel of St John: Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am: that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me. And in another place He says that His servants shall sit down to meat—that is, in the richness and the fulness of those virtues which they have exercised—and He will go one to another and will minister unto them of His glory which He has achieved. And He will generously impart and reveal to His beloved, to each one specially and separately—more or less according as he is worthy of it and can lay hold of it—the loftiness of His glory and honour which He alone has earned by the merits of His life and His death. Thus all saints shall be forever with Christ, each in his own order and in the degree of glory which he has earned through God's help by his works. And Christ, according to His manhood shall be set above all saints, and above all angels, as a prince of all glory and all honour; the which pertain to His manhood alone above all creatures. Behold, thus you may understand how we are united with God through means, both here in grace and hereafter in glory. But there is a great distinction and a great difference in these means, and this is true both as regards life and reward, as I have told you. And this was well understood by St Paul, when he said that he had A desire to depart and to be with Christ. But he did not say that he had a desire to be Christ Himself or God; as is done by some unbelieving and perverse men, who say that they have no God, but that they are so wholly dead to themselves, and united with God, that they have themselves become God.

CHAPTER IV

OF THE MEN WHO PRACTISE A FALSE VACANCY

Behold, such folk, by means of a onefold simplification and a natural tendency, are turned in upon the bareness of their own being; and therefore they think eternal life is and shall be nought else but an enduring state of beatitude, without distinction in order in holiness or in reward. Yea, all such are so deep in error that they say that the Persons shall pass away into the Godhead, and that nought else shall remain in eternity than the essential substance of the Godhead; and that all blessed spirits shall be so simply absorbed with God in the Essential Blessedness that nothing shall remain beside it, neither willing nor working, nor the discerning knowledge of any creature whatsoever. Behold, these men have gone astray into the vacant and blind simplicity of their own being, and they seek for blessedness in bare nature; for they are so simply and so idly united with the bare essence of their souls, and with that wherein God always is, that they have neither zeal, nor cleaving to God, neither from without, nor from within. For in the highest part into which they have entered, they feel nothing but the simplicity of their own proper being, depending upon the Being of God. And the onefold simplicity which they there possess, they take to be God, because they find a natural rest therein. And so they think themselves to be God in their simple ground; for they lack true faith, hope and charity. And, because of the naked emptiness which they feel and possess, they say that they are without knowledge and without love, and are exempt from the virtues. And so they endeavour to live without heeding their conscience, what wickedness soever they commit. And they are careless of the sacraments, and of all virtues, and of all the practices of Holy Church, and believe that they have no need of them: for they fancy in their folly that they have passed beyond all these things, but imperfect men, they say, have need of them. And some men have become so accustomed to and deep-rooted in this simplification that they would know and heed as little of all the works which God has wrought, and all that Scripture teaches, as though not one line had ever been written; for they believe themselves to have found and to possess that for the sake of which all Scriptures have been made, namely, the blind essential rest which they feel. But in fact they have lost God and all the ways which may lead to Him; for they have no more inwardness, nor more devotion, nor holy practices, than a dead beast has. Yet they sometimes approach the sacraments, and at times they quote the Scriptures, that thus they may the better dissimulate and cover themselves; and they like to take some dark saying of Scripture, which they can falsely turn to their own sense, so that they may please other simple men, and may draw them into the false vacancy which they themselves feel. Behold, these folk think themselves wise and subtle beyond any one else, and yet they are the most coarse and crude of all men living; for that which even Pagans and Jews and bad Christians, learned and unlearned, find and understand through their natural reason, these wretched men neither can nor will attain. You

may cross yourselves against the devil, but beware earnestly of these perverted men, and take care lest you should not recognise them in their words and works. For they would teach, and be taught of none; they would reprove, and be reprov'd of none; they would command, and obey none. They would oppress others, but no one may oppress them; they wish to say whatever they like, but will endure no contradiction; they recognise only their own self-will and are subject to no one; and this they take to be ghostly freedom. They practise the liberty of the flesh, for they give to the body whatsoever it lusts after; and this they take to be natural freedom. They have unified themselves in a blind and dark vacancy of their own being; and there, they think, they are one with God, and they take this for the Eternal Blessedness. And they have entered into this, and have taken possession of it, through self-will and their natural tendency; and therefore they imagine themselves to be set above the law and above the commandments of God and Holy Church. For, above that essential rest which they possess, they feel neither God nor any otherness; for the Divine light has not shone into their dimness. And this is because they have neither sought after it through active love nor through supernatural freedom. And thus they have lost truth and every virtue, and have fallen into a perverted unlikeness; for they make it a part of the highest holiness that a man should yield to all that concerns his nature, and be without restraint, so that he may abide, with an inclined spirit, in vacancy; and that as regards the lusts of the flesh whenever they move him, he should turn outwards, that the flesh being satisfied, he may quickly escape from the image and may return once more unencumbered into the bare vacancy of his spirit. Lo! this is a fruit of hell, which grows from their unbelief; and therewith shall unbelief be nourished even in death. For, when the time has come and their nature is weighed down with bitter woe and the sorrow of death, then they are filled with images and unrest and inward fear; and they lose their vacant introversion in quietude, and fall into such despair that none can console them, and they die like mad dogs. And their vacancy shall bring them no reward, and those who worked wicked works, and died in them shall go to the eternal flames, as our faith teaches.

I have shown to you the evil and the good side by side, so that you may so much the better understand the good and be able to guard against the evil. You shall abhor and fly from such folk, for, how holy soever they seem in their conduct, in works, in dress and demeanour, they are the mortal enemies of your soul. For they are the devil's ministers, and the most noxious of all who now live to simple and unlearned men of good-will. But I will leave this subject, and go back again to the matter with which I first began.

CHAPTER V**OF THE UNION WITHOUT MEANS**

You may remember that I showed heretofore how all saints and all good men are united with God through means. Now I will further show to you how they are all united with God without means. But in this life there are but few who are meet for this, and sufficiently enlightened to feel and understand it. And therefore, whosoever wishes to find and to feel within himself those three unions of which I am going to speak, he must live entirely and wholly in God, so that he may satisfy and be amenable to the grace and the stirring of God, in all virtues and inward exercises. And he must be lifted up through love, and die in God to himself and all his works; so that he yields himself up with all his powers, and submits to the transformation through the incomprehensible Truth which is God Himself. And to that end it is needful that living he should go forth in the virtues, and dying should enter into God. And in these two things his perfect life consists; and these two are joined together within him like matter and form, like body and soul.¹ And as he exercises himself in them so he becomes clear in understanding, and rich and overflowing in feeling; for he has joined himself to God with uplifted powers, with true intention, with his heart's desire, with ceaseless craving, with the living ardour of his spirit and of his nature. And since he thus exercises himself and keeps himself in the Presence of God, love overpowers him: in whatsoever manner he moves, he is ever growing in love and in all virtues. But love always moves each man according to the profit and the ability of each.

1 It will be seen that this is another aspect of that balanced life of action and fruition described in *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*, which parallels on the human plane the essentially static and personally dynamic aspects of the Divine life. Compare note 66.

CHAPTER VI

OF HEAVENLY WEAL AND HELLISH WOE

The most profitable stirrings which such a man can feel, and for which he is best fitted, are heavenly weal and hellish woe, and the ability to respond to these two with fit and proper works. For heavenly weal lifts a man up above all things into an untrammelled power of praising and loving God in every way that his heart and his soul desire. After this comes hellish woe, and casts him down into a misery, and into a lack of all the comfort and consolation that he experienced before. In this woe, weal sometimes shows itself, and brings with it a hope which none can gainsay. And then the man falls back again into a despair in which he can find no consolation. When a man feels God within himself with rich and full grace, this I call heavenly health; for then he is wise and clear of understanding, rich and outflowing with heavenly teachings, ardent and generous in charity, drunken and overflowing with joy, strong in feeling, bold and ever ready in all the things which he knows to be well pleasing to God; and such-like things without number, which may only be known by those who feel them. But when the scale of love goes down, and God hides Himself with all His graces, then the man falls back into dereliction and torment and dark misery, as though he should never more recover: and then he feels himself to be nought else but a poor sinner, who knows little or nothing of God. He scorns every consolation that creatures may give him; and the taste and consolation of God he does not receive. And then his reason says within him: Where is now thy God? What hath become of all that thou didst receive from God? Then his Tears are his meat day and night, as the Prophet says. Now if that man is to recover from this misery, he must observe and feel that he does not belong to himself, but to God; and therefore he must freely abandon his own will to the will of God, and must leave God to work in him in time and in eternity. So soon as he can do this, with untroubled heart, and with a free spirit, at that very moment he recovers his health, and brings heaven into hell, and hell into heaven. For howsoever the scales of love go up and down, all things to him are even or alike. For whatsoever love gives or takes away, he who abandons himself and loves God finds peace in all. For his spirit remains free and unmoved, who lives in all pains without rebellion; and he is able to feel the unmediated union with God. For he has achieved the union through means by the richness of his virtues. And after this, because he is one aim and one will with God, he feels God within himself together with the fulness of His grace, as the quickening health of his being and all his works.

CHAPTER VII

SHOWING WHEREFORE ALL GOOD MEN DO NOT ATTAIN TO THE UNMEDIATED UNION WITH GOD

But now you may ask me why all good men do not attain to feel this. Now listen and I will tell you the why and the wherefore. They do not respond to the stirring of God with a forsaking of themselves, and so they do not abide with quickening fervour before the Presence of God; and also they are not careful of heart in their inward self-examination. And therefore they always remain more outward and manifold than inward and simple, and they work their works more from good custom than from inward feeling. And they care more for particular methods and the greatness and multiplicity of good works than for the intention and love towards God. And so they remain outward and manifold of heart, and are not aware of how God lives in them with the fulness of grace.

CHAPTER VIII

SHOWING HOW THE INWARD MAN SHOULD EXERCISE HIMSELF, THAT HE MAY BE UNITED WITH GOD WITHOUT MEANS

But now I will tell you how the inward man, who has health amidst all miseries, should feel himself to be one with God without means. When such a quickened man rises up, with his whole being and all his powers, and joins himself to God with life-giving and active love, then he feels that his love is, in its ground, where it begins and ends, fruitive and without ground. If he then wishes to penetrate further, with his active love into that fruitive love: then, all the powers of his soul must give way, and they must suffer and patiently endure that piercing Truth and Goodness which is God's self. For, as the air is penetrated by the brightness and heat of the sun, and iron is penetrated by fire; so that it works through fire the works of fire, since it burns and shines like the fire, and so likewise it can be said of the air—for, if the air had understanding, it could say: "I enlighten and brighten the whole world"—yet each of these keeps its own nature. For the fire does not become iron and the iron does not become fire, though their union is without means; for the iron is within the fire and the fire within the iron; and so also the air is in the sunshine and the sunshine in the air². So likewise is God in the being of the soul; and whenever the soul's highest powers are turned inward with active love, they are united with God without means, in a simple knowledge of all truth, and in an essential feeling and tasting of all good. This simple knowing and feeling of God is possessed in essential love, and is practised and preserved through active love. And therefore it is accidental to our powers through the dying introversion in love; but it is essential to our being, and always abides within it. And therefore we must perpetually turn inwards and be renewed in love, if we would seek out love through love. And this is taught us by St John, where he says: He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him. And though this union of the loving spirit with God is without means, yet there is here a great distinction, for the creature never becomes God, nor does God ever become the creature; as I explained to you heretofore in the example of the iron and the fire. And if material things, which have been made by God, may thus be united without means; so much the more may He, whenever such is His pleasure, unite himself with his beloved, if they, through His grace, submit to it and make themselves ready for it. And so in such an inward man, whom God has adorned with virtues, and, above that, has lifted up into a contemplative life, there is no intermediary between himself and God in his highest introversion but his enlightened reason and his active love. And through these two things,

2 This ancient simile for the union of the soul with God is constantly used by Ruysbroeck. It goes back at least to the fourth century A.D.; being found in the sermons of St Macarius. Ruysbroeck probably took it from St Bernard (*De diligendo Deo*, cap. 10), or possibly Richard of St Victor (*De Quatuor Gradibus Violentae Charitatis*).

he has an adherence to God; and this is “becoming one with God,” says St Bernard. But above reason, and above active love, he is lifted up into a naked contemplation, and dwells without activity in essential love. And there he is one love and one spirit with God, as I said heretofore. In this essential love through the unity which he has essentially with God, he infinitely transcends his understanding; and this is a life common to all God-seeing men. For in this transcendence such a man is able to see in one sight—if it be God’s pleasure to show it to him—all the creatures in heaven and on earth, with the distinction of their lives and their rewards. But before the Infinity of God, he must yield, and must follow after It essentially and without end; for This no creature, not even the soul of our Lord Jesus Christ, which yet received the highest union above all other creatures, can either comprehend or overtake.

CHAPTER IX**OF THE INWARD WORKING OF GOD'S GRACE**

Behold, this Eternal Love, which lives within the spirit, and with which it is united without means, gives its light and its grace to all the powers of the soul; and becomes thereby the cause of all the virtues. For the grace of God touches the highest powers of the soul, and from this touch there spring charity and the knowledge of truth, the love of all righteousness, the practice of the counsels of God according to discretion, freedom from images, the overcoming of all things without effort, and the death into the Unity through love. As long as a man can maintain himself in this exercise, he is able to contemplate, and to feel the union without means; and he feels the touch of God within himself, which is a renewal of grace and all virtues. You must further know that the grace of God also pours forth even through the lowest powers, and touches a man's heart; and from this there comes forth a heart-felt love towards God and a sensible joy in Him; and the love and delight pierce through heart and senses, through flesh and blood, and the whole bodily nature, and cause a pressure and restlessness in all his members, so that he is often at his wit's end. For he feels like a man full of wine, who is no longer master of himself. And from this there come many a strange state, wherein men of tender heart cannot well govern themselves. Sometimes through impatient longing, they lift up their heads and gaze with wide-opened eyes towards heaven; now joying, now weeping; now singing, now crying; now in weal, now in woe, and often both together; running and jumping, laughing, clapping their hands, kneeling, bowing down: and many other like gestures are seen in them. So long as a man remains thus, and lifts himself up with an open heart towards those riches of God which live in his spirit, he feels ever anew the stirring of God, and the impatience of love; and then all these things are renewed in him. And so this man through this bodily feeling may sometimes pass into a ghostly feeling which is according to reason; and through this ghostly feeling, he may pass into a godly feeling, which is above reason; and, through this godly feeling, he may drown himself in an unchangeable and beatific feeling. This feeling is our superessential blessedness, which is a fruition of God and all His beloved: and this blessedness is that Dark Quiet which ever abides in idleness. To God it is essential, and to all creatures superessential. And there we may behold how the Persons give place and abide in the Essential Love, that is, in the Fruitive Unity and yet they dwell for ever, according to Their personal nature, in the working of the Trinity.

CHAPTER X

**OF THE MUTUAL CONTENTMENT OF THE DIVINE PERSONS, AND THE
MUTUAL CONTENTMENT BETWEEN GOD AND GOOD MEN**

And so you may perceive that the Divine Nature eternally works according to the Persons, and is eternally idle and wayless according to the simplicity of Its Essence. All therefore that God has chosen and laid hold of with eternal personal love, has already been essentially and fruitively possessed of Him in unity with essential love. For the Divine Persons are enfolded within the Unity in a mutual embrace in an eternal contentment, in abysmal active love. And this is perpetually renewed in the lifegiving life of the Trinity; for here there takes place a perpetual new birth in new knowledge new contentment and new outbreathing; in a new embrace with new torrents of Eternal Love. In this contentment all the chosen are enfolded: angels and men, from the first even to the last. Upon this contentment depend heaven and earth, and life and being and the activity and preservation of all creatures, save only the tendency to turn from God in sin: this comes from the wilful and blind wickedness of the creatures. From the Divine contentment grace and glory and all gifts pour forth in heaven and on earth, and into each creature separately, according to its needs and its receptivity. For God's grace is made ready for all men, and awaits the conversion of every sinner, and whenever a sinner, urged by grace, renounces himself and will call upon God with faith, he finds pardon. And likewise, whosoever through grace with loving contentment turns towards the Eternal Contentment of God, he is enwrapped and embraced in the abysmal love which is God Himself. And thereby he is perpetually renewed in love and in the virtues; for, between our contentment in God and God's contentment in us there abides an activity of love and of eternal life. But God has eternally loved us and established us within His contentment, and if we rightly observe this, our love and our contentment shall be wakened anew. For, in the mutual relations of the Persons in the Godhead, this contentment perpetually renews itself, in a new gushing forth of love, in an ever new embrace within the Unity. And this takes place beyond Time; that is, without before and after, in an eternal NOW. For, in this embrace in the Unity, all things are consummated; and in the gushing forth of love, all things are wrought; and in the life-giving and fruitful Nature lie the power and possibilities of all things. For in the life-giving and fruitful Nature, the Son is in the Father, and the Father in the Son, and the Holy Ghost in Both. For It is a life-giving and fruitful Unity, which is the home and the beginning of all life and of all becoming. And so all creatures are therein, beyond themselves, one Being and one Life with God, as in their Eternal Origin. But in the precession of the different Persons, the Son proceeds from the Father, and the Holy Ghost from Both: and it is there that God has made and ordained all creatures according to their proper being, and has re-made man, through His grace and His death, inasmuch as he

cleaves to Him. And He has adorned His own with love and with the virtues; and has turned back with them, towards His Origin.

There the Father and the Son and all the beloved are enfolded and embraced in the bonds of love; that is, in the unity of the Holy Ghost. And this is that same unity which is fruitful in the outgoing activity of the Persons, and forms in Their return an eternal bond of love which shall never be untied: and all who know themselves to be bound up in it shall be blessed throughout eternity, and they are rich in virtue, and clear in contemplation, and simple in fruitive rest. For in their introversion, the Love of God is revealed to them, pouring forth with all good, and drawing back again into the Unity, and above all being and beyond all conditions abiding in eternal rest. And so they are all united with God, through means, and without means, and also without distinction.

CHAPTER XI

**HOW GOOD MEN IN THEIR CONTEMPLATION HAVE THE LOVE OF GOD
BEFORE THEM, AND HOW THEY ARE LIFTED UP INTO GOD**

They have the Love of God before them in their inward seeing, as a common good pouring forth through heaven and earth; and they feel the Holy Trinity inclined towards them, and within them, with fulness of grace. And therefore they are adorned without and within with all the virtues, with holy practices and with good works. And thus they are united with God through Divine grace and their own holy lives. And because they have abandoned themselves to God in doing, in leaving undone, and in suffering, they have steadfast peace and inward joy, consolation and savour, of which the world cannot partake; neither any dissembler, nor the man who seeks and means himself more than the glory of God. Moreover, those same inward and enlightened men have before them in their inward seeing whenever they will, the Love of God as something drawing or urging them into the Unity; for they see and feel that the Father with the Son through the Holy Ghost, embrace Each Other and all the chosen, and draw themselves back with eternal love into the unity of Their Nature. Thus the Unity is ever drawing to itself and inviting to itself everything that has been born of It, either by nature or by grace. And therefore, too, such enlightened men are, with a free spirit, lifted up above reason into a bare and imageless vision, wherein lives the eternal indrawing summons of the Divine Unity; and, with an imageless and bare understanding, they pass through all works, and all exercises, and all things, until they reach the summit of their spirits. There, their bare understanding is drenched through by the Eternal Brightness, even as the air is drenched through by the sunshine. And the bare, uplifted will is transformed and drenched through by abysmal love, even as iron is by fire. And the bare, uplifted memory feels itself enwrapped and established in an abysmal Absence of Image. And thereby the created image is united above reason in a threefold way with its Eternal Image, which is the origin of its being and its life; and this origin is preserved and possessed, essentially and eternally, through a simple seeing in an imageless void: and so a man is lifted up above reason in a threefold manner into the Unity, and in a onefold manner into the Trinity. Yet the creature does not become God, for the union takes place in God through grace and our homeward-turning love: and therefore the creature in its inward contemplation feels a distinction and an otherness between itself and God. And though the union is without means, yet the manifold works which God works in heaven and on earth are nevertheless hidden from the spirit. For though God gives Himself as He is, with clear discernment, He gives Himself in the essence of the soul, where the powers of the soul are simplified above reason, and where, in simplicity, they suffer the transformation of God.³ There all is full

3 “Hi gheeft hem in dat wesen der sielen, dar der sielen crachten, boven redene, gheenvoldicht sijn en ghedaghen die overforminghen Gods eenvoldigher wijs.” Reason, will and love must here be fused in one simple state, in

and overflowing, for the spirit feels itself to be one truth and one richness and one unity with God. Yet even here there is an essential tending forward, and therein is an essential distinction between the being of the soul and the Being of God; and this is the highest and finest distinction which we are able to feel.

order that they may apprehend the Unity in which an wisdom, love and will are resumed. This doctrine of self-simplification was well understood by the Platonic mystics and has passed from them into the Christian tradition. Thus Plotinus says, "The soul must ascend to the principle which is in herself, and become one instead of many, in order that she may contemplate the Principle of all things, and the One." (On the Good, or the One.)

CHAPTER XII**OF THE HIGHEST UNION, WITHOUT DIFFERENCE OR DISTINCTION**

And after this there follows the union without distinction. For you must apprehend the Love of God not only as an outpouring with all good, and as drawing back again into the Unity; but it is also, above all distinction, an essential fruition in the bare Essence of the Godhead. And in consequence of this enlightened men have found within themselves an essential contemplation which is above reason and without reason, and a fruitive tendency which pierces through every condition and all being, and through which they immerse themselves in a wayless abyss of fathomless beatitude, where the Trinity of the Divine Persons possess Their Nature in the essential Unity. Behold, this beatitude is so onefold and so wayless that in it every essential gazing, tendency, and creaturely distinction cease and pass away. For by this fruition, all uplifted spirits are melted and noughted in the Essence of God, Which is the superessence of all essence. There they fall from themselves into a solitude and an ignorance which are fathomless; there all light is turned to darkness; there the three Persons give place to the Essential Unity, and abide without distinction in fruition of essential blessedness. This blessedness is essential to God, and superessential to all creatures; for no created essence can become one with God's Essence and pass away from its own substance. For so the creature would become God, which is impossible; for the Divine Essence can neither wax nor wane, nor can anything be added to It or taken from It. Yet all loving spirits are one fruition and one blessedness with God without distinction; for that beatific state, which is the fruition of God and of all His beloved, is so simple and onefold that therein neither Father, nor Son, nor Holy Ghost, is distinct according to the Persons, neither is any creature. But all enlightened spirits are here lifted up above themselves into a wayless fruition, which is an abundance beyond all the fulness that any creature has ever received or shall ever receive. For there all uplifted spirits are, in their superessence, one fruition and one beatitude with God without distinction; and there this beatitude is so onefold that no distinction can enter into it. And this was prayed for by Christ when He besought His Father in heaven that all His beloved might be made perfect in one, even as He is one with the Father through the Holy Ghost: even so He prayed and besought that He in us and we in Him and His heavenly Father might be one in fruition through the Holy Ghost. And this I think the most loving prayer which Christ ever made for our blessedness.

CHAPTER XIII

OF THE THREEFOLD PRAYER OF CHRIST, THAT WE MIGHT BE ONE
WITH GOD

But you should also observe that His prayer, as it has been written by St John in this same Gospel, was threefold. For He prayed that we might be with Him, that we might behold the glory which His Father had given Him. And therefore I said at the beginning that all good men are united with God by means of Divine grace and their own virtuous life; for the love of God is always pouring into us with new gifts, and whosoever is aware of this is fulfilled with new virtues and holy exercises and with all good, in the way that I told you heretofore: and this union through the fulness of grace and glory, in body and soul, begins here below and shall endure throughout eternity.

Further, Christ prayed thus, that He might be in us and we in Him. This we find in the Gospel, in many places. And this is the union without means; for the Love of God is not only outpouring, but it also draws us inwards, into the Unity. And those who feel and are aware of this, become inward and enlightened men, and their highest powers are uplifted, above all exercises, into their naked being; and there, above reason, the powers become simplified in their essence, and so they are full and overflowing. For in that simplicity, the spirit finds itself united with God without means; and this union, with the exercise which belongs to it, shall endure eternally, as I have told you heretofore.

Further, Christ uttered His most sublime prayer, namely, that His beloved might be made perfect in one, as He is one with the Father: not one as He is with the Father one single Divine Substance, for this is impossible to us; but so one, and in such a unity, as He is one fruition and one beatitude with the Father without distinction in Essential Love. Those who are thus united with God in this threefold way, in them the prayer of Christ has been fulfilled.

These with God shall ebb and flow,
 Having and joying, they shall empty go;
 They shall both work and passively endure,
 And in their superessence rest secure.
 They shall go out and in, and find their food,
 And, drunk with love, in radiant darkness sleep in God.

Many more words I should like to say here, but those who possess this have no need of them: and he to whom it has been shown, and who cleaves with love to Love, he shall be taught the whole truth by Love itself. But those who turn outwards, and would find consolation in outward things, do not feel this; and, even though I should say much more of it, yet they would not understand. For those who give themselves wholly to outward works, or those who are idle in inward passivity, shall never be able to understand it. Now although

reason and all bodily feelings must here give place and yield to the faith and contemplation of the spirit,⁴ and to those things which are above reason; yet reason and also the life of the senses continue to abide in their place, and cannot pass away, any more than the nature of man can pass away. And further, though the gazing and tendency of the spirit towards God must give place to fruition in simplicity; yet this gazing and this tendency continue to exist in their place.⁵ For this is the inmost life of the spirit; and, in the enlightened and uplifted man, the life of the senses adheres to the spirit. And so his sensual powers are joined to God by heart-felt love, and his nature is fulfilled with all good; and he feels that his ghostly life adheres to God without means. And thereby his highest powers are uplifted to God in eternal love, and drenched through by Divine truth, and established in imageless freedom. And so he is filled with God, and overflowing without measure. In this inundation there comes to pass the essential outpouring or immersion in the superessential Unity; and this is the union without distinction, of which I have often told you. For in the superessence all our ways end. If we will go with God upon the highway of love, we shall rest with Him eternally and without end: and thus we shall eternally go forth towards God and enter into Him and rest in Him.

4 The Flemish word “*instaeerne*,” which Ruysbroeck here uses, conveys the idea of an absorbed inward gazing, for which we have no exact expression in English.

5 “*Staende in syn abijt*.” This phrase has puzzled all translators, from Surius onwards. Taken with its context, it seems to mean that the self’s ascent to the heights of Divine fruition does not entail any impoverishment of the lower levels of existence. The senses, the intellect, the normal religious faculty, each continue to exist “in their own place.” This is another statement of the profound truth insisted upon in *The Sparkling Stone*: that the completed life of man, like that of its Pattern Christ, is both active and contemplative, both human and divine—“living wholly in God where we possess our blessedness, and wholly in ourselves where we exercise ourselves in love to God.”

CHAPTER XIV

HERE THE AUTHOR DECLARES THAT HE SUBMITS ALL THAT HE HAS WRITTEN TO THE JUDGMENT OF HOLY CHURCH

Now at this time I cannot set forth my meaning more clearly. In all that I understand, or feel, or have written, I submit myself to the judgment of the saints and of Holy Church; for I wish to live and to die as a servant of Christ, in the Christian faith; and I desire to be, by the grace of God, a life-giving member of Holy Church. And therefore, as I told you heretofore, you should beware of those self-deceived men who, by means of their idle vacancy, and with their bare and simple gaze have found the Divine Essence within themselves in a merely natural way; and who pretend to be one with God without the grace of God, and without exercise of virtue, and without obedience to God and to Holy Church. And for all their perversity of life, which I have described, they would be one with God's Son by nature. But if the Prince of all the angels was cast out of heaven, because he set himself up against God and would be like unto the most High; and if the first man was driven from Paradise because he would be as God: how then shall this wretched sinner—that is, the faithless Christian who would be as God without likeness to God in grace and virtue—ever rise from earth into heaven? For through his own power no man has ascended into heaven, save the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. And therefore we must unite ourselves with Him, through grace and virtue and Christian faith: so we shall ascend with Him whither He has gone before us. For in the Last Day we shall all rise, each with his own body; and then those who have worked good works shall go into life everlasting, and those who have worked evil works shall go into everlasting fire. These are two unlike ends, which shall never come together for each flies from the other perpetually.

Pray for him who has composed and written this, that God may have mercy upon him. That his poor beginning, and his and our wretched middle course may be brought to a blessed end, this may Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, bestow upon us all. Amen.