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THE MYSTERY OF HUMAN PARTICIPATION IN THE PASCHAL MYSTERY OF CHRIST ACCORDING TO MEDIEVAL MYSTICISM OF THE LOW COUNTRIES

Summary

The article analyses the question of human participation in the paschal mystery of Christ in the understanding of medieval mystics of the Low Countries. The presentation consists of three parts. The first part explains the concept of the mystery of human participation in the paschal mystery of Christ, the second presents the foundations of human participation in the mystery of Christ on the basis of selected writings by John of Ruusbroec, Beatrice of Nazaret, Hadewijch, as well as *Arnhem Mystical Sermons* and *The Evangelical Pearl*. The last part explains the ways of human participation as conceived of in the above-mentioned medieval mystical works.

Keywords: an inner union with God, the mystery of human participation in the paschal mystery of Christ, salvation, medieval mysticism, mystics of the Low Countries

TAJEMNICA UDZIAŁU CZŁOWIEKA W MISTERIUM PASCHALNYM CHRYSYUSA WEDŁUG ŚREDNIOWIECZNEGO MISTYCYZMU KRAJÓW BENELUXU

Streszczenie

Artykuł bada, w jaki sposób średniowieczni mistycy krajów Beneluxu rozumieli udział człowieka w misterium paschalnym Chrystusa. Praca składa się z trzech części. Pierwsza wyjaśnia zagadnienie związane z tajemnicą udziału człowieka w misterium paschalnym Chrystusa. Druga ukazuje podstawę tego udziału na podstawie tekstów Jana Ruusbroeka, Beatrycze z Nazaretu, Hadewijch, *Arnhem Mystical Sermons* i autora *Ewangelicznej Perły*. Ostatnia część pokazuje sposoby udziału człowieka w misterium paschalnym Chrystusa według wskazanych wyżej tekstów.

Słowa kluczowe: zjednoczenie z Bogiem, tajemnica udziału w misterium paschalnym Chrystusa, zbawienie, mistycyzm średniowieczny, mistycy krajów Beneluxu

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INTRODUCTION

It is quite difficult, not to say rare, to find any direct references to the question raised in the title of the present study in texts of medieval mystics. However, although passages dealing in a direct way with the paschal mystery of Christ and human participation in it are scarce, it can in fact be argued that, in an indirect way, all those texts touch upon that issue since they all refer to man's union with God. An inner union with Christ is one of the most characteristic elements of the mysticism of the Low Countries. To begin with, it must be stated that Jesus Christ's mystery is a prerequisite of that union. It is only through him that we can achieve a mystical union with God and this union is also the aim of human participation in the mystery of Christ.

The main inspiration behind the theme raised in the present paper was a text of late medieval mysticism of the Low Countries, entitled *The Evangelical Pearl, How God Wants to Fulfill All the Great Feast in the Soul, and Wants to Renew Them in Her Always*. Being impressed by it, I decided to analyze in detail how the author understands human participation in the paschal mystery of Christ, and especially, the thought of carrying in our hearts sufferings of Jesus which he formulates². The second, however not less important and definitely not accidental motive for undertaking that topic is my longstanding interest in it. That interest prompts me to gain a deeper insight into the mystery of Christ through the prism of mystical texts and not only from the perspective of speculative theology.

Consequently, the aim of my work is to analyze how medieval mystics of the Low Countries understand human participation in the paschal mystery of Christ. In order to pursue that aim I would like to provide answers to the following questions: What are the basis of human participation according to medieval texts? How is this participation presented there? What kind of expressions are used to refer to it? Where can we experience this participation? Is this participation possible for everyone? How can we achieve it?

In order to find answers to the above questions, I am going to concentrate in particular on Chapter 3 of *The Evangelical Pearl's* sermon. Among all texts, this one contains a lot of allusions to Jesus' death. I will also take a closer look at John Ruusbroec's works since he explains in detail the issue of the union between God and man. Lastly, I am going to refer to the works of Beatrice of Nazaret, Hadewijch and *Arnhem Mystical Sermons*.

² This thought constitutes a reference to the Scripture and, especially, to Paul's words pointing to fact that fate of man is bound with Christ. Such expressions as: co-suffering, co-offertory, co-dying, including into the death and rising from the dead, the complicity, co-resurrection describe participation of man in the paschal mystery of Christ: "with the Christ I was nailed to the cross" (Gal 2,19-21); participation in his suffering (comp. Phil 3,10); complementing deficiencies of Christ's torments (comp. Col 1,24); "buried with Him" (comp. Col 2,11-12); with Christ we died (comp. Col 2,20; 3,1-5); "our old man is crucified with him" (comp. Rom 6,4-11); "we are carrying dying of the Jesus incessantly in our body" (2Cor 4,10-14); participation in his suffering, becoming like him in his death (comp. Phil 3,10-11); "you are participants in Christ's suffering" (1P 4,13); "because we are participants of Christ" (Heb 3,14).

This analysis consists of three parts. The first part explains the concept of the mystery of human participation in the paschal mystery of Christ, the second presents the foundations of human participation in the mystery of Christ on the basis of the above mentioned texts. The last part explains the possible ways in which man can participate in Christ's mystery.

1. THE MYSTERY OF HUMAN PARTICIPATION IN THE PASCHAL MYSTERY OF CHRIST

The mystery of human participation in the paschal mystery of Christ is rooted in the mystery of human person which consists in an openness to God. According to theological anthropology, man is a being oriented at God and destined for participation in his life, i.e. deification. The structure of human existence implies that man is a free being and he is capable of transcendence. That is why, man cannot exhaust the full potential of his life by himself. He is also a relational being and as such he cannot find fulfillment in himself alone, but only in relationships with others. Lastly, man is an ecstatic being, i.e. he is able to stand outside himself and a dialogical being characterized by epiclesis, i.e. he wordlessly calls his Creator. In his ontic structure, man is open to God and contains in himself as if two two-dimensions: the inherent and the supernatural nature³. Even if he negates any of these dimensions, it does not change anything in his structure. Therefore, in his whole existence, man leans towards the Creator. However, all the desires and anthropological longings alone do not allow him to participate in divine life.

Man was called into existence in original holiness, but as a result of sin this capacity was disrupted and he lost the possibility of direct communion with God. However, this situation is not irretrievable. Theology distinguishes in man the image and likeness. The first one was clearly weakened by the original sin, but never entirely destroyed in man. Likeness, on the other hand, is a dynamic reality which is given to man. Due to the image, human nature ontologically leans toward the Creator, whereas likeness cannot be achieved by human powers. Likeness is restored by Jesus Christ whose event constitutes an absolute novelty and the pivotal point in the history of salvation (Dupuis 1999, 189-193). In the days of the Covenant with the chosen People, God looked after people, but this relation was external. With the incarnation, the life-saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God Himself came into the fate of man. In the person of his Son God redeemed man and human redemption consists not only in his liberation from sin but, primarily, in the restoration of human capacity to become like God and to

³ As a result, man cannot live otherwise than by according to his two natures. "Man is fully a man, when he participates in the life of God and carries the God's image in himself (the idea of participation assumes a dynamic concept of man as a free and theocentric being open to participation in God)" (Hryniewicz 1982b, 440; Hryniewicz 1995, 714; Hryniewicz 1989, 122; Hryniewicz and Nossol 1995, 694-698; Bonora 1982, 6-13; Gózdź 2006; Kijas 1995, 173-191).

unite with Him in the form of participation in His life⁴. The paschal event of Christ established a new communion of God with humanity and lead to a new, positive situation in the world which, although it is a sovereign work of God, does not preclude the need for cooperation on the part of man. Although this participation constitutes the purpose of man inscribed in his nature and his ultimate fulfillment, it is both a reality which is given and expected, which is realized through voluntary cooperation with God consisting in the adoption and assimilation of all that Christ did for the salvation of man in the Paschal event.

In this perspective, it appears that the “Paschal Mystery” refers to the mystery of God’s plan of salvation which finds its pivotal point in the event of Jesus Christ – his entire life (*The Evangelical Pearl* 2008, Part III, Ch. 3) and, especially, in the climax of passion, death and resurrection. Christ’s mystery, therefore, cannot be limited only to his death and resurrection (narrower sense), but it actually stands for the whole mystery of salvation (broad sense), which includes: 1) preparation in the Old Testament; 2) fulfillment in Jesus Christ; 2) continuation in the Church; 4) culmination of the Second Coming (Hryniewicz 1982a, 52-63). Of course, the work of historical and glorified Christ which is the pinnacle event that reaches people living before the Incarnation of the Logos is continued in the Church and constitutes anticipation of eschatic times. Thus, people of all times have the opportunity to participate in Christ’s act of salvation. Christ’s mystery is one and indivisible and, as such, extends to individual events that belong together⁵. Referring to the biblical and patristic concept of the Passover, a theologian from Lublin clearly expands on the four dimensions of the paschal mystery: Christological and soteriological (Passover of Christ), ecclesiological or mystery-sacramental (Passover of the Church), anthropological (Passover of man, spiritual and moral participation) and eschatological (Heavenly Passover). The Passover includes not only the historical event of Jesus, but also the whole sacramental life of the Church, in which human participation is connected with his lifelong commitment. The end point is the eschatological crowning in *parousia*. This means, that the Passover of Christ is at the same time the Passover of man, of the Church and

⁴ Stressing the positive dimension of the grace of redemption they are emphasizing that a possibility of uniting with God is his great fruit, and only later absolution of sins. C. R. Koster is making interesting reflection in this field. He thinks that according to theology of John the sin is a lack of faith, with hate which is alienating from God. In such a light the Jesus is smoothing sins through directing people at the faith which is initiating the saving relation with God. So according to Koester killing sins effected by the Lamb of God consists in the fact that the man as a result of his act is turning towards the faith, namely to the relation giving the gift of life with God (Koester 2005, 146).

⁵ Waclaw Hryniewicz explains the meaning of “mystery” in that way. He quotes the Fathers for whom this term denotes the events of the Old Testament typologically representing the events of the New Testament; the God-man Christ and individual events from his life, the Bible, the Church and the Christian cult. Gradually, the word “mystery” began to be used with reference to sacraments in which, under the outside, symbolic sign, a saving reality is hidden, i.e. the mystery of the Passover. The redemptive act of Christ manifests itself in the Church through sacraments. By the word “Passover”, Hryniewicz does not only understand the suffering (*passio*), the painful agony and death, but also the passage (*transitus*) of Christ from death to the new life (Hryniewicz 1982a, 52-63). See also: Hryniewicz 1981, 167-181; Czerwik 2002, 895-902.

of the world. In the history of theological thought the Passover was explained in various ways. Christological dimension was often overly stressed without linking it to the life of an individual man. At other times, anthropological, spiritual, or moral dimension was emphasized leading to spiritualization⁶. Meanwhile, the only correct interpretation should integrally comprise all indicated dimensions.

In this perspective, it is clear that participation in the death and resurrection of Christ is just one of many aspects of the paschal mystery. It results from the saving plan of God, who wants to bring people into communion with himself. This is done by the love of God, which cannot be contained in any system of thought. "The mystery of the Pascha is a great mystery of God's plan of salvation, which exceeds the cognitive capacity of the human mind to such an extent that even after the revelation we are not able to grasp its full depth" (Hryniewicz 1982a, 52). It can only be understood through faith, under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Both the paschal event of Christ and man's participation in it reveal truths inaccessible to the human mind. Hence, the theme of this work: the mystery of human participation in the paschal mystery of Christ. The word "mystery" draws attention to the fact that one cannot fully understand or explain that participation. Any attempt to approximate the question will always be imperfect, limited or aspectual because the mystery of God's closeness will always be greater than the human ability to penetrate it.

The question of human participation in the paschal mystery and the ways of its realization is a question about human identity, about the very heart of faith and religion. The answer is not without difficulties, because it is impossible to express in human language the truths that transcend the human mind. In the centuries-old history of the Church only mystics could brilliantly explain the deepest truths associated with the relation of man and God. The present paper will concentrate on how the mystics of the Low Countries described the internal bond with God through participation in his mystery.

2. FOUNDATION OF HUMAN PARTICIPATION IN THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST ACCORDING TO THE MEDIEVAL MYSTICS OF THE LOW COUNTRIES

The very fact of creation constitutes the most basic foundation of human participation in the paschal mystery of Christ. According to the general presentation of medieval mysticism "the human person is formed to the image of the Son and given

⁶ These tendencies are rooted in two early Christian traditions: Asian and alexandrine. The first stressed the Christological dimension of the Passover bringing Christ to the foreground (Passover of Christ – *passio*). The second one underlined the anthropological dimension – the internal passage of man from the state of sin to the state of blessedness, and ultimately, the passage from death to the eternity (Passover of man – *transitus*). This tradition underlines the actualization of the saving events for man, taking place in a mystical and sacramental way. According to Hryniewicz, their synthesis (*transitus per passionem*) took place in the teaching of St. Augustine. Not only was the agony of Christ linked with his rising from the dead, but also the Passover of Christ was identified with our Passover, the Passover of the Church, thanks to which man proceeds from death to life (Hryniewicz 1987, 29-37).

destination to grow in similarity with Him, even before being taken by grace into the inner life” (Deblaere 1944-1948, 2). Since all human beings were created by God and to image of his Son, it means that our created life cannot be fulfilled in any other way than by striving towards communion with God. Due to the fact that God is our beginning, he is also our destination. “Everything that was created in time, was first life in him [...]; this is our «superbeing» (*overwesen*), in which our created life moves” (Deblaere 1944-1948, 2). Exactly the same thoughts can be found in the works of Ruusbroec (1944-1948, 108 and 112)⁷. The majority of his texts deal with man’s proceeding towards the source of his origin even though the author rarely explains the very act of human creation. It is a kind of presupposition that does not need to be explained as it seems quite clear. Participation is an inherent element of human nature but, what is important, this anthropological yearning and natural inclination alone does not guarantee man participation in God’s life. So, what makes it possible?

The ultimate possibility was opened up for man through the incarnation of the Son and, what it implies, his eternal presence in us. “Through his incarnation and his presence in us, the Word makes it possible for us to lead back our being to its super-being – that is the meaning of life in time – and leads mankind back to the bosom of the Father” (Deblaere 1944-1948, 2). This view is clearly expressed in *The Evangelical Pearl*, where its author claims that Jesus Christ was born once in the flesh for the humanity’s sake, so that he could always be born spiritually in every man (*The Evangelical Pearl* 2008, Chapter 3). Incarnation is here a base for human participation in God’s life. It is noticeable that incarnation does not mean here only the moment of receiving human nature by the eternal Word but also its fulfillment in resurrection by which it can be present in us. Thus, in its broader meaning, incarnation comprises the whole life of Jesus, including his death and resurrection⁸. The act of transformation performed in his rising from the dead resulted not only in his new presence in the world but, simultaneously, it led the mankind into the very realm of God. For, by rising from the dead and through the Ascension, Christ attained God’s persons along with his human nature which allowed the ones who in the course of centuries will be uniting with him, also attain God’s presence. This thought was genuinely developed by Benedict XVI in his homily on the solemnity of the Ascension. The Pope stated: “He, the Eternal Son, led our human existence into God’s presence, taking with him flesh and blood in a transfigured form. The human being finds room in God; through Christ, the human being was introduced into the very life of God. And since God embraces and sustains the entire cosmos, the Ascension of the Lord means that Christ has not departed from us, but that he is now, thanks to his being with the Father, close to each one of us forever. Each one of us can be on intimate terms with him; each can call upon him. The Lord is always within hearing. We can inwardly draw away from him. We can live turning our

⁷ God is the foundation of every being.

⁸ It is not explicitly said in medieval texts, although author of *The evangelical Pearl* seems to allow to that understanding. This unity of salvific event is stressed in contemporary theology, f. e. (Journet 1951, 171).

backs on him. But he always waits for us and is always close to us” (Benedykt XVI 2005, 19). Moreover, according to John of Ruusbroec we are elevated into our origin by the Son. In his seminal work, Ruusbroec writes that Jesus brings us back to our source by assuming our human form and he died so that we may remain in the loving embrace of the unity of the Holy Trinity. He continues that in this unity all things are renewed and we are fulfilled (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 176). In another passage, the Flemish mystic explains that in Jesus Christ our heavy human nature sits crowned at the right hand of the Father (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 176).

In that light, it becomes clear that we may achieve participation in God’s life thanks to Jesus. However, what is most interesting is the fact that it is only the author of the *The Evangelical Pearl*, who clearly points out that this human union with God is possible only through Jesus and with the mystery of Jesus. It means that only this author puts stress on human participation in Jesus Christ’s life as a prerequisite of man’s union with God. He clearly implies it in the following statement:

All the other great feasts that were outwardly celebrated by me should also be fulfilled spiritually within you [...], since you should constantly have and carry in your heart my whole life and suffering⁹ (everything that I underwent, gave up, taught, and suffered for your sake) [...]. In this way it is always Good Friday within you, and you are spiritually crucified and you die every day for my sake and are entombed in me; you entomb me within yourself in the grave of your heart, and you anoint me with the oil of dying to yourself; you enfold me in the winding sheet of your conscience that I have cleansed by my death and passion. This is how I shall rise in you and through you, and bring you to life out of death [...]. And your life shall be in heaven with me, for I am in you. In this way, you shall celebrate and carry out my ascension within you (*The Evangelical Pearl* 2008, Chapter 3).

The above passage is so explicit that it seems superfluous to provide any further explanation for the fear of blurring its content. Actually, the whole chapter could be quoted here. It is only worth stressing that according to Ruusbroec, all that Jesus experienced must also be experienced by every human being (in unity with Christ) in order for man to reach union with God¹⁰. At the same time, this union with God is the main goal of taking part in Jesus’ paschal mystery, which means his whole life. “You may always have my reality in your body, and thus you shall [...] abide in my divine union” (*The Evangelical Pearl* 2008, Chapter 3).

It also needs to be explained that this union is possible through the Holy Spirit. The author of *The Evangelical Pearl* also encourages to fulfill in human reality sending

⁹ The author seems to allude here to 2Cor 4,10.

¹⁰ The objective redemption of man was already achieved in Christ. Now, it is supposed to come true subjectively in every Christian who dies and is rises from the dead with Christ to the new life. Everything what took place in Christ must somehow be experienced by the mankind. Christ’s humanity provides man with permanent access to God. The entire objective salvation will be of no avail, if it is not manifested subjectively as co-dying and co-rising with Christ in the Holy Spirit (Balthasar 1997, 36). Also, as Lazaro Bustince notices, the thought of John Paul II expresses a similar view on subjective participation in the paschal mystery of Christ (Bustince 1999, 215-225).

of the Holy Spirit. Because the descent of the Holy Spirit enabled man to participate in the mystery of Christ. Ruusbroec expresses this conviction in his work when he writes that the Spirit of God lives in every man and that he moves and impels everyone in particular, according to his ability, towards virtue and good works thus making him pleasing to God (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 140). What was uniquely achieved by Christ is eternally current for man, if he accepts the Divine offer and makes an effort to act in accordance with the Holy Spirit. In this way, the Spirit becomes a provider of unity, hallowing and living in Divine community of persons. He carries out human return to God which was enabled thanks to the event of Christ. The way of salvation which led from God the Father, through the Son to the Holy Spirit is now the very same thing: man becomes able to participate in God's life thanks to the Spirit and through his participation in the mystery of the Son which is, at the same time, a communion with the Father. In this way, Christ reveals himself as the way to God, and the Holy Spirit as the guide on it. He involves man in the secret of salvation, that is, in the mystery of the Church, through faith and sacraments. In this way, the Holy Spirit gives to the mankind a new quality of life, opening it to God and uniting it with him. By proposing every man of goodwill a life-giving encounter with the Risen, he forms the community of the Church through free participation of man and he leads this community into eschatological times. In this way, the uniting action of the Spirit simultaneously implies the full rising from the dead with Christ and participation in the life of the Holy Trinity.

When the author of the sermon writes about the requirement of celebrating all those great feasts he means liturgical celebration because, after the Ascension, the Church is the place where the life of Jesus and his union can be experienced. All of this takes place in human conscience, which is by other mystics defined as an inward temple or the innermost part of the soul. Exactly the same thought can be found in Ruusbroec's writings, in which the Church is paralleled with the conscience (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 140). A similar thought can also be found in Arnhem Mystical Sermons (*Church dedication* sermon), in which it is stated that the Eternal Word comes and performs the High Sacrifice in the soul and sacrifices Himself in the soul, and with that soul in Him it is melted and united with the Father in the Godhead. He adds also that through Jesus' sacrifice, the soul's form is transformed and made one with God¹¹.

3. MANNERS OF HUMAN PARTICIPATION

Thanks to the saving event of Jesus Christ and human participation in it, man can be unified with God and achieve the eternal life. This participation is inscribed in human nature, it is a sovereign gift of the Lord but, at the same time, it is a task that needs to be undertaken by man and which can only be realized in cooperation with Jesus Christ by participating in all that he did in his paschal mystery.

¹¹ Ruusbroec would immediately explain that this union does not mean a hypostatic union.

This view is strongly stressed by all medieval mystics and it means that, first of all, participation in God's life is his sovereign gift that nobody can deserve on his own. God is the principle of any action, instead of the proud *I* or *myself*. Human activity is the second step and seems to be a kind of gratitude which needs to be expressed. It is motivated by Love which prompts man to cooperate with God but still, it does not provide a means by which man can obtain this unity by himself.

Ruusbroec expresses it in the most explicit way. He writes that God calls and invites all people without exception both good and evil to the unity with Him, and he does not leave anyone out. He continues that the grace of God works in every man according to the measure and manner in which he is able to receive it. Thanks to God's work in man, every sinner is given strength to abandon sin and turn toward virtue – if he wants to do so. “For all we are and all we have received, inside and out, has been given to us freely by God, for which we have to thank him and with which we have to serve him if we are to please him” (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 122). Again, our service does not guarantee that we will receive grace because we are not able to reach it by ourselves, but we need to do our service due to gratitude, due to pure Love and without any reason. John of Ruusbroec continues that he wants to be one with God, which implies making an effort, because he wants to pay back the debt that God asks of him, namely the debt of Love (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 110)¹². The author of *Sparkling Stone* points out that this effort should be made beyond any reason because love is above reason (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 108). The same thought can be found in Beatrice of Nazareth who advocates serving the Lord freely, without any reward of grace or glory.

Many mystics put stress on the priority of God's action. They say that it is God's desire to be united with man and, therefore, he renews human soul and draws the soul towards himself. His thought is recurrently stressed in the discussed texts. For example, the author of chapter 8 of *The Temple of our Soul* quotes Prov 8,31 pointing to the words: “It is my desire to dwell with the sons of men” and continues in chapter 10 saying that it is God who enlightens and who draws all human persons to himself so they may walk in the newness of life. The same idea is expressed by Ruusbroec who claims that “God's unity draws all things into itself and no man can overtake Jesus Christ for he transcends all creatures and takes precedence over them all and he reveals itself to those he chooses” (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 112 and 116).

But, simultaneously, the same mystics add that to response God and to be drawn into union with Him, the soul has to make some preparations which many authors compare to purification. In this context, the authors use terms which suggest also the idea of participating in Jesus Christ's life and death, as they suggest an act of kenosis, i.e. self-emptying of one's own will. Namely: “when the soul has cast off self-love and all that is creaturely, and stands completely naked and empty

¹² Actually Ruusbroec quoted here Hadewijch who wrote in poem 12 that the debt love demands the beloved to pay.

of all multiplicity, purely in the truth, then the unique One, God himself, responds to the unity of the souls [...]”. Ruusbroec writes further that: “the eternal Word has filled the whole earth with love and in love it wants to burn all loving spirits to nothingness” (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 114), and he emphasizes in his work the necessity of passing over into bareness and modelessness, which implies making one’s own Passover (lat. *transitus*) from *me* to God, from what *I* can do to God himself so that we may be wrought by the Spirit of God (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 134 and 138). This transition is compared to climbing Mount Tabor. Ruusbroec writes: “Jesus leads us on to the mountain of our bare mind in a region barren and hidden and reveals himself to us glorified and we hear the voice of God’s wisdom” (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 172). So, there is a need to die in God to ourselves and all our self-consciousness, because “in this dying we become hidden sons of God and we find a new life in ourselves, which is life eternal” (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 144)¹³. This dying means giving one’s own life completely to God, so as to we do not belong to ourselves anymore but we are born from God and thanks to that new birth the Spirit helps us to overcome sins and moves everyone towards virtues. By dying to all things, man can feel the touch of the Father that draws him inward.

According to Ruusbroec, this dying takes place by our offering ourselves and all our work: “In our approach to God we must carry ourselves and all our works before us as an eternal offering to God, and in the presence of God we shall forsake ourselves and all our works, and dying in love we shall pass away from all createdness into the superessential riches of God, and there we shall possess God in an eternal death to ourselves” (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 144).

As Ruusbroec claims in his masterpiece, this dying and, what it implies, friendship with God requires the “debt of love”, which means practice of love and being towards the others (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 126). Of course, this service cannot preoccupy man and become more important than the loving relation with God, claims the author of *Sparkling Stone*, but it is good and desired. For, immersion of love is always linked with and followed by a modeless practice of love¹⁴ and without practicing love we can never possess God, we cannot be united with God and we cannot know God (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 148, 150 and 154). “If we want to feel God in ourselves we must help him: we must remain inwardly united with him; we must go out of ourselves to all men in good faith and brotherly love” (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 156)¹⁵. Through that loving practice and union with God we, as Hadewijch claims, can experience the eternal life here on earth.

¹³ In this place Ruusbroec seems to quote St. Paul and all his theology of dying and resurrecting in Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ “But there are stupid men who want be so inward and doing nothing that they do not want to work for their fellow Christian in need – they are false for nobody can lives in God’s friendship and not take his commandments. Friendship with God is the requisite of any practice and it’s source” (Ruusbroec 1944-1948, 148).

¹⁵ Ruusbroec presents here four ways which comprise such practice and include good works; clinging to God with the right intention, praise, gratitude, devotion. In fact, his whole masterpiece is about self-improvement as he describes how to reach the perfect state. However, a detailed analysis of that kind of human exercising is beyond the framework of that presentation.

CONCLUSION

According to the presented medieval works, it seems clear that human person needs to participate in the paschal mystery of Christ if he wants to achieve an inner union with God and the eternal life. That participation is founded on God's desire to be unified with all human beings. God created man according to the image of His Son who was born in flesh for humanity's sake. Due to his incarnation, the whole life, death and resurrection and in consequence of sending the Holy Spirit, all human beings can reach communion with God. It happens through the reception of Jesus' mystery which has to be fulfilled within every human being. It is defined by mystics by the term kenosis: dying to oneself, passing over, being empty, experiencing Good Friday within man, being an eternal offering, carrying in our heart the life and suffering of Christ, being spiritually crucified with Jesus and being crowned in him, etc.

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Church, liturgy and human conscience is the place where that union is experienced. It is not possible to achieve it by any human effort but it is a sovereign gift of Lord offered to everyone. However, according to medieval mystics, God wants all human persons to cooperate with him by exercising and practicing love so that the "debt of Love" may be paid.

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