



An Outflowing, Voracious, Abysmal Love: Retrieving Jan van Ruusbroec's Understanding of *Minne* Within Contemporary Fundamental Theology and Philosophy of Religion Discourses.

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Contemporary Challenge: Thinking love anew

Situated within fundamental theology and philosophy of religion discourses over the primacy of love to modalities of 'truth' or 'being' that are currently taking place within a (post)-metaphysical context.

- **Ecclesial forum:** Critically developing Benedict XVI's decided praise of 'eros' in *Deus Caritas Est* (2007) and *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), while admitting of its historical marginalization and downgraded in various strands of Christianity's history.
- **Academic forum:** Responding to Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological call for an 'erotics of wisdom' as originary to *philo*-sophia that attests to love's unique rationality, critiquing modern metaphysics inability to think erotically that has resulted in the division between rational love and irrational passion, while refusing to be conscripted within a horizon of 'truth' or ontology of as normative and prior to love.
- **Societal forum:** A theologically committed perspective in critical/constructive response to commonplace societal notions that both the Roman Catholic Church and Christian faith in general are often no longer seen, both *ad intra* and *ad extra* as credibly bearing witness to love as foundational to its own Christian self-identity.



Minne and Ruusbroec: A Hunger Unstilled

- Proposed retrieval of the Brabantine mystical theologian, bl. Jan van Ruusbroec's (1293-1381) dynamic, unified love concept of *minne*—of which encompasses an outflowing love towards others (*caritas*), affectionate love (*liefde*) of possession as well as a view of interiority marked by yearning and desiring for the alterity of the Other.
- Radical love mysticism of embodied affectivity, rooted in a thoroughly Christological and Trinitarian understanding of the abyss of love and our full, graceful participation in its dynamic life of continual "ebbing and flowing" within its embrace of creation, while thinking such love from within the particularity of our very own erotic selves as inclining towards the Other in and through the mutuality of *minne*.
- Ruusbroec rejects a distinctly, hierarchical view of union with God, in terms of gradation and assent and instead, argues for more of a dynamic view of the various unions with God—union with mediation, "Active Life"; union without mediation, "Interior Life"; and union without difference or distinction, "Contemplative Life"—a balanced, synthesized view of loving union or the "common life" (*ghemeyne leven*) in which always fluctuates and changes, flowing out of its endless depths of blissful enjoyment, but never going beyond and leaving behind the liturgical practices and virtuous activities that ground one's relations, commitments and concrete responsibilities towards others in the world.

Challenges in affirming a robust, nuanced, theological conceptuality of love in view of its affective embodiment, concrete praxis towards others and its responsiveness to alterity within love's very own primacy:

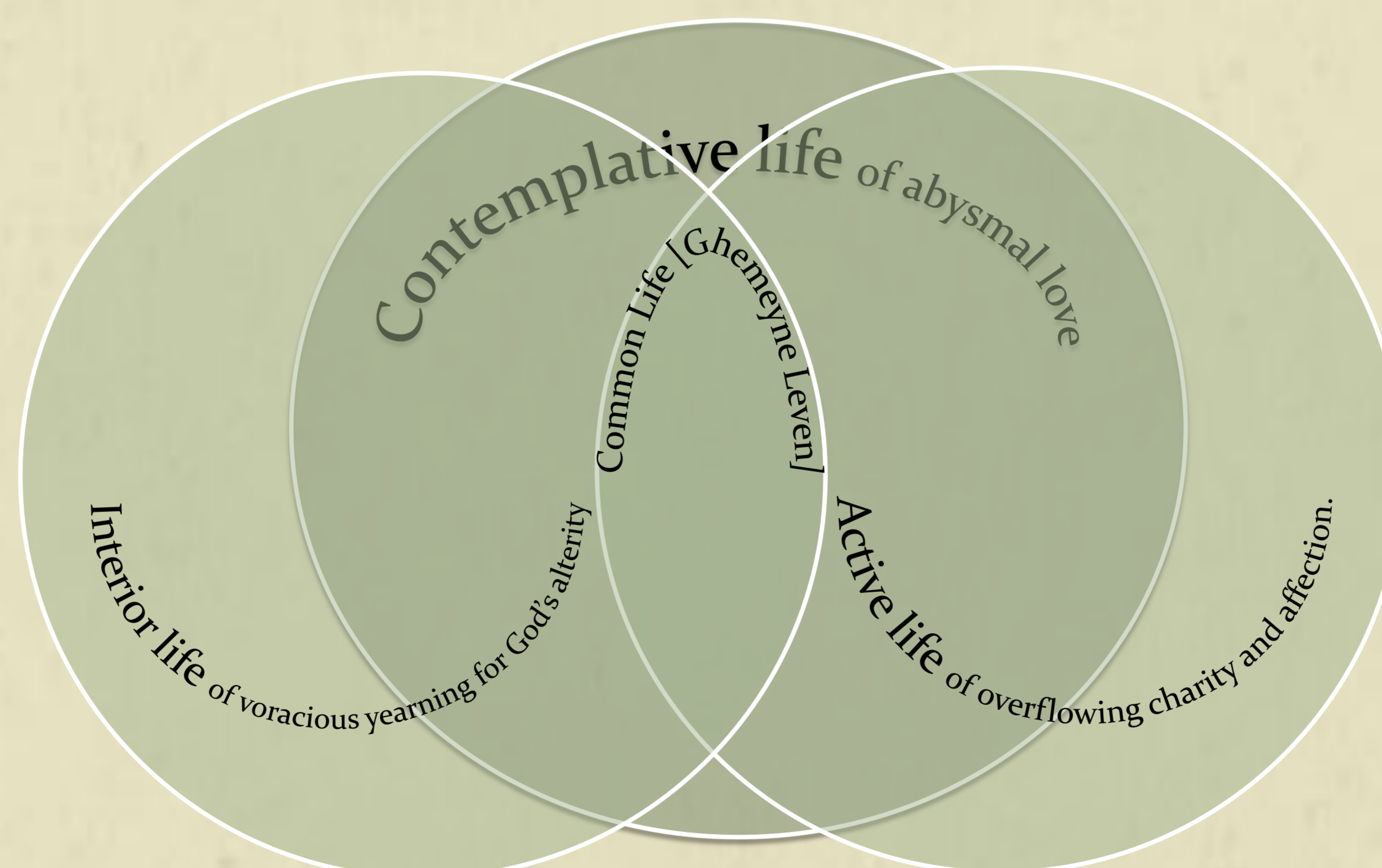
How to reclaim the erotic within religious categories as a viable alternative to more limited societal consumerist narratives of sexuality

"The living union that we feel with God is active and always renews itself between us and God. In that we mutually kiss and touch, we feel otherness that does not let us be quiet in ourselves. For though we are above reason, we are not without reason. And therefore, we feel that we touch, and are touched; love [*minnen*] and are loved [*ghemindt*], and are always renewing and turning back into ourselves, going and coming as the lighting of heaven. For how much we incline and strive in love, it is swimming against the current: we cannot break through our createdness nor pass beyond it. And therefore His touching and our hidden inner striving are the last intermediary between us and God, where we become united with Him in mutual meeting of love."

- **How to affirm alterity**, not as a confrontation with identity, yet as primary to that of a self-reflexive identity that attests to a more relational, non-foundationalist anthropology as responsive to love's primacy.

• **How to think charity** beyond obligatory passionless acts towards others

- "For love beyond your comprehension, that is the Spirit of our Lord. Therein you shall be elevated, rest and dwell in unity with God beyond the understanding of your reason."
- "But the love that is in you is the grace of God and your own good will. Therein you have richness and fullness of all your virtues, and with it God lives and dwells in your midst with His grace and with His gifts, and there you may always wax and increase in pleasing Him."
- "Furthermore, the love between you and God is a holy ascending desire in the honor of God, with thanks and with praise and with all practice of love. That love with its practice between you and God will always be renewed through the stirring of the Holy Spirit and the good will and the affection (*liefde*) of your heart."
- "The love that is below you is an outflowing of charity toward your fellow Christian (*evenkersten*) with works of mercy in every way that he has need of you and you can know."



Beyond affirmation and negation: the kernel of *minne* as complete mutuality of its loving enjoyment as *modeless and without manner*.

"For our love and His love are always alike and one in having joy, where His Spirit has slurped up our love [*onse minne op ghesopen heeft*] and swallowed it in Him in enjoyment and in one blessedness with Him. And when I write that we are one with God, it is to be understood: in love, not in essence [*wesen*], nor in nature; for God's essence is uncreated, and our essence is created. And this is unlike without measure, God and creature. And therefore, even though it may unite, it cannot become one. If our essence came to naught, we would not know, or love, or be blessed. But our created essence is to be beheld as a wild, waste desert, wherein God lives and reigns over us. And in that desert we must wander modelessly and without manner. For we cannot come out of our essential being into our supressential being otherwise, than with love."