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Propositions

accompanying the dissertation

Enacting Devotion

Performative Religious Reading in the Low Countries (ca. 1470-1550)

Joanka van der Laan

26 August 2020

1. The language of performance is apt for the study of late medieval devotional literature not only because of the popularity of the dramatic genre in this period, but also because it allows for the framing of readers as moving, acting, imagining, and feeling participants in their own devotional enactments.
2. When assessing late medieval devotional reading culture, we should carefully expand our understanding concerning the notions of literacy and reading to include performative modes of reading that extend outside the pages of the book.
3. The laity's active participation in religious culture was negotiated through their literate activities, a large part of which was their engagement with books made accessible to them through the efforts of their fellow laymen, the printers.
4. The designation of printed *devotionalia* as a homogenous category termed 'pious literature' ['vroomheidslectuur'] has led them to be unjustly dismissed as booklets that advocate a simple and passive form of lay spirituality.
Contra: Elly Cockx-Indestege and Willem Heijting, 'De doorbraak van de drukunst in roerige tijden. Het Nederlandse boek in de zestiende eeuw', *Kopij en druk revisited. Jaarboek voor Nederlandse Boekgeschiedenis* 17 (2010), p. 95.
5. An emphasis on manuscript books as unique, personal, and tailor-made objects inaccurately posits printed books as uniform, standardised mass productions.
Contra: Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the wilderness: private devotion and public performance in late medieval England* (Chicago, 2007), p. 1, n. 2.
6. To understand the character and depth of the spiritual discourse and practice of the laity in the late medieval period it is more relevant to study works such as the *Devote meditatie* and *Negen couden* than it is to reference work that originated in the circles of the Modern Devotion, such as *De spiritualibus ascensionibus* by Gerard Zerbolt van Zutphen, or the work of earlier mystics, such as *Die geestelike brulocht* by Jan van Ruusbroec.
Contra: Ingrid Falque, *Devotional Portraiture and Spiritual Experience in Early Netherlandish Painting* (Leiden, 2019), pp. 25-26.

7. The erroneous attribution of the *Berch van Calvarien* to Godscale Rosemond found in the Short Title Catalogue Netherlands, the Universal Short Title Catalogue, and Andrew Pettegree and Malcolm Walsby's *Netherlandish Books: books published in the Low Countries and Dutch books published abroad before 1601* (Leiden, 2011) testifies to the fact that both the work and the author have undeservedly been neglected in the history of the printed religious book.
8. Some advice given in some modern self-help books, such as that found in Hal Elrod's *Miracle Morning* cited below, could have been taken straight out of a late medieval devotional work.

'In order for your affirmations to be effective, it is important that you tap into your emotions while reading them. (...) You must take responsibility for generating authentic emotions and powerfully infusing those emotions into every affirmation you repeat to yourself.'

'It can also be beneficial to incorporate a purposeful *physiology*, such as reciting your affirmations while standing tall, taking deep breaths, making a fist, or exercising.'
Hal Elrod, *Miracle Morning: The 6 Habits That Will Transform Your Life Before 8AM* [EPub] (London, 2016), pp. 130-131.

9. Experiencing virtual presence at online church services in the corona era leads to a more profound understanding of the (im)possibilities that medieval devotional booklets had in the creation of such virtual experiences for their lay readers.
See Hendro Munsterman, 'Pasen vieren met je beeldscherm: onlinemis of juist thuisliturgie?' *Nederlands Dagblad*, 7 April 2020.
10. The translation of the *Negen couden* as the 'nine colds' may cause unnecessary panic during times of corona.
11. The usefulness of bodily exercise cannot only be affirmed by medieval devotional practice or the modern self-help genre, but also by the positive effects of dog walking and marathon training on the successful completion of this dissertation.
Contra: the apostle Paul, 1 Timothy 4:8: 'For bodily exercise profiteth little'.