

The Reception of Jean Gerson in Late Medieval and Early Modern Theology, Spirituality and Law



Researchers are familiar with seeing and examining the influence of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and other significant figures in Western intellectual history. The reception of Jean Gerson (1363-1429) — the late medieval French Church reformer, ecclesiastical leader, theologian, poet, educator and chancellor of the University of Paris — is, however, an understudied field. Gerson's legacy had nevertheless an impact on late medieval and early modern movements and thinkers of great significance, paving the way for many developments, which still shape our existence today. He became a source of inspiration for all those involved in establishing new religious and national identities, and his name appears in both Protestant (of all

branches) as well as in Catholic sources. Aside from the expected influence in theology and Church history, his ideas transformed law, jurisprudence, art, music, pedagogy, literature and even medicine. The topography of his legacy is just as broad and varied, spanning from Portugal to Scandinavia, and from Japan to Mexico. From a deeper perspective, Gerson is extremely important for understanding the religious evolution of Western civilization. Jean Gerson's legacy provides a significant theological context where contemporary ideas such as, for example, the concept of individual right or need of palliative care, find their roots. Today, when the question of religion has retaken the central stage of our existence, an understanding of our theological background is no longer the fief of specialized researchers, but a social necessity.

In this first *Lectio* Round Table focusing on the study and transmission of ideas, distinguished scholars will explain and debate the reception of Jean Gerson in the late Middle Ages and Early Modern Era from a diversity of perspectives, including theology, spirituality, law, and literature.

PROGRAM

11.30	Introduction by Wim FRANÇOIS (KU Leuven)
11.45	Yelena MAZOUR-MATUSEVICH (University of Alaska Fairbanks), <i>The Very Special Case: Gerson & Thomas More</i>
12.45	Lunch
14.00	Bénédicte SÈRE (Université Paris-Ouest Nanterre), <i>Gerson lu par les modernes: mythologisation et instrumentalisation</i>
14.45	Virpi H. MÄKINEN (University of Helsinki), <i>Gerson and the Gersonian Rights Tradition in the History of Natural Rights</i>
15.30	Coffee
16.00	Serena MASOLINI (KU Leuven), <i>Harmonizing the Gospels in Brabant Between the 15th and 16th Centuries: a Note on the Legacy of Jean Gerson's Monotessaron</i>
16.45	Plenary discussion & concluding remarks

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Date: Monday 19 February 2018

Venue: Romerozaal, COVE 02.10, Sint-Michielsstraat 2-4, 3000 Leuven

Participation is free, but registration is required via bert.tops@kuleuven.be before 11 February 2018.

Chair: Wim François (KU Leuven)

Organization: Wim François, Erika Gielen, Bert Tops

ABSTRACTS

Yelena MAZOUR-MATUSEVICH (University of Alaska Fairbanks / Senior Fellow KU Leuven)

The Very Special Case: Gerson & Thomas More

Before looking closely at Thomas More's connection to the late medieval French theologian Jean Gerson (1363-1429), I could not imagine the breadth and depth of More's dependency on his legacy as a source of scriptural narrative, moral theology or legal theory. More's extensive knowledge of Gerson's works is evident from the Englishman's writings, and his admiration, already manifest in his early years, only increased as he aged, climaxing during his imprisonment in the Tower. Leaving aside More's polemical writings, this presentation will concentrate on three Tower works *Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation*, *Treatise Upon the Passion*, and *De Tristitia Christi*, where More's theological reliance on Gerson takes an acutely personal and intimate character, revealing both similarities and differences in two men's perspectives.

Bénédicte SÈRE (Université Paris-Ouest Nanterre)

Gerson lu par les modernes: mythologisation et instrumentalisation

L'œuvre ecclésiologique de Jean Gerson est, dans son temps, une œuvre décisive, tant sur les questions de la théorie conciliaire et du pouvoir du pape, que sur celles de la réforme, du gouvernement des évêques et de la direction des pasteurs.

De cette œuvre et surtout de la figure du grand théologien, la modernité s'est emparée comme d'un parangon, brandi pour étayer les grandes causes, aussi diverses qu'opposées: gallicanisme, conciliarisme, richérisme, antiromanisme, protestantisme... Il s'agira de voir, par sondes et par dossiers, comment la modernité a réemployé l'œuvre ecclésiologique du théologien pour lui faire dire, ce qu'*in fine*, il n'avait pas dit.

Virpi H. MÄKINEN (University of Helsinki)

Gerson and the Gersonian Rights Tradition in the History of Natural Rights

In this presentation, Jean Gerson's contribution to natural rights discourse in late medieval and early modern periods will be discussed, by focusing, first, on his own ideas of rights as well as their theological and philosophical background and, second, on the meaning of the interpretation of his ideas by later authors such as Conrad Summenhart and the Spanish neo-scholastics.

In his *Natural Rights Tradition* (1979), Richard Tuck argues that Jean Gerson was the first to describe the notion of *ius* as "a dispositional faculty or power, appropriated to someone and in accordance with a right was understood in terms of an ability". This idea, according to Tuck, places Gerson in a central place in the rights tradition. Brian Tierney has criticized Tuck's arguments (e.g. *The Idea of Natural Rights* 1997) by showing the earlier elements of natural rights language and theories already from the twelfth-century onwards among the decretists and the Franciscan theologians. Whereas Tuck has emphasized Gerson's moral theological interpretations, Tierney also sees Gerson's conciliarism as an important factor behind the theory. Gerson's opposite to the Wycliffe's doctrine of *dominium* based on has also been seen as an important basis for Gerson's rights doctrine (Brett 1997).

It seems evident that Gerson played a significant role in later development of rights tradition but what the Gersonian rights tradition really means? What was Gerson's main contribution concerning the tradition?

Serena MASOLINI (KU Leuven)

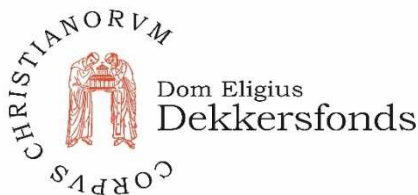
Harmonizing the Gospels in Brabant Between the 15th and 16th Centuries: a Note on the Legacy of Jean Gerson's Monotessaron

In the introductory Epistle of his *Concordia evangelica*, Cornelius Jansenius 'of Ghent', one of Louvain's most famous 16th-century biblical scholars, listed the names of those earlier authors who had attempted to give a chronological account of the life of Christ by harmonizing the

discrepancies between the accounts in the four Gospels. Amongst his closest predecessors he mentioned the work of the Parisian Chancellor Jean Gerson, and those of two professors of theology working at the early University of Louvain: Johannes Varenacker (d. 1475) and Petrus de Rivo (d. 1499). Completed around 1420 as a complement of Augustine's *De consensus Evangelistarum*, the *Monotessaron* by Jean Gerson is certainly one of the most well-known Gospel Harmonies composed before the rise of Biblical Humanism. The aim of this work was to allow the students of theology to read the events of the life of Christ in their correct historical order, and to memorize their sequence using the system of rubrics, tables and mnemonic verses accompanying the text. The intellectual and spiritual project of Gerson left its traces in 15th-century Brabant, echoing within the halls of the University of Louvain and in the cloisters of the religious communities inspired by the *devotio moderna*. Whilst Varenacker's own *Monotessaron* is now lost, the 'New' *Monotessaron* composed by Rivo has survived in five manuscripts and three different versions, reshaped according to the needs of his readership – in particular, those of the Brabantine priories affiliated to the Congregation of Windesheim, where the liturgical calendar was central to devotional life. The aim of this paper is to investigate this legacy.



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