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The Minor Biblical Prereformers of the XV Century

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THE MINOR BIBLICAL PREREFORMERS OF THE XV CENTURY

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OUTLINE

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

LOCATING THE MINOR BIBLICAL REFORMERS IN HISTORY

We cannot speak of "Pre-reformers" unless we have a clear conception of the term "reformation". Too often we leave the Reformation historically unexplained as if it were a sudden upheaval in the life of the church, a change as sudden as the inversion of an hour glass. But no Reformer just drops from heaven. "In spite of its originality and freshness, the Reformation by no means interrupted the continuity of human affairs -- on the contrary, it was, on the one hand, preceded and its way prepared by pious and enlightened men, who preached almost the very doctrines that distinguished the Reformers, while, on the other hand, a very and considerable Christian and intellectual culture was possessed by numerous individuals and communities, and generally, there was a wide circle of susceptible minds which sympathized with the Reformers, and resigned themselves to their influence". (1)

The successful leaders of the "Revolt" of the XVI Century were not a handful of men who solely by their personal power induced the people to follow them along a new way. Long before their time the soil was prepared for the seed.

(1) Ullmann, Reformers, preface vol. 1, p. XX.

Approved: P. Kretzmann

We might classify this preparation as "the will to reform" and the "method of reform". Both were preexistent in the bosom of the Church long before the final advent came.

A study of these pre-reformatory currents and streams does not diminish the position of Luther as a Reformer, but rather enhances it. Almost everything Luther had said and done had been said and tried before him, but not successfully. Clearly Luther appeared when in the mercy of God the new fullness of time had come. He had the personal qualities, and the political conditions favored his work.

In order to appreciate the "will for reform" one must first of all, get a clear picture of the growth of the opposite principle, "implicit faith". That dogma was the secret of the power of the church. This principle of "implicit faith" began to formulate itself feebly already in the Age of Augustine. When the council formulated the creed and the state enforced the decisions of the council, the germ of the doctrine began to grow. This doctrine of "implicit faith" gained strength as the centuries went on. Innocent III (1161-1216) greatly extended the scope and exalted the value of the dogma of "implicit faith". According to him, "should a man implicitly believe an erroneous doctrine, he is not guilty of heresy, but, on the contrary, wins and retains merit merely because he believes that the church believes as he does".(1)

(1) Hulme, Renaissance and Reformation, p. 147.

It had thus become the highest duty of man to accept blindly the guidance of the Church. The Church, not the individual, became the external custodian and interpreter of truth. The individual no longer, in the eyes of the Church, had the right to determine for himself what was necessary for salvation, nor was he free to interpret the creeds of the Church. Due to the authority of the doctrine of "implicit faith", the individual's "faith sank from the level of reason to that of mere obedience . . . Inner conviction gave way to external authority". (1)

With the Renaissance, however, the individual became important. The Renaissance marks the revival of the individual, the nation, literature, art, and science. In religion the Renaissance marked the "transfer of religion from the objective to the subjective side of things". (2). We might go a step further and say that the Renaissance marks the rebirth of Christianity - "the rebirth of conscience", as Hulme calls it. Too often we think of the Middle Ages as an inactive and dark age, but the history of the Middle Ages shows that the life of the Middle Ages was one of incessant struggle for reform.

The Renaissance glorified the individual. In religion that meant the use of conscience as a guide. Gradually the individualistic spirit grew.

(1) Hulme, op. cit., p. 145.
(2) Beard, The Reformation of the XVI Century, p. 1.

In opposing the church an appeal was made from the traditions of the church, first to the Fathers, and then to the New Testament itself. The Greek text, the Septuagint, and the Hebrew Bible took the place of the Vulgate in the hands of the learned. The Scriptures in the vernacular languages of Europe brought home to the minds of the people how widely different the Church of the New Testament was from the ecclesiastical system they suffered under.

As the appreciation of individual conscience began to grow there naturally arose an opposition to the corruptions of the church. Thus from the beginning of the XIII to the end of the XV century a lively sense of need of reform was there and efforts were made in that direction.

The efforts of these three centuries might be divided into three classes (1): Catholic, Mystic, and Biblical. The Catholic opposition began with the sects of all kinds attacking the sacerdotalism of the church - the Petrobrusians, Albigenses. Besides the sects, there was also the monastic reforms which resulted in the organization of the Dominicans and Franciscans. Then there is also the criticism of the humanists. Petrarch in his "Epistolae sine Titulo, Boccaccio's Decameron, Chaucer's Pardoner - all reveal a critical spirit, much more severe than Luther. The later humanists; Agricola, Erasmus, Ulrich v. Hutten, breathe the spirit of the Renaissance.

(1) Ibid., p. 6 - uses this classification.

Another group of "Pre-reformers" are the mystics. Mysticism can hardly be classified as a "Pre-reformatory tendency", because it is more of a withdrawal from life and not self-propagating. It is intensely personal; yet there is the opposition to the hierarchy and sacerdotalism. This feeling of opposition as well as the subjective element of the mystics justifies their inclusion in this group. Their great contributions might be mentioned: the Imitatio Christi of A'Kempis, and the Theologia Germanica. Luther said concerning this work: "And I will say though it be boasting of myself and 'I speak as a fool', that next to the Bible and St. Augustine, no book hath ever come into my hands whence I have learned, or would wish to learn, more of what God and Christ and man and all things are". (1) The names of Eckart, Tauler, Suso, Ruysbrook, the Brethren of the Common Life, and Staupitz also belong here.

The third class of "Pre-reformers" are the Biblical Reformers. They made use of a different plan of attack - the Bible. The other sects merely negatively opposed the church. The Biblical Reformers, however, had the authority of the Bible. Sometimes we are startled when we are reminded that copies of the Bible existed before the Reformation. We are told, for instance, that a High German translation of the Bible was printed at Mayance 1462 and on the whole fourteen times before the Reformation in Strassburg, Augsburg, and Nuerenburg. (2)

(1) Beard, op. cit., p. 29 - Luther's 2 ed. in preface.
(2) Gieseler, Ecclesiastical History, Vol. V, p. n. 3.

We must not be puzzled. This is merely an indication of the spirit of reform that was active in the centuries before the Reformation.

The importance of the Biblical Reformers cannot be overestimated. They took the right track. The religion of the church that they came in contact with had lost its power. It had been converted into law. The church was guilty of commingling Law and Gospel. The result was that "during the Middle Ages, the essential nature of the Christian faith had become gradually and progressively misunderstood until, at last, it was again reduced almost wholly to an objective Law - an external ordinance, strict and unbending, and which only commanded and threatened". (1)

With the beginning of the Renaissance movement, the opposition to the Church was mainly negative and went to the opposite extreme - Antinomianism - a hatred for all authority. It is just here where the greatness of the Biblical Reformers comes into view. The Biblical Reformers took the proper medium. They evolved their Christianity and liberty from Scripture, strictly interpreted, and "taught men once more to recognize in Christianity the creative power of God, diffusing fresh life into the deepest roots of our spiritual being, and guiding us from atonement to sanctification -- a free doctrine of grace and faith, of love and spirit, prompting us from the heart outwards to the fulfilling of the Law; while, at the same time, it restored the doctrine which is the kernel of St. Paul's Creed, but which in the course of time had been wholly overgrown by the legalism which had crept in". (2).

(1) Ullmann, op. cit. Vol. Preface, p. XIV.
(2) Ullmann, Ibid, Preface, p. XIV.

The substantial spirit of the Reformation was already contained in the doctrine of the pioneers who did in a more private and circumscribed circle what the Reformers did on a great scale.

These Pre-reformers also operated on the Renaissance principle of liberty - of emancipation, but it was Christian Liberty. They had a real liberty based on and limited by divine truth. Their liberty consisted in an assurance of perfect fellowship with God and also on independence of all things human. They thus substituted faith, internalism, and Christian liberty for legalism, externalism, and submission.

The Biblical Pre-reformers might be described as "men who, in both in their religious method and the conclusions to which it had led them, so closely resemble Luther and Zwingli as to excite wonder that they did not anticipate their success". (1) Though they were individualistic, yet they had much in common. They all ostensibly remained within the Church, their fundamental thesis of the sole authority of the Bible was common to all. None of them had a wide following. They gave no direct contribution to the Reformation. They must rather be considered as intimationf of the profound unrest that was stirring Germany in the XV century.

The oldest of these Biblical Pre-reformers are the Waldenses, a still surviving church. Their history goes back to the XII century. Dissatisfied with the church, they sought satisfaction in the Bible.

(1) Beard, op. cit. p. 23

They translated the Bible into their daily tongue, discarded the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, taught the universal priesthood of believers, had two sacraments, rejected purgatory, indulgence, the adoration of the saints, prayer for the dead. Soon after their birth they multiplied rapidly. There were so many Waldensians soon after they came into existence that it was said that a Waldensian traveling from Antwerp to Rome could sleep every night in the house of a fellow believer. (1).

Approaching the XIV and XV centuries we concern ourselves with the individual Biblical Reformers. These men might be divided into major and minor Reformers. The major Pre-reformers include Huss, Wiclif, Savonarola. These men were reformers in whom action was the predominant characteristic. They are all well known men.

The other group of Biblical Reformers is called the minor Biblical Reformers. This paper will consider these. These men are distinguished from the others by the fact that they are all Germans -- although not geographically in Germany proper, yet they lived in those countries connected with the Fatherland by the Rhine and by the German language -- though molded into a peculiar dialect. Germany was the center from which the Reformation went out into the world. It was also the center of the Reformation, for nowhere else were the preparations so deep and effectual.

These Minor Biblical Pre-reformers are also of great interest because so little is known of them. They were all quiet and modest men who furnished spiritual food they derived from the Bible.

(1) Ibid. p. 25.

They were humble men who in ever widening circles and in increasing degrees penetrated the various classes of people and made the people susceptible to the words and acts of the Reformers. They were, in fine, humble, scriptural, experience theologians, who worked in unknown circles and in an unobserved manner. No parade or flash was associated with them. None had any influence on Luther directly, though Luther said he studied Wesel's writings for his degree. Of Wessel Luther said that it seems that he derived all he knew from him.(1) Outside of this history is silent. Though these men were quiet and secluded men yet they were important for their cultivation of their theological ideas, which formed the real essence of the Reformation.

These minor Reformers were distinctive personalities. The first of this trio is John Pupper of Gooh (1400-75). He was a recluse by temperament. His importance lies in this that he was a cultivator of theological principles. John Ruchrath of Oberwesel, however, was bold, courageous man. (1410-81). He is important to the church for his moral leadership. The third, Wessel Gansfort (1420-89) was the outstanding man of the trio. He had both the qualities of scholarship as well as leadership. The finest qualities were blended in him. He well deserves the title of "Luther's Precursor". These men either sought to establish truth (Gooh) or to refute error (Wesel). Both of these characterize Wessel.

(1) Ullmann, op. cit., p. Preface XIII vol. 1.

JOHANN PUPPER VON GOCH

1400 -- 1475

"THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE REFORMATORY TRADITION"

Johann Pupper von Goch was born in the town of Goch in the Duchy of Cleves, which is situated about fourty-three miles n.w. of Duesseldorf, Germany. Goch seldom used his family name, but rather used the name of his place of birth when referring to himself. Sometimes he is designated as a Brabanter, a Belgian, or an an inhabitant of the town of Mechlin.

The life of Goch might be divided into two sections; the unknown, and the dark period. The unknown period is a period for historical conjecture in which Ullmann indulges rather freely. Very little is known of the family tree or the early education of Goch. It is conjectured that Goch studied at one of the schools of the Brethren of the Common Lot. The only reason that Ullmann furnishes for this conjecture is the fact that Goch's writings are filled with the spirit of the Brethren. (1) At this school he is supposed to have met Wessel Gansfort. Since it was the custom of theological students of that age to attend a university, it is conjectured that Goch attended some university, perhaps Paris or Cologne, although Goch did not have a master's degree.

(1) F. Piper, Zeugen der Wahrheit, p. 285 (article by Ullmann)

The next conjecturetakes us to the year 1448. Ullmann says that a certain John of Gooh is mentioned together with Godfrey 'a Kempis as governors of a house of the Brethren of the Common Lot, founded in 1448 at Harderwyk. Both of these men together with a teacher named Hermann von Schurrenburgh made a great success of the institution. It is furthermore conjectured that Gooh himself founded a monastary at Sluys, Flanders, in 1448. He is said to have received orders at this time. Ullmann bases this conjecture on a statement of Foppens, who reports that Gooh moved his nuns from Sluys to Mechlin, a city specializing in monkery.

The positive history of Gooh begins with the year 1451, when Gooh established a priory for nuns at Mechlin at the age of fifty. This priory was called Tabor and was founded on the rule of St. Augustine. (1). As a prior Gooh seems to have been very successful, for his monastary grew from eight to sixty inmates. After serving as rector and confessor to the nuns of Tabor, Gooh died on March 28, 1475, four years after Thomas a Kempis and fourteen years before Wessel. After a life of quiet labor this modest Johann Pupper von Gooh was buried in the old church of the monastary of Tabor.

Though little is known about Gooh, yet we know enough from his writings to get a clear picture of the man and his work. Though a recluse, Gooh was a man of deep spirituality, profound intellect, and glowing piety. (2).

(1). Schroeckh, Christliche Kirchengeschichte, p. 303
(2) Kurz, Church History, p. 214.

He lived a simple life of contemplation, but he had a keen mind as his logical skill in handling the fourth error in De Quattuor Erroribus shows. Being of a quiet disposition, Gooh never excited the suspicion of the hierarchy nor suffered any persecution; although he was criticized by a Dominican monk on one occasion. The quiet tenor of his life resembled that of a Kempis. Though Gooh was contemplative, he was an extreme Nominalist and rejected all speculation in the sphere of religion. (1).

Though less learned that Wessel and less imbued with the spirit of the reformer than Wesel, Gooh had a greater depth of intellect and a greater mystical inclination. Ullmann well describes Gooh, "In John of Gooh we have made the acquaintance of a theologian, who, being of a predominently reflective nature, devoted himself almost exclusively to the contemplation of the more inward condition of the Christian body, traced the deep roots of its corruption, and pondered upon the remedies which would prove most effectual for renovating its spirit and general tendency." (2).

But how did that recluse Gooh exert any influence? In his lifetime Gooh's influence was limited to the circle of his friends, but at the time of the Reformation Gooh was revived and used for the furtherance of the Reformation. At that time his works were published for the first time to show how Lutheran men were before Luther. This reviving of Gooh was done by a man named Grapheus. (3)

(1) Schaff- Herzog Re. Ency. Vol. V, p.2.
(2) Ullmann, Reformers, Vol. I, p. 161.
(3) For an account see: Ullmann, Reformers, Vol. I, Appendix II, p. 397.
D. Gerdes, Historia Ref., Tomus III, p. 21- Picture of Grapheus.

Grapheus was the town clerk of Antwerp. His name was really Cornelius, but because of his job he received the name "de Schryver, Scribonius, Grapheus". This town official was a warm admirer of Luther and Erasmus and a friend of Durer. (1). Grapheus heartily admired the unpublished works of Goch, and so he set about having these enlightening works published. Grapheus had the chief work of Goch (De Libertate Christiana, written 1473) printed in 1521. Other works followed. Grapheus, however, was set on a scaffold in Brussels and was compelled to retract certain propositions. He then was forced to throw his scathing preface to the De Libertate into the fire. Later on he was dismissed from office. Kalkoff summarizes the account as follows: "Der hatte die Schrift des

> Johannes Pupper von Goch für über die "Christliche Freiheit", die mit den grundlegenden Ideen der deutschen Reformation, der Ablehnung der scholastischen Philosophie, der Betonung der Schriftautorität und Verwerfung der Werkheiligkeit zu Gunsten eines verinnerlichten religiosen Lebens immerhin eine starke Verwandschaft zeigte, mit einer eindringlichen Vorrede vom Marz 29, 1521 herausgegeben. Dieser feurige Aufruf an die heilbegierige, nach selbständiger Erkenntnis strebende Laienwelt, mit scharfen Ausfallen gegen die Unterdrückung der ev. Wahrheit u. die Ausbeutung des irregeleitenten Volkes durch den Klerus, erschien also gerade in jenen Monaten, als ohnehin in Antwerpen die Leidenschaften durch die damals tobende Fehde der predigen Mönche aufs tiefste erregt waren.

(1) Schriften des Vereins fur Reformationsgeschichte, No. 81 p. 70

Kaum hatte dann Alexander nach der von ihn am 13. Juli pomphaft in Szene gesetzten Bücherverbrennung der dadurch seiner Meinung nach hinlanglich von der Ketzerei gesauberten Stadt den Rücken gekehrt, so veroffentlichte Grapheus eine gegen die Werkheiligkeit der scholastischen Theologie gerichtete Streitschrift Johann Puppers: in seiner Vorrede vom 23. August 1521 protestierte er aufs heftigste gegen die Verfolgung der schlichten Christenlehre mit Acht und Bann, mit Fluchen u. Scheiterhafen" (1). Due to the influence of a juror and later mayor, Lanzelott von Urseln, Grapheus was reinstated as one of the four clerks and kept that office until his death in 1548. (2).

Though this biographical sketch is but brief, it is sufficient for our purposes. Goch was a theologian and mystic in the good sense of the term. It is not for his activity that we know Goch, but for his thoughts. Goch is important to us because he "commences the Reformatory tradition." His writings, though enlightening, were not published until the beginning of the XVI century. They are important because they were stored with reformatory principles. Goch's importance can be appreciated in the history of dogma, since his writings show his reformatory doctrines.

THEOLOGY

Goch was a theologian of the Augustinian school, emphasizing monism in grace as opposed to the Pelagian and Semipelagian tendencies of the age.

(1) Paul Kalkoff, Schriften des Vereins fur Reformationsgeschichte. No. 79. p. 57

(2). Ibid., No. 81, p. 104, n. 22.

Pelagianism was threatening the church with a perverted view on good works, indulgences, hierarchy, priestly order, the treasury of merits. The Gospel had become a code of laws, and the Church was looked upon as an institute of dishing out merit. Since Gooh was a Biblical theologian, he opposed these corruptions. His theology was Biblical and anti-philosophical, Augustinian and anti-pelagian. Gooh made love the material principle of his theology and the sole authority of Scripture the formal principle of his theology. There is, therefore, a love from which he derived everything and a certain liberty which spontaneously flows out of this love as opposed to the legal view of Christianity in the Church. In short, his theology was God-centered; of God, through God, and to God. Leaving generalities, let us examine some specific dogmas of Gooh:

SCRIPTURE

Gooh is a Biblical Reformer, and it is important to get his view on Scripture. In practice Gooh always appeals to the standard of Scripture. His appeal in his book, De Quattuor Erroribus shows this tendency very clearly. He says that he will undertake to "draw from the fountain of Canonical Scripture the sole and indisputable authority." If in doing so, he will contradict particular statements of the Fathers, Gooh promises to give proofs that "they had either erred in interpreting Sacred Scripture or had not expressed themselves with sufficient accuracy." (1)

(1) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 85.

He not only respects Scripture, but he also gives Scripture a very high authority. "This Scripture (canonical) is the only one, which, being derived from the highest truth, possesses an incontrovertible authority, from which nothing can be taken away, and to which nothing can be added, so that all other writings are authoritative only in proportion to their consonance with canonical Scripture." (1) The qualities of this infallibility are: a firm foundation for faith to rest upon, convincing evidence, and absolute infallibility.

Gooh's hermeneutical principles as given in his Christian Liberty also sound good. Among these he states the requirement that Scripture be explained by itself, and his preference for the literal rather than the other interpretations in vogue: allegorical, tropological, anagological. In case of argument, he demands that the literal sense be taken, since it is "primarily intended by God".

SIN

In his book Christian Liberty Gooh gives his view on sin. He regards sin as the cause of evil. He also looks upon the Fall of man as the source of sin. This sin is inherited, leaving man with a concupiscence - a "sinful bias". Thus he regards original sin, not merely as a negative want of righteousness, but also as a positive bent toward evil. In fine, original sin is the "kindling spark of sin in all, with which all are born, has sprung from the actual sin of Adam". (2).

(1) Ullmann, op. cit. Vol. I, p. 54 from Christian Liberty
(2) Ibid., p. 69

THE CHURCH

The Church, whose head is Christ (1) has the chief vocation of appropriating and propagating the spirit of Christ and of "practical exercise of the evangelical life". Though Gooh has high respect for the Church, yet he acknowledges the Church's fallibility. "The Church militant, which is not raised above error" (1) In assigning the highest place in the Church to Christ, Gooh regarded the priesthood as the highest office in the Church, even above bishops. (2). Gooh thus recognized the essential equality between bishoprics and the presbytery. The next step is the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all Christians. John Wessel took that step as we shall see later.

Gooh regards priests on a higher plane than monks. In fact, he looks down on "monkery". Contrary to the accepted opinion of the age that monastic life had a superior virtue. Gooh regarded monks as imperfect and weak -- as people in the penitential state.

While Gooh did speak disparagingly of monastic life, we must remember that he himself was the head of a monastic institution. How does he justify himself? In a very interesting way. "For as one thing is salutary for the sick, and another for the whole, one thing is for the weak, another for the strong, so has our Mother, the Church, making the exigencies of individuals her own, studied to provide all with incentives to piety."

(1) Ibid., p. 124
(2) Ibid., p. 124

With this view, she ordained the monastic vow for the weak and unstable, who could not, by means of the ordinary institutions, be brought to the perfect observance of the Gospel law . . . Monks belong to the class to whom the saying of the Savior applied, "Compell them to come in' . . . . They are the unsettled vagrants of the highways, mentioned in the parable, who have, no doubt, a certain willingness to be Christians, but are driven and tossed about by the inconstant gusts of their inclinations."(1) We thus see that Gooh had little regard for the monks thus placing himself in opposition to the popular opinion of the age as well as of Aquinas and other churchmen.

JUSTIFICATION

We now come to the crown of all doctrines, and here we must be careful in judging. Ritschel in his scathing criticism of Ullmann maintains that Gooh's theory was plainly Catholic. He says, "Seine Exerpte beweisen nur, dass ernichts anders als die katholische Justificationslehre fuhrt". (2) A modern writer, O. Clemen, maintains that "vor allem seiner Rechtfertigungslehre nach gehorte Pupper noch ganz uberwiegend dem Baumkreise der mittelalterkichen Kirche an". (3) Another says, "Die katolische Gnadenlehre ist auch bei dem mehr popularen Theologen dieser Richtung nicht gebrochen.

(1) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 120
(2) Alb. Ritschl, Rechtfertigung u. Versohnung, p. 132. Scathing crit.
(3) Paul Kalkoff, Die Angange der Gegenreformation in den Niederlanden, op. cit., no. 79, p. 101. n. 44

So etwa bei Gooh". (1) Klotsche, " in the decisive questions concerning justification by faith, their (minor reformers) conception was essentially catholic". (2)

I am not so sure that Gooh did have the Catholic view of justification. Gooh, first of all, had a profound sense of human sinfulness, strictly excluded all merit, and exalted the grace of God procured through Christ. In his book De Liberate Christiana Gooh condemns Pelagians and Semipelagians. He condemns four errors that: 1. man's natural will must cooperate with the grace of God in order to his justification 2. merit is an action to which reward is due on the score of justice 3. that merit receives an increase from the good work to which it belongs 4. an action performed from love, when weighed in the scale of justice, bears some proportion to our eternal felicity. Then he goes on to say, "By no actions, however, that maybe performed, can man acquire merit to himself; for antecedently he is a debtor to God for all he can do. Hence it is that the Church, being founded upon faith in Christ, relies upon his merits, and believes and hopes for salvation from these. In fact, he alone has procured for us deliverance, and justification, and glorification, that God may be praised in all. The true faith, by which we are incorporated with Christ,consists in believing that our whole salvation is based upon his merits." (3)

(1) Seebert, Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte, p. 193
(2) Klotsche, History of Doctrines, p. 173
(3) Ullmann, op. cit. vol. I, p. 76

Gooh not only excludes all work righteousness, but he also exalts the grace of God procured through Christ as the only foundation for salvation. The following statement makes this clear: "Hence it is not the merit of our works which makes us heirs to the kingdom of heaven, but the being spiritually born of God and that Christ has meritod for us by his death". (1)

In spite of this firm stand on grace and Christ's merit, Gooh uses many suspicious phrases that would lead one to believe that he held the "gratia infusa" idea of justification. "He defines grace generally to be the gift of God imparted to man in the course of his development for the purpose of emancipating his will from the bondage of concupiscence and inflaming it will with the love of that righteousness which renders him worthy of eternal salvation". (2)

However, in defining grace as "faith working by love" it may be that Gooh merely, in opposition to Antinomianism, is trying to show that faith is a living, active thing. In quoting the passage that we are "justified by faith without the works of the law" against the Antinomians, Gooh says "Man is justified without the works of the Law, but he (Paul) by no means says -- without the works of faith". (3) He insists on the necessity of the "works of faith".

Having seen Gooh's view of sin, Scripture, grace, we might say that Gooh came quite near to the correct view. It may be that for the want of better terms he used Catholic terms.

(1) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 77
(2) Ibid. p. 69
(3) Ibid. p. 94

Perhaps he merely wanted to emphasize the fact that faith is a living thing when he adds the words "works of faith". This theory could well furnish the theme for a thesis. I leave it as an open question, rather giving Goch the benefit of the doubt, though Ullmann confesses, "The article of Justification by Faith alone does not shine forth as the governing center in the same degree as was the case of the Reformers" (1)

WORKS

The works of Goch make him important. It is through them that Goch became known to us. His works are of such a reformatory nature that the Council of Trent placed Goch in the first class of prohibited authors whose works are never to be read. During his life time his works were not published, but Grapheus, the town clerk of Antwerp, published four of them in the XVI century. (2) The four works that he published were 1. Epistola Apologetica (probably published 1520), the QuattuorErroribus, De Libertate Christiana in 1521 to which Grapheus added his scathing preface, and possibly the De Gratia Divina, which is surrounded with conjectures. The best accounts of Goch and his works are given by Walch in his Monimenta Medii Aevi, published in Goetting in 1760. (3) Of these works Ullmann summarizes two. The De Libertate is summarized on pages 52-81; the De Quattuor Erroribus on pages 83-131.

(1) Ibid., p. 81
(2) cf. p. 11.
(3) Schroeckh, op. cit., claims this p. 303.

The first of these De Libertate Christiana contains chiefly Gooh's positive convictions on the fundamentals of Christianity and the way of salvation. Following an introduction there are six books. Only the first three and part of the fourth is preserved, but the contents of the others can be found in De Quattuor Erroribus, for much of the same ground is found there. The chapter headings are: 1. interpretation of Scripture as the only sure source of faith, 2. Of the human will and its operations. 3. Of merit and the conditions on which it depends. 4. of vows and questions connected with them. 5. of the different positions as regards moral conduct occupied by parties who are under vows and by parties who are not, 6. of the objections made by Engelbert, a monk.

The other book is the De Quattuor Erroribus which is predominently negative, prescribing in the main his answer to the false tendencies of the age. The bulk of his reformatory views are found here. He wrote this book in answer to the request of friends who complained about the false doctrine that was circulating about the vow. False teachers said that the Gospel Law could only be kept within monastic life. The four errors of these people in regard to the Gospel Law he states as follows: 1.unevangelical legality. 2. lawless liberty. 3. false confidence in self, 4. self devised outward piety. The book is written in the form of a dialogue. The conversation takes place between the "spirit" and the "soul";

O. Clemen claims this shows his most mature thought. (1)

A third work is the Epistola Apologetica. This treatise was written in response to the criticism of an unknown Dominican monk. (2) This monk criticized Goch's idea of the liberty of the Christian religion as found in the book De Libertate or De Quattuor Erroribus or both. The whole consists of twenty-four pages divided into two parts: the first, treats of Scripture as the source of our knowledge of true Christian faith; the second, the principle of Christian liberty, pages fourteen to twenty-four. (3).

(1) Schaff-Herzog, op. cit., Vol. V. p. 2
(2) cf. p. 10
(3) cf. note in Ullmann, op. cit., Vol. I. p. 108, note 1, where this work is discussed in detail.

John Ruchrath von Ober Wesel

1410 (?) -- 1481

John Wesel was born in the town of Ober Wesel, which lies on the banks of the Rhine between Mayence and Coblentz. He is usually referred to as Johannes de Vasalia, which refers to the section of the country that he came from. His family name is Ruchrath, but is spelled several ways: Richrath, Buchard, Ruchrad, Bucherath.

The date of his birth is not known, but he was born within the first twenty years of the XV century. Nothing positive is known about his parents, early education, or friends.

The real biography of Wesel begins with his matriculation at Erfurt. This occurred in the year 1440. Here Wesel was a successful student. He received his Bachelor's Degree in 1442, his Master's in 1445. About 1445 Wesel entered the clerical profession, but he did not take the monastic vow. This is of some importance during his trial as we shall see later. In the year 1456, Wesel became a Licentiate and received his Doctor's Degree in Theology. Shortly after Wesel became a Doctor, he became a professor of Theology. During the years 1456-7 he was Rector of the University. About 1458 Wesel became Vice-Rector under Count John of Henseberg. Here at Erfurt Wesel labored for twenty years as a teacher and for ten years as a professor of Theology. He was a brilliant professor and won the hearts of his students. Besides teaching, Wesel was also a brilliant and zealous preacher of the Gospel. Through his sermons he won the hearts of the people who admired him greatly.

Wesel's fame at Erfurt became so great that in the course of time Wesel became the dominating character of Erfurt. A contemporary called Wesel an "ornament of Erfurt and the most celebrated pupil of its University". (1) Luther also testified to his influence.. He said: "M. Johannes Wesalia der zu Mainz Prediger gewest, zuvor zu Erfurt die hohe Schule mit seinen Buchern regiert aus welchen ich daselbst auch bin Magister geworden". (2) This statement of Luther proves that Wesel had exerted a great influence upon the university. A certain Barthalomaeus Arnoldi of Ursingen reported in a work, printed for the first time in 1499, that Wesel's reputation still was great at the university.

In order to understand Wesel, it is necessary to remark something about the university. The University of Erfurt was located in central Germany. Being isolated in Germany, Erfurt had no customary "nations". Besides being distinctly German, Erfurt was also a peoples' university. Erfurt was also slightly anti-papal right from the beginning. The University was founded during the papal schism. Two rival Popes gave permission to build it. Later at the Councils of Constance and Basel representatives of Erfurt were present. These men brought back reformatory ideas and ideals. In fact, one professor, Matthew Doering, A Franciscan monk, took the part of the Council of Basel against the Pope; and he was popular at Erfurt. (3)

(1) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 230
(2) Walch edition, St. Louis, XVI 2243
(3) Schroeckh, op. cit., 304

During the Huss Rebellion many German students left Prague and went to Erfurt. It is possible that they too helped to kindle the reformatory spirit at Erfurt. Furthermore, some of the teachers of Wesel were reformatory at heart. Among them was Jacob of Jüterbock, who exerted great influence on Wesel. He was a quiet monk who longed for reform. The theologians also had the spirit of reform in their blood, though they in general favored the hierarchy.

Under such circumstances the student Wesel cultivated his reformatory ideals. Even as a student Wesel was already concerned about indulgence. (1) Later as a professor Wesel began to express himself more freely. However, Wesel's opposition really began in the Jubilee Year of 1450. Indulgence was then the fad. At that time the Papal representative, Nicolaus of Cusa, came to Erfurt on his indulgence tour. The crowds were so great that several persons were lost their lives in the press of the crowds. All this, however, did not impress Wesel favorably. In 1454 another messenger came with great oratory, but he too made no impression upon Wesel. In opposition to this traffic Wesel wrote his tract. Wesel's opposition to this abuse apparently did not hinder his reputation at Erfurt, for in 1456 he became a Doctor of Theology.

When Wesel received His Doctor's Degree, he was permitted to speak openly on matters of theology.

(1) Ibid., 299

He did this in his sermons to the people. He must have distinguished himself as a great preacher, for he was called to the church at Mayence. It was the custom to call distinguished teachers and preachers from the university to the archiepiscopal residence. Wessel, however, did not remain very long at Mayence. The rumor is that a pestilence broke out in Mayence, and Wessel thought it would be safer to go elsewhere. Wessel, frightened by the pestilence, left the city. (1). While at Mayence Wessel became friendly with a Bohemian, Nicolaus De Bohemia. Wessel was thirty for knowledge and enjoyed conversing with him. At his trial he confessed that they spoke about medicine and theology. This Nicolaus was a Hussite, and Hussites opposed indulgences. As a result of their discussions, Wessel agreed to write a treatise on this subject for the companions of Nicholaus in Bohemia. This is his "Tractatus Super Modo Obligationis Legum Humanorum." This treatise later found its way into the archbishop's hand and led to his conviction. (2).

Wessel, after leaving Mayence, became a professor at Basel. (3) He did not remain there very long, for in 1463 Wessel became a preacher at the Cathedral at Worms. At Worms Wessel felt himself superior to the clergy, for he was a brilliant theologian and able speaker. During his pastorate of seventeen years he became increasingly irritating in his sermons. This was in keeping with his character.

(1) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 278
(2) Schaff Herzog, op. cit., p. 304
(3) Ibid., p. 304

Though he was of a practical turn of mind, Wesel was also a scholar, an orator of skill and reputs. His accurate intellect and eloquent tongue sometimes got the better of him. As a result of his boldness, his courage often degenerated into arrogance. In order to win the popularity he often gave himself away to shady jesting. Expressions like this shocked the hierarchy; "If St. Peter did introduce this practice (of fasting on Friday) it could only have been to obtain a readier sale for his fish"; (1) Here is another, "I despise the Pope, the Church, and the Councils and extol Christ". By degrees Wesel awakened hosts of adersaries by his reckless severity, coarse popular diction, and sometimes pedantic speculations.

Besides attacking the hierarchy in general, Wesel began to make specific charges. Enraged by the wealth and pomp of his bishop, Reinhard of Sickingen, Wesel began to attack the bishop. His opposition to the bishop must have covered a period of years and aroused the bishop to take measures against him. We gather this from a letter Wesel addressed to the bishop, written about 1478. In this letter he accused the bishop of being the enemy of his life, honor, and fortune; life, because the vexations of the bishop robbed him of sleep and weakened his body; honor, because he brought the charge of heresy; fortune, because he caused some of his salary to be withheld and ploted against him. (2)

(1) Ullmann, op. cit. p. 299
(2) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 330

The Bishop apparently brought pressure to bear upon him. He finally held a meeting at Heidelberg. When Wesel refused to recant there, the bishop deposed Wesel. After this Wesel was brought before the Archbishop Diether von Isenberg, Archbishop of Mayence. The Archbishop, however, who was an advocate of the principles of the Councils of Basel and Constance, did not try Wesel. Feeling himself incompetent or unwilling to try Wesel, he decided to have Wesel tried by the monks rather than by himself. In the meanwhile Wesel was imprisoned in a Franciscan Monastery.

The archbishop invited noted theologians from Cologne and Heidelberg to constitute a Court of Inquisition. The inquisitorial part was delegated to the Cologne representatives, two of them who were Dominicans. The scientific end was left up to the Heidelberg delegation. Gerard von Alten had charge of the inquisition. All of these men had the advantages of learning and judicial science. They were appointed not to deal kindly with an erring brother, but they were to silence and judge a heretic.

At this trial Wesel was at a great disadvantage. He was, first of all, a Nominalist, but the members of the court were Realists with the exception of Nicolaus of Wacherheim of Heidelberg. (1) Furthermore, Wesel was a secular clergyman, but the judges were all monks.

(1) Schaff Herzog, op. cit., p. 304

Wesel was a defender of the Bible; the monks were defenders of Thomas Aquinas. In the face of such marked opposition Wesel was helpless. Gieseler reports an eye witness to say: "Et nisi forsitan impetus quidam irrepsisset in Religiosos triumphandi de Saeculari, et praesertim de eo, qui illorum Thomam peculiariter non coluerat, forsitan poterat cum eo mitius -- benigniusque actum -- fuisse". (1)

The hatred of the monks showed itself in the charges that were brought against him -- charges that were made to stir up the hatred of the people. He was accused of being a bishop of the Hussites, of having lived on friendly terms with Jews and Hussites, and of saying, "Whoever sees the holy Sacrament sees the Devil". (2) These charges were merely catch phrases to inflame the hatred to the people whose hearts he had won through his brilliant preaching. The last of these charges is absolutely false, but the other two have a grain of truth in them. Wesel was friendly with some Jews, but for scholastic reasons. He was anxious to learn Hebrew and associated with some intellectual Jews to learn the language. Furthermore, he also had intercourse with a Bohemian, Nicolaus, but he was no bishop, as was claimed.

At the trial Wesel did not appear as brave and heroic as he did in the pulpit. The challenging orator was now "frightened to death", for he was merely yielded unconvinced to mere pressure. His courage can, however, be explained. Wesel was an old, pale, sickly man of eighty years. Sitting in the circle drawn on the floor for the defendant, Wesel appeared as a withered corpse.

(1) Gieseler, op. cit., p. 169 n. 14.
(2) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 332

He had been ailing for some time, as we gather from the letter to the bishop. He was so weak (and) that he had not been able to officiate at Mass for sometime. Even at the recantation he was so weak that rather than assuming the customary position of kneeling, he was permitted to sit with staff in hand. This accounts for his attitude that he had no wish to live but merely wanted to die in peace. The whole trial must have irritated him. His actions were those of a sick man who will do anything to be left alone and have it over with.

The trial opened on Friday, Feb. 8, 1479. The first two days were occupied with preliminaries. On Monday the real trial began. It was held at the Convent of the Minorites. The examination began much the same way as Luther's examination before Cajetan began. Right at the beginning he was told to ask for mercy. After humbly protesting, he gave in and said, "I ask for mercy." Then the first question followed. He was asked whether he <u>believed</u> he was bound by oath to speak the truth though it may be contrary to his own interest. Wesel, "I know it". Inquisitor, "Say, I believe it." Wesel, "What is the use of saying I believe it,when in fact I know it?".The irritated Inquisitor then said, "Master John, Master John, Master John, say, I believe, say, I believe it". Wesel then answered, "I believe it." Luther refers to this incident in his works. (1) And so the questioning went on for several days.

(1) Luther, St. Louis, Vol. XVI 2743

After the questioning on Wednesday, a group of men went to him in his cell to talk him into recanting. After much debate he finally said, "I will recant, if you take the responsibility upon your consciences"! (1)

If Wesel thought that his recanation would free him, he was deceived. After recanting before the court, he had to recant in public at the cathedral on Sunday, Feb. 21, 1479. His books were also burned in his presence, and this caused him much anguish of heart. Though Wesel had pleaded for mercy at the court and requested that he be not sent back to prison, the court did not heed his request. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Augustinian Monastary at Mayence. This was his opportunity to do pennance. Here Wesel pined away with sorrow, and after two years, he died a broken man in 1481.

Wesel's Theology

Wesel derived his theology from the Bible and St. Augustine. He was a Scotist and Nominalist. Rather than operate with dogmatics, Wesel took greater interest in the abuses and innovations that encroached upon the doctrine of free grace. All those practices that were opposed to Scripture and grace gained his attention. He opposed indulgences, transubstantiation, feasts, fasts, the ceremony of the Mass, holy oil, pilgrimages. In spite of his clear thinking, Wesel had many weaknesses. He denied the filioque and original sin. He misunderstood the word "holy" in the Apostolic Creed and wanted it removed, for not all baptized were sincere Christians.

(1) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 355

He also misunderstood the petition "Thy Kingdom come" and wanted it removed.

SCRIPTURE

Taking his stand like Luther upon the Bible, Wesel set up as his criterion of theology Scripture and divine grace. He had a reverence for the whole Bible, but especially for the epistles of Paul and St. Augustine. Wesel did not believe in commentaries or writings of a teacher but insisted that the Bible could be explained by itself. This Bible he placed above all councils, Fathers, or traditions. All ceremony and dogma must be submitted to the test of Scripture. "Quod nihil sit credendum, quod non habeatur in Canone Bibliae". (1) He followed this out in practise, for in his tract on indulgences he says "I ... protest at the outset that it is not my intention to say or write anything in any way contradictory of the truth of the faith, as that is contained in Scripture". (2)

SIN AND GRACE

Wesel's doctrine of grace was essentially Augustinian. His aim is to exalt the grace of God and exclude the works of man. (3) An extract from a sermon shows this. "It is by the grace of God alone that all are saved who are saved at all" (4)

This salvation is a result of the eternal election. "Sola Dei gratia salvantur Electi".

(1) Giesoler, op. cit., p. 165
(2) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 259
(3) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 295
(4) Ullmann, ibid., 295 - quotes Paradoxa

He said that God wrote all the elect down into his book and those that were not written in the book could not be saved even by the Pope. ". . . quen Deus vult salvare, donando sibi gratiem, si omnes sacerdotes vellent illum damnare aut excommunicare adhuc salvaretur ille. Et quem Deus vult damnare, si omnes --- vellent hunc salvare, adhuc iste damnaretur". (1) It is all grace, not even the will assenting.

His conception of grace, however, is difficult to perceive. He does speak of a "gratia infusa", but perhaps he wants to picture the new man who grows and walks in holiness before God, much like we speak of a new man growing within us by faith. Ullmann says that Wesel had "penetrated to the centre of Christianity, to the very essence of the Gospel, to the righteousness, spirit, and life of Christ, in short, to that Savior who, to all who embrace him by living faith, becomes a source of peace, love, and true morality". (2) Schroeckh, however, says, that, "Wesel die Spuren des ächten Christentums nur doch sparsam entdeckt hat, aber er war doch auf dem richtigen Wege dazu begriffen". (3) Seeberg admits the Biblical character of Wesel but ascribes the Catholic doctrine of "gratia infusa" to him. So also Ritschl.

But Wesel was Augustinian in his theology. In referring to St. Augustine, Klotsche gives a cue to solve this problem. Speaking of St. Augustine he says, "the crowning act of grace is the 'infusion of love.

(1) Gieseler, op. cit., p. 168
(2) p. 291
(3) p. 302

Justification according to St. Augustine is not a forensic act, but a process, a transformation of an ungodly into a righteous man". (1) There is the key. Wesel, like St. Augustine, had the idea of justification, but was not acute enough and mature enough to describe it as a forensic act. Though not absolutely Catholic, Wesel was not as clear on this doctrine as the XVI century reformer.

INDULGENCES

From the beginning of the XIII century, when the doctrine of Indulgences reached its maturity, until the XVI century when it was challenged, there was a growing opposition toward it. Opposition was in the air at Wesel's time. His modest professor, Jacob of Jüterbock, wrote a treatise emphasizing the point that indulgences effect merely the temporal ecclesastical penalties of sin. (2) John Wesel caught his spirit already as student, but it was not until the Jubilee year of Clement VI that he wrote against them.

This doctrine of indulgences "concentrates as in a focus all the radii of the hierarchial tendencies" of the secular character of the Church. By attacking this system Wesel felt he was promoting the glory of God. He wrote, therefore, not about indulgences, but against them. In his treatise he is much clearer than Luther was when he posted the ninety-five theses in search of further truth.

In his treatise Wesel aims to answer the questions whether the pope has the power to grant indulgences. With irresistible logic that penetrates all the joints of the scholastic system Wesel examined the key upon which this doctrine rested.

(1) Klotsche, op. cit. p. 92
(2) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 252

The scholastics said it rested on the key of the priesthood (clavis ordinis), but Wesel said it was an application of the key of jurisdiction (clavis jurisdictionis). If they belonged under the key of the priesthood then indulgences are sacramental and belong to the Sacrament of Penmance. Since this is so, the matter of forgiveness belongs to God who employs the priest merely as an agent who announces divine pardon. Having shown that indulgences can only come under the key of jurisdiction, Wesel then showed that neither Scripture (which says that the works follow the dead) nor the ancient Church supports this. The clavis jurisdictionis is only for incorrigible sinners. Besides Scripture, the treasury of merits is adduced as a proof. Wesel, however, destroys this treasury by arguing from Scripture and purgatory.

Since the forgiveness of sins includes not only the negative forgiveness but also the positive infusion of grace, no priest can forgive sins by indulgences except the ecclesastical punishment assigned by the Church. Therefore he concludes that indulgences are a "pious fraud" practised on believers. Inasmuch as the works were done to God they were meritorious before God. Since the Church is composed of the wicked and the good, the wicked are responsible for this doctrine.

THE CHURCH

Wesel defined the Church as the aggregate of the faithful who were joined together in love that is known only to God. The Church, the bride of Christ, is ruled by the Holy Spirit. However, he did not regard the visible Church as infallible.

He did not as yet have the conception of a visible and invisible Church, but he had an idea close to it. He divided the Church into the true and false Christians. The false members he held for the doctrine of indulgences. He regarded the universal and Catholic Church as one. The true members believe "Jesus to be God and man". "The name Catholic is given to it, because the preaching of Christ, by which alone faith is produced, is spread over the whole world". (1) This Catholic Church, inasmuch as it embraces the Church of Christ founded upon a rock is holy, immaculate, without error. (2)

Wesel does not ascribe a divine institution to the hierarchy. He clearly sets down the duties and rights of the hierarchy in his tract De Potestate Ecclesiastica. In this tract he restricts the power of the hierarchy solely to the ministry of the Word and the exercise of charity. As soon as it goes beyond this, the hierarchy becomes tyranny. It is not the name, but faith by the grace of God that makes a pope. He and the bishops are there to give watchful care. Obedience is due to these superiors, but they must then watch the flock. "The man who instructs and corrects us with the word of God he is our Pope and Bishop and Pastor and Lord, though the most illiterate and humble of all the people". (3) In an oratorical moment he is reported to have said, "Ich verachte den Pabst, die Kirche u. Concilia, und lobe Christum". (4)

(1) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 271 and Gieseler, op. cit., p. 166
(2) Gieseler, op. cit., p. 166 -- Ullmann, op. cit. Vol I, 271
(3) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 324
(4) Gieseler, op. cit., p. 168

Wesel had no mercy for the corrupt and greedy fat priests. "I abominate the priestly slippers decorated with precious stones and gold. I laugh at the high sounding names, the traggic titles, and the lofty triumphs. They are mere semblances and any thing rather than the badges of a true pastor, bishop, or teacher, when that is lacking, which gives them worth, and renders them tolerable". (1) Again he censures, "On the contrary, the triple crown, the glittering bulls, the proud hats, and priestly decorations, are all to blame for the disregard into which the word of God is fallen among the humble". (2) Those bishops and even the popes are subject to the rebuke of the humblest Christian who has more insight and wisdom than the offender.

WORKS

At his trial Wesel admitted that the following books came from his pen:

1. "Super modo obligationis legum humanarum ad quendam Nicolaum de Bohemia"
2. "De Potestate Ecclesiastica"
3. "De Indulgentis"
4. "De Jejunio"

Of these his tract De Indulgentiis is the most important. Ullmann calls it "one of the most important monuments of the XV century. It seems to be composed of two small essays, the heart of it being the section covered by chapters three to ten.

(1) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 319
(2) Ibid., p. 324

The manuscript was first published 307 years after it was written. This was done by Walch. This treatise exists in manuscript in the Royal Library at Berlin. Ullmann gives a summary of the works, and a summary is found under the heading of "Indulgences" of this paper. (1)

The other work that is still extant is the De Potestate Ecclesiastica. It was probably written while he was at Worms. It is less methodical and scholarly than the tract on indulgences, and the language is sometimes intemperate and harsh. O. Clemen seizes this for evidence to disprove that Wesel wrote this treatise. This argument of style is weak, as Wesel was extravagant in his expressions by nature. Clemen, furthermore, says that Wesel did not write this, for the work says that a layman wrote it. But Wesel was not a monk but belonged to the secular clergy. He could then term himself a layman. Wesel's aim in this work is to determine what the functions of the priests really are and in how far their enactments are obligatory upon the Christians. (2) Ullmann summarizes this work. (3)

Though nothing is known of the other works, there are a few manuscripts of his lectures extant. From his lectures at the University of Erfurt at the following are extant: "Quaestiones de Libris Physicorum Aristotelis", and a commentary on the Sentances of Peter Lombard.

(1) p 29
(2) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 317
(3) Ullmann, ibid., p. 317-27

The former is at Erfurt, and the latter at Berlin. The following works from the Basel period are at the Munich Library: Lecture on Logic, a commentary on Aristotelis Libros de Omnia. At the university of Wurzbur there is a copy of some polemical writings of Wesel and John of Lutter debating whether the pope is the vicar of Christ. (1) Besides these there is a volume called Paradoxa, which contains extracts from his sermons.

The influence of Wesel was great. He influenced his age through his brilliant oratory, frank writings, and penetrating lectures. His friends (Wessel) as well as his enemies (Archbishop Diether) testify to his great ability. Wesel also had a case. His seven propositions on indulgences went much further than Luther's Ninety-five Theses went.

Wesel's influence did not stop with his age. His great influence on the University of Erfurt left its impress on Luther. Luther studied his works, and much in Luther's polemics reminds us of Wesel. Luther did not break out in excited praise over Wesel as he did over Wessel. This is the case, because Wessel was a discovery, but Wesel was an old familiar friend.

(1) Schaff Herzog. op. cit., p. 304

John Wessel Gansfort
(1419-1489)

Although there are no dramatic episodes, no clashes with the Church, no great displays of courage to adorn the life of Wessel, yet his life is intensely interesting. In spite of his handicaps of weak eyes, limping foot, and frail health, Wessel managed to become an outstanding figure in the religious world of his century. Friends called him "Lux Mundi" and enemies sarcastically "Master of Contradictions". His thirst for knowledge, his open mindedness and patient scientific research gains our admiration. Romanists feel disturbed when he is cited as a Prereformer. Though they would like to claim this brilliant and intimate friend of Pope Sixtus IV as their own, they must admit that his works were condemned by the Council of Trent as first class heretical works.

The life of this interesting character can be divided into three distinct sections: 1. Early life up to Cologne (1-32) 2. University life (32-60) and 3. Old age of literary activity. (60-70)

EARLY LIFE

Wessel Gansfort was born in Groningen in 1419 (20). Groningen lies in the north eastern part of the Utrecht Diocese and was one of the leading towns of the Netherlands at the time of Wessel. The year of Wessel's birth is important, for he was born the year Philip began to rule over the Netherlands - thirty-five years after the death of Wyclif and five years after the death of Huss.

The parents of Wessel were poor and wanted to send him to work at a tender age. Perhaps he was to work in his father's shop, for his father was a baker. They, however, were not destined to guide his future, for they died when Wessel was still a very young boy.

This young orphan and his two sisters (1) were received into the kindly home of a wealthy relative of their mother, Oda Clantes. Hyma calls her Jarges. (2) This fine lady sent Wessel to school with her young son. Wessel began his early education at the school of the brethren at the Church of St. Martin in Groningen. (3)

In 1432 Wessel went fifty miles south to Zwolle, the center of the "New Devotion", and a famous school of the brethren of the Common Life. Here Wessel lived first as a student, and then as a student teacher. He lived there from his twelfth to his twenty-ninth year, seventeen years in all.

The student life at Zwolle was semi-monastic. The students wore a monlike habit as well as a tonsure. Each person had his appointed duty to perform, and Wessel assisted in the dining hall. (4) Though the education of this school was rather narrow and limited to the training in religious life, Wessel owed much to those followers of Gerhard Groote. Here Wessel developed a heartfelt Biblical piety, a strictness in morals, and a certain humility that always graced his learning in later life.

(1) Hardenberg, Life of Wessel, found in Miller Scudder, Wessel, Vol. II, p. 317
(2) Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 192
(3) Pictures of this church of St. Martin, Miller-Scudder, Vol. II p. 39 & 129
(4) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 48

His heart was cultivated to dominate his mind so that in later life it was not the genius but the Christian that predominated in Wessel.

Besides being introduced to the Bible, Augustine, and Bernard, Wessel learned the trade of the Brethren. They were devoted to the art of illuminating and binding manuscripts. Thys they made their living. Wessel became very proficient at this art. Hyma claims that Wessel later learned his Hebrew and Greek merely to get a better understanding of the texts from a professional viewpoint. (1)

After Wessel passed through the eight grades of the town school of Zwolle he was appointed as a teacher of the second class below him. From 1440-49 he taught in the "Parva Domus", one of the smaller dormitories that were built to accommodate the increasing number of students. The Procurator of the "Parva Domus" was Rutger von Doetenghen. He and Wessel became warm friends.

Soon after Wessel began to teach, he learned to know Thomas à Kempis. Wessel, who was now in his early twenties, often walked the three miles to the monastary of St. Agnes to sit at the feet of this venerable man who was in his sixties. Thomas à Kempis must have recognized the possibilities of Wessel and became his intimate friend. This is shown by the fact that a Kempis valued Wessel's advise. À Kempis had just finished his "Imitatio Christi" when he met Wessel. Wessel was one of the first to read it, and he criticized it. À Kempis was a great worshiper of Mary, but Wessel resented all superstition of that kind.

(1) Hyma, op. cit., p. 192

It seems that Wessel induced a Kempis to revise his "Imitatio" so that it showed "fewer traces of human superstition". (1)

Thomas a Kempis did exert a great influence on Wessel. The "Imitatio" gave Wessel his first incitement to piety. This became a part of him, so much so that he later felt uncomfortable in Rome. At the evening addresses in the "Parva Domus" Wessel would urge the boys on to higher ideals. Wessel was, however, independent enough to think for himself. When a Kempis urged him to enter the monastic life, he refused. He felt his duty was outside of the monastary. Later he became an opponent of this institution. (2).

This independent mind began to assert itself in the classroom. Wessel had the characteristics of a Frieslander; energy, bluntness, and independence. In the classroom his independence would sometimes get the better of him. He made some statements in class which were apparently challenged. He then wrote a defense of his ideas. Life became uncomfortable, perhaps because of criticism or just student teasing. Wessel left Zwolle much earlier than he would have left under ordinary circumstances.

UNIVERSITY LIFE

After attending a preparatory school, Wessel entered the University of Cologne. In 1449 he matriculated as a student of arts. The financial problem was solved by a scholarship that was granted him. It was called the "Laurence Bursary" and was founded by a former pastor of the Church of St. Martin in Groningen for the natives of that town.

(1) Miller Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I p. 47
(2) Ibid. p. 46

Here Wessel remained until he was about thirty. In 1450 he received his B.A. In 1452 he received his M.A. in literature and arts. Having obtained his degree, Wessel applied himself to the study of philosophy and theology for which he always had a decided liking.

Cologne was the seat of "Obscurantism". Here the dry, unfertile, irritating scholasticism pervaded the classrooms. Realism dominated. Wessel, who was of an independent mind, was dissatisfied with such cold lectures. He began to turn to the libraries. This is characteristic of him, for he is much of a self taught man. His physical defect from childhood probably drove him to the books. This reading brought him in contact with a new and fresh world - humanism. This became so much a part of him that is said that he greatly disturbed the professors, especially those of the theological department, by forever bringing up something new. That was unorthodox, and he must have received many frowns.

Wessel's humanism led him in two directions. He began to dig into the evangelical truths of the Bible, but he also began to dig into the original languages. As far as languages are concerned, Wessel was a master of Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. He set about learning these languages soon after he came to Cologne. Whether he learned these languages for professional reasons or whether he learned them for religious reasons makes little difference. It might be said that Wessel's linguistic achievement lies not in the extent of his ability to handle the languages, but rather in the fact that he learned Greek and Hebrew without a textbook in an age that frowned on such a venture, especially as far as Hebrew is concerned.

Agricola and Reuchlin far surpassed him, although he interested them in these languages. These languages merely opened the original text up to Wessel and brought him into the company of the great Fathers and philosophers of the Golden Age.

During this period Wessel discovered another source of living theology. That was in the writings of Abbot Rupert, who died in 1135. Rupert was a Biblical scholar who condemned the moral corruption and laxity of theclergy. (1) Here Wessel drank deep. He found the works in the Benedictine Library at Cologne. Rupert strengthened Wessel's ideas on the Bible and emboldened him in his criticism of the Church. Here Wessel received most of his theology, especially his Reformed idea of the Eucharist as opposed to transubstantiation. (2) Wessel's training as a copyist came in handy now, for he began to copy extracts from the Fathers, the philosophers, and Rupert, which he called Mare Magnum or the Great Sea, as if it were formed from the streams of knowledge of all lands. This volume became one of his deadliest weapons in his debates in later life.

In Dec. 1452, Wessel left Cologne to go to Paris. At first he stopped over at the University of Louvain and remained there until the fall of 1453. In 1454 Wessel came to Paris, at the age of thirtyfour. During the first years at Paris Wessel seems to have travelled around some. In 1456 he went to Heidelberg for one year. In 1457 he was at Zwolle, and in 1458 he returned to Paris, where he now remained permanently until 1469. (3)

(1) Ullmann, Reformers, Vol. II, p. 285
(2) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 56
(3) Hyma, op. cit. p. 196 is the only one that offers these dates.

The University of Paris, no doubt, had many attractions for a scholar like Wessel. Paris was the outstanding school of theology in Europe. It was of Gerson fame. Furthermore, the university was patronized by the king and fostered by the pope. Paris was the authority in the theological contentions of the day, a rival even to the pope himself. Then there were the advantages of the city - the cathedrals of Notre Dame and Sainte Chapelle and the culture of urban life. All this must have influenced Wessel a little, but his real reason for coming to Paris was something else. It was the great battle between Nominalism and Realism that was raging at Paris. At Cologne Wessel was considered as a great champion of Realism. When he heard that the Nominalists were triumphing in Paris, Wessel loaded his guns and set out for Paris firmly believing that he would convert the University to Realism.(1)

The problem of Nominalism and Realism was as important and acute in those days as evolutionism and modernism are in our century. The Realists, who were the conservatives, swore by Aristotle. The Nominalists were the modernist party and opposed Scholasticism. Almost all of the reformers of the XV century were Nominalists.

The question at stake was whether universals possess objective reality or have merely an ideal existence in our thinking. Realism insisted on the objective existence apart from our thought.

(1) Miller-Scudder p. 285- Letter of Wessel to Hoeck.

Nominalism insisted that the generic ideas were merely abstractions of human thinking. Carried over to theology, Nominalism leaned toward tri-theism and polytheism, while Realism leaned toward monarchism (no distinction of persons in the Trinity). (1)

If Wessel came to Paris "riding forth to conquer", he was mistaken. At Cologne he was the champion of Realism, but there he merely debated among assenting Realists. When he came to Paris, he suddenly realized that there was another side of the question. He met with stern opposition, for the celebrated professor Nicholaus of Utrecht was the leader of the Nominalist Party in Paris. (2) After three months Wessel was converted to Nominalism for the rest of his life, and the leader of the opposition became one of his most valuable friends. After his "conversation" Wessel spent a year studying the doctrines of Scotus, Maro, and Bonetus. (3).

Wessel had a rare faculty for making friends, and he used it in Paris. He made a host of friends among the Occamist groups, who were reading Thomas à Kempis, Zerbolt, and many other acquaintances of Wessel. Wessel was attracted by these liberal and more enlightened men of the Nominalist group. It is, therefore, not strange that he became a close friend of the leader of the Nominalists, Nicholaus of Utrecht. At this time Wessel began to practice medicine in a more general way. He became the private physician and trusted companion of Nicholaus of Utrecht.

(1) Ullmann, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 301
(2) Hardenberg, Miller-Scudder, Vol. II, p. 323
(3) Letter to Jacob Hoeck, Miller-Scudder, Vol. I, 285

It is said that Nicholaus suffered from the gout, and Wessel cured him by bathing him in warm milk. (1) In gaining the friendship of Nicholaus, Wessel gained a powerful protector. Nicholaus was the bishop of Burgundy. In secular life he was the son of Philip the Good and a half brother of the powerful Charles the Bold. (2) Both had a taste for learning and reform and got along together very well. In Wessel's last years, Nicholaus protected Wessel against the threatening inquisition. Wessel was also said to have been the medical attendant to Francis de Rovere (Sixtus IV). They knew each other in Paris before the latter's coronation as pope. It is possible that Wessel served in this capacity when he visited Sixtus in Rome. Hardenberg reports that Wessel wrote several treatises on medicine, but they were destroyed. (3)

In Paris Wessel also met Dr. Hoeck of Naldwick, one of the most eminent theologians of the Netherlands. (4) He later in life complained to the theologians at Cologne about Wessel's heretical ideas. Another friend was the distinguished Bessarion who came near being pope twice. (5) This highly cultured Greek called Wessel "Basilius". (6)

Here at Paris Wessel also met his disciples; Rudolph Agricola and John Reuchlin.

(1) Hardenberg, Miller-Scudder, Vol. II, p. 335
(2) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 107
(3) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 121
(4) Ullmann, op. cit. Vol. II, 360
(5) Ullmann, Johann Wessel (German), p. 87, n. 2
(6) H ardenberg, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. II, 324

He met Reuchlin when the latter was but eighteen years of age. Reuchlin owed much to Wessel, and had much respect for him. Reuchlin's nephew, Melanchton, shared in this veneration of his uncle. Agricola, who was born near Groningon, was Wessel's junior by twentythree years when they met. He later surpassed his master in linguistics and became one of the leading Hebrew scholars. He and Wessel were bosom friends, especially in Wessel's last year.

About 1469 Wessel left Paris for Rome. Authorities differ in the sequence of the events of the following years. Hyma has Wessel return to Paris the following year, while Miller has Wessel remain in Rome for three years. (1) At any rate, Wessel spent some time in Rome, Venice, Florence, and Basel. At Rome he saw Rovere become pope in 1471. In an audience with the new pope, Wessel was asked to make a request. Wessel, instead of asking for a bishopric, asked for a Greek and Hebrew manuscript from the Vatican Library. The pope was surprised at such a humble request and granted it. Some place this incident at the time Sixtus became pope, while others place it as much as two years later. When we consider that the first Hebrew Bible was first printed a year after Wessel's death, we realize how much this manuscript must have meant to this scholar.

While in Rome, Wessel became acquainted with several members of the papal court and the ecclesiastical system of Rome. Wessel, who was distinguished for his piety, was shocked and disgusted with Rome.

(1) Hyma, op. cit., p. 197 compare Miller-Scudder, op. cit. Vol. I. 90

In his old age Wessel declined a papal invitation to visit Rome.

Leaving Rome, Wessel returned to Paris. He did not remain there very long, for he had many enemies there. Nominalism was in danger. King Louis XI made an attempt by a decree to anihilate Nominalism at the University of Paris, but was not successful. Wessel's bishop friend, David, sensed the danger and urged Wessel to leave Paris and promised him protection. (1) Wessel left Paris to go to Basel, where he remained until 1477.

In 1477 Wessel was asked by the Elector to teach at Heidelberg. Heidelberg attracted Wessel, for a fresh spirit of progress seemed to pervade the university. The theological faculty refused to extend its hand of approval. Wessel was too liberal and radical to please them. Being excluded from the theological department, Wessel entered the arts department and taught philosophy, Greek, and Hebrew.

Here we might pause and discuss the relationship between Wessel and Wesel. These men knew each other quite well. They undoubtedly visited each other while Wessel was at Heidelberg, for Heidelberg is just across the Rhine from Worms, where Wesel was preacher. Wesel had been at Worms since 1463, and Wessel came to Heidelberg in 1477. Wesel was condemned in 1479. Allowing for the imprisonment, these men perhaps shared each others friendship for possibly a year. Since both men were disciples of Groote and had much in common, they undoubtedly made every effort to get together.

(1) This letter is found in Miller-Scudder, Vol. I, 331

Though friends, both men were of opposite character. Wessel was a refined scholar, while Wesel was a popular preacher - a publicity man. Wessel often complained about Wesel's way of going about things. He complained in a letter:

> "I do not like his absurdities, which deviate from the truth and are a stumbling block to the people; yet his learning and unusually keen faculties are such that I cannot help loving the man and sympathizing with him in his misfortune. Oh, what an advantage it would have been to him, as I often said 'inter nos' at Paris, if he had first been trained thoroughly, as we were, in the studies both of the Realists and the Formalists ! For in that case he would not have been incautious and off his guard, but as though from a citadel and watchtower he would have forseen the coming assaults.' Again, he continued, 'I have often feared his inconsiderate and rash manner of speech. For although his teaching had some scholastic subtelty and possibility at times contained some catholic truth, yet to make such statements as he did to the unlearned crowd and to those who were incapable of understanding them caused serious scandal to simple minded people and was altogether odious'. (1)

While Wesel was arrested, Wessel was in Heidelberg. When Wesel was found guilty of heresy, Wessel became alarmed. He had reason to be alarmed. He held the same doctrines as Wesel and criticized the same abuses.

(1) From a letter to Van Veen Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, 236-7

Furthermore, Wessel was not popular with the faculty of Heidelberg, and two members of the faculty were judges at Wesel's trial! They didn't like Wessel from the beginning and Wessel had made himself obnoxious in taking part in the battle between Realism and Nominalism that had just begun at Heidelberg. But that wasn't all. Jacob Hoeck, the great theologian, being alarmed over Wessel's views, complained to the University of Cologne. And two delegates from Cologne were also judges at Wesel's trial. (1) Rumors came to Wessel's ears that he was next to appear before the Inquisition.

Wessel acted quickly. He wrote for advice to his friend Ludolph Van Veen, an expert in canon law. He also wrote to the Dean of Utrecht. Soon after Wesel was condemned, Wessel left Heidelberg to go to Groningen, where he had the protection of his bishop, the powerful David of Burgundy. When the Catholic Encyclopedia says, "during his lifetime he was never taken to task by the Inquisition", it states a half truth. (2) The only reason the Inquisition did not seize him was the powerful influence of Bishop David.

LAST DAYS

Leaving Heidelberg, Wessel returned to his native country. Here he received a grand welcome. His friend, Thomas à Kempis, was not there to greet him, for he had passed away in 1471.

Wessel spent his last years at several monasteries. From 1475-1482 he was mainly at Zwolle and Mt. St. Agnes.

(1) cf. Letter of Wessel to Hoeck in which he censures him for taking this liberty. Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 266-7
(2) Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XV, p. 590

His last years, however, were spent at Adwerd and Groningen. The books of the monastery at Adwerd attracted him. Here he also took great interest in the young monks. He spoke to them about Hebrew, Greek, the Bible, and reform. Most of his time was spent in friendly intercourse in a circle of admiring friends. He also did much to build up the schools of the monastery.

Wessel's last years were spent at the Convent of the Spiritual Virgins at Groningen, which was located in the shadow of the Church of St. Martin, there he went as a little child. Here the nuns nursed him, as he was quite frail.

Shortly before Wessel's death, he experienced a period of doubt. He had doubted the ecclesiastical system of the Church, but this time he doubted the truth of Christianity itself. (1) He, however, was spared, and died with the wonderful confession', "I thank God all the vain and troublesome thoughts have gone, and I know naught but Jesus Christ and Him crucified"! (2) He died with this confession on Oct. 4, 1489, and was buried at the Convent. In 1860 his body was removed and placed in the Church of St. Martin in Groningen, where the body lies today.

WORKS

Not all great men were as fortunate as Wessel. Most of them were so absorbed with the great problems of their day that they had little opportunity to leave much literary material for their followers.

(1) Geldenhauer, Wessel Gansfort, in Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 346
(2) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I. p. 110

This, however, was not the case with Wessel. After he had sixty years of experience, Wessel returned home for ten years of leisure spent in the study of theology, research, and discussion. Though his health was failing him, Wessel managed to leave a great reformatory tradition for his people. Most, if not all, his writings belong to this period of his old age.

We are fortunate in having many of his works, for all of his private manuscripts were destroyed soon after his death by embittered monks. (1) Wessel had attacked the superstition of the monks and thereby excited the enmity of the monks, especially the mendicants. Furthermore, all of his works were placed on the Index in 1529 and later they were condemned again by the Council of Trent.

We are indebted to Cornelius Honius of the Hague, for it is he that collected Wessel's manuscripts soon after Wessel's death. Hoen, who was embued with the spirit of the Reformation, was a former pupil of the School of the Brethren at Utrecht. Having collected many of Wessel's works he conferred with Hinne Rhode, the rector of his alma mater. They agreed that Wessel's writings should be printed. Knowing the sentiments of Luther, they agreed that these writings should get into Luther's hands as well as into Zwingli's hands. For that reason Rhode and a companion went to Wittenberg in 1521. Luther was happy to see these works, but had to leave for Worms. After Luther returned, an edition appeared in August 1522 under Luther's supervision.

(1) H ardenberg, op. cit., p. 335

When Luther saw Wessel's writings for the first time, he leaped with joy. They were brought to him at the psychological moment when Luther so sorely needed comfort and reassurance. In 1521 Luther felt like a lost sheep. He had broken with Rome, not because he wanted to, but because he was forced to do so. Now after it was over, Luther began to feel the responsibility of that great move. Did he do right? In his preface to this edition, Luther confessed, "For I, being forced through some providence of God into the public arena, felt that I was alone in my fight with these monsters of indulgences and pontifical laws and so called theology." He felt like Elijah under the juniper tree, so that he complained, "Still, I always desired to be taken away -- even I -- from the midst of my Bealites . . . to live to myself in some corner". (1)

While Luther felt sick at heart, this well of fresh water was opened to him, and Luther drank deeply. "For, behold! a Wessel has appeared, whom they call Basil (Basilius), a Frisian from Groningen, a man of remarkable ability and of rare and great spirit; and it is evident that he has been truly taught of the Lord". - . . "But now my joy and courage begin to increase, and I have not the slightest doubt that I have been teaching the truth, since he, living at so different a time, under another sky, in another land, and under such diverse circumstances, is so consistently in accord with me in all things, not only as to substance, but in the use of almost the same words".

(1) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 291

No doubt Luther felt all the stronger at Worms with Wessel on his side, for Wessel must have inspired him and given him much of the courage he so sorely needed. Luther's doctrine was no innovation; it was true! Wessel and Luther had so much in common that Luther admitted if he had read Wessel earlier, his enemies might have accused him of copying this renowned theologian.

Of course, there are differences between the two men, but they are much alike in spirit. Luther went to far as to say that Wessel was "divinely instructed". Faber, the bishop of Vienna, wanted to capitalize on this statement of Luther and published a work listing more than thirty differences between the two men. Now, if Wessel was divinely instructed, Faber wished to conclude that Luther was otherwise than "divinely" instructed. (1) Faber's points of differences are listed by Ullmann. (2) Hyma also discusses them at length. (3) Luther himself was conscious of the differences. He showed this in rejecting Wessel's "Eucharist". Furthermore, he merely read Wessel for confirmation and inspiration and insisted, "I fought as thinking myself alone" (4)

The writings that Rhode brought to Luther were the Farago, the Eucharist, and some letters. Luther endorsed all but the Eucharist. Luther wrote a very favorable preface for the Farrago and recommended it very highly to everyone.

(1) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 161
(2) Ullmann, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 589. Also a biographical note on Faber
(3) Hyma, op. cit., p. 322-3
(4) Beard, op. cit., p. 32

In 1522 Wessel's writings were published for the first time at Wittenberg, Leipsig, and Basel. (1) Due to Luther's hearty approval, the Farrago was in great demand.

Luther, however, did not approve of the devotional treatise, "De Sacramento Eucharistiae". In fact, Luther did not care to have it published at all, for he did not approve of the Reformed doctrine that it contained. Luther and Carlstadt disagreed very violently over it. (2) Rather than publish the treatise, Luther sent it to Oecolampadius for examination who sent it to Zwingli, who was greatly influenced by it. Martin Bucer was also greatly influenced by it. (3) Though it is the "most Protestant" of Wessel's writings, it is perhaps the most unscriptural.

The extant writings of Wessel are all found in the Groningen edition of Wessel's writings, printed in 1614. It consists of one volume and fills 921 pages. The works contained therein are:

1. Concerning Prayer, with an exposition of the Lord's Prayer.
2. Scala Meditationis, or the Training of Thought and Meditation.
3. Examples of the above dedicated to the monks of Mount Saint Agnes.
4. The Causes of the Incarnation, and the Magnitude of the Sufferings of our Lord.

#5. The Sacrament of the Eucharist.
#6. The Farrago, which has six sections.
#7. The Letters.

Ullmann also lists them. (4) We might note that almost 1000 pages of Wessel's works have been lost. Ullmann gives the list. (5) Scudder has translated all but four of the extant works of Wessel.

(1) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 158
(2) Ibid., p. 165 - a very heated disagreement.
(3) Ibid, p. 160
(4) p. 603 Vol. II
(5) p. 600 Vol. II
Translated by Scudder. Vol. I contains the letters. Vol. II the rest.

The New Brunswick Theological Seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church has the largest collection of his writings. Examples of beautiful work in bookbinding maybe seen in the New York City Library, which has two rare original copies of Wessel's works: De Sacramento Eucharistiae and De Oratione et Modo Orandi. (1)

WESSEL AS A REFORMER

Although Wessel remained a laymen, he was the boldest of the prereformers. Though the boldest of the prereformers, he is not always acclaimed as such. Romanists condemn Ullmann as being "partisanly Protestant" and as exaggerating Wessel's diviation from the Church. (2) Romanists admit Wessel's criticism, but claim that Wessel was essentially a Catholic. Protestant writers, however, claim that he was "beyond doubt the most prominent of all those of the Germanic race who prepared the way for the Reformation and stood nearer mentally to the Reformer than any other man of his generation". (3) This is a very good evaluation of the man. Though Wessel lived and died in fellowship with the church, Luther regarded him with profound esteem and acknowledged him as his precursor.

Wessel was a reformer both directly and indirectly. Wessel was a great scholar and humanistic at heart. In spite of his scholarship, Wessel also had the personality to win friends and pupils to carry on his work. Luther recognized Wessel's scholarship. Enemies and friends recognized his ability. His thirst for knowledge led him to all the great thinkers of the pagan world as well as all the great men of the Church.

(1) Miller-Scudder, op. Cit, Vol. I, p. 168
(2) Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XV, 590
(3) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 163

The list of writers that Wessel is familiar with is astounding. Ullmann gives a long list. (1) Hyma does also. (2) Wessel was thus essentially a scholar, a man of the schools.

Wessel was a true scholar, for he was open-minded. He could rise above tradition and prejudice. He was a lover of truth and followed it, no matter in which direction it led him. In a letter he made the remarkable statement : "Truth has been the object of my pursuit since the days of childhood, and is more so now than ever, because through truth alone lies the way to life"! (3)

With this love for truth Wessel developed a certain independence that sometimes developed into arrogance. That was a trait early in life. As a more student at Zwolle, he ventured to differ with à Kempis. At Zwolle he ventured to express his opinions, so that his temerity cost him his position. At Cologne Wessel neglected classes to do his own research and think his own thoughts. Later in meeting the objections of the Traditionalists he dared to say "Thomas was a doctor, what than! I am a doctor, too. Thomas knew Latin, and it was the only language he did know; whereas I am master of the three principal tongues". (4)

As a scholar Wessel was a pioneer in the study of Hebrew and Greek long before Erasmus was born. Because of his linguistic ability he was called "Lux Mundi. Because of this accomplishment people venerated him and often became extravagant in praise.

(1) Vol. II, p. 597-8
(2) Hyma, op. cit., p. 206
(3) Ullmann, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 359
(4) Ullmann, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 315

They often called him a doctor of Theology, Medicine, and Law, but it is doubtful that he was a Doctor of Medicine or Law.

Though a scholar, Wessel loved teaching and debate. He had a rare ability for debate and argumentation. He even courted controversy and was usually victorious.

Though a scholar, Wessel had a charming personality that easily won friends. That is shown by the interest people took in him. Mrs. Glantes sent him to school with her own boy, à Kempis loved him, his teachers at Zwolle had enough confidence in him to make him a teacher.

Being of such a nature, it is no wonder that Wessel attracted a host of friends and won the admiration of the students. Using his scholarship, he fed the streams of Humanism though his pupils: Agricola, Reuchlin, (his nephew Melanchton indirectly), Alex. Hegius, Goswin of Holem, the head of a school of Brethren that had 2000 students, Willem Fredricks, the popular preacher of St. Martin's Church of Groningen. There was also the second generation of admirers; Albert Hardenberg and Gerhard Geldenhauer, who wrote biographies of him. These men became leaders in the reformatory movement in the Netherlands and Germany either directly or indirectly through their contributions to Humanism.

Through his writings Wessel influenced Luther and Zwingli and a host of the XVI century readers. He did not influence Luther as much as Zwingli. Luther read Wessel more for reassurance; Zwingli read for doctrine and derived much of his doctrine on the Lord's Supper from Wessel.

Wessel did not only influence the Reformation indirectly, through his scholarship and humanistic contributions, but he was also a reformer at heart. He was a reformer both in criticizing abuses as well as in his emphasis on Biblical doctrine.

In an age of legalism and institutionalism Wessel's mind had no patience with the professional attitude of the Church. He insisted on the principle of love as opposed to legal authority. For that reason he severely condemned all the innovations of institutionalism as: works of superrogation, the Church's right to act as mediator of divine grace, judicial confession and the penetential system, indulgences, endowment of masses, pilgrimages, celibacy, asceticism, monastacism, the superstitious worship of Mary, though he permitted veneration. (1)

Condemning institutional religion, Wessel also condemned the paraphanalia of holiness that are a part of such religion: the observance of special days, devotions at certain shrines, the use of the crucifix, the rosary, etc. In Fact, Wessel absolutely refused to use a prayerbook and the rosary. The monks could not understand this. Wessel frequently spent some time at Mt. St. Agnes near Zwolle. When the monks saw that he used no rosary, they asked him why he didn't pray. "He replied that by the grace of God he did indeed try to pray all the time; nevertheless each day he recited the Lord's Prayer once, and hoped that the purity of that prayer would suffice even if he read it only once a year". (2)

(1) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 147
(2) Geldenhauer, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 346

Wessel detested these mechanical devices, for he conceived worship as a communion with his God. We might say he was a mystic.

Wessel also was free to criticise corruptions as he noticed them. At the University of Paris he was shocked at the moral life and seems to have helped to reform university life. (1) His criticism of monastic life was so severe that he gained the hatred of the monks, especially the mendicants. In fine, Wessel was a man of action. "He learned languages, changed systems, fought his way in the world, disputed, strove, contradicted reigning opinions, and burned with a desire to apply his hand to the improvement and reformation of the corrupt state of the Church" (2)

THEOLOGY

Wessel did not only influence the Reformation indirectly through his Humanistic and personal contributions, but he also affected the Reformation directly through his theology. He had the embryo of the Biblical theology that produced the Reformation in his heart. Although it is true that Wessel's chief interest in early life was purely academic; yet in later life he became a deep theologian and spoke with authority.

Catholic writers, however, insist that Wessel's theology is fundamentally Catholic. "Yet in those points which touch the fundamental doctrines of the Reformers, Wessel stands entirely on Catholic ground" Again, "He cannot be regarded as a precursor of the Reformation." (3)

(1) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 78
(2) Ullmann, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 272
(3) Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XV, p. 290

This is a definitely biased attitude to take. Some Protestants also are guilty of this bias. Miller evaluates such Catholic and Protestant writers and adds, "However, the more modern Catholic writers are disposed to make important concessions to their Protestant opponents, and it seems probable that Wessel's spiritual affiliation with the Reformers will ultimately be recognized by all parties". (1)

Wessel was a Protestant in his theology. For that reason he was suspected of heresy. His theology made it unsafe for him at Paris and made him unwelcome at Heidelberg. Erasmus said that Wessel taught all that Luther taught, but in a less violent manner. (2) Wessel was a Protestant, for he accepted the characteristic principles of the Reformation: the formal and the material principle as well.

Scripture

Wessel learned to love the Bible in the schools of the Brethren. This love for Scripture guided him throughout life. As one reads his writings one is astounded by the Scriptural tone that pervades his writings and by the abundant and intelligent quotations from Scriptures. The Biblical imagery found especially in his letters shows that he was familiar with Scriptures. (3) The Scriptural tone of sections of the Farrago is reverent and delightful. (4)

His reverence for the "Sacred Page" led him to the original. With his knowledge of Hebrew and Greek Wessel "dug into the text". The reverent and scholarly exegesis Wessel offers both in the Hebrew (5)

(1) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 130
(2) Ibid., p. 129
(3) Letter to Bernard of Meppen, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 246-8
(4) Farrago, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 158-9
(5) "Sacrament of the Eucharist", Miller-Scudder, op. cit. Vol. II., pp. 25, 40-1

and in the Greek (1) and the Latin (2) is remarkable and inspirational.

Wessel not only loved the Bible, but he also made the Bible the sole authority in religious matters. He ascribed authority to the Bible, because he regarded the whole Bible as the infallible revelation of God in all its parts. He says in a letter; "Scripture is a connected whole, every part of which must be inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore must be true" (3).

He was willing to be guided and reproved by this Bible. Here is a remarkable statement: "I wish to affirm nothing but what is in agreement with Holy Writ. Moreover, if it differs anywhere from the Holy Scripture, when I am convinced of it, I will quickly recall it". (4) A complaint of a theologian to Wessel on this point sounds much like the complaints Luther heard, "I do not intend to assail you with arguments that hard unconquerable undaunted head of yours which yields neither to the hammer of common belief nor to the sword of the authority of the ancient Fathers". (5)

Wessel, furthermore, accepted the Church because of the Bible and not vice versa. For that reason he regarded the fathers, councils, and pope only if they were tested by Scripture. As he stated in his letter to Hoeck, he believed not <u>in</u> but <u>with</u> the Church. (6) Wessel recognized the uncertainty connected with making the pope or any human body the standard

(1) Farrago, ibid, p. 154
(2) Ibid., p. 302
(3) Letter, Miller-Scudder, Vol. I, p. 252
(4) Farrago, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol II, p. 282
(5) Letter of Hoeck, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 277
(6) Letter to Hoeck, ibid., p. 299

the authority on doctrine. A pertinent remark of Wessel is in place; "But he ought never to subscribe to any statement of an assembly against his conscience, so long as it seems to him to assert anything contrary to Scripture". (1)

Justification

Aside from the formal principle, Wessel also taught the material principle of the Reformation - justification by faith alone. In this doctrine, Wessel "was as much in harmony with Paul as Luther was in 1522 or any Protestant after him". (2) A quotation from his "De Magnitudine Passionis" proves this;

> "Arbitramur hominem justificari per fidem Jesu Christi abusque operibus (Rom. 3,28), et fides sine operibus ermortua est (James 2,27): diversum discunt Apostolus Paulus et Jacobus, verum non adversum. Communis utrique sententia est, justum ex fide vivere, fide inquam, per delectionem operante". (3)

His brillaint theses on justification (4) as well as chapters two and six in the "Sacrament of the Eucharist" show how clearly Wessel thought on this doctrine. (5)

Wessel believed that we are justified by faith; yet faith active in love. He, like any good Lutheran, cannot conceive of a dead faith. Faith and faithfulness belong together. Though Wessel might sometimes speak of "infusing love", this does not necessarily mean that he had the Catholic conception of justification.

(1) Miller-Scudder, Vol. II, p. 204
(2) Hyma, op. cit., p. 213
(3) Gieseler, op. cit., p. 172
(4) Farrago, Miller-Scudder, Vol. II, p. 144-7
(5) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 3-20

We see that from his emphasis on the fact that salvation is not gained by our works. In a letter to a nun, whom he advised not to chastise her body, he said, "No one shall be saved by his own merits or his own righteousness. There is only one sacrifice of the great High Priest, and only so far as we partake of this are we sanctified and pure in heart". (1) Urging the nun to accept the righteousness of Christ, he says, "What then is the use of all this needless hardship in trying to attain the impossible?" (2) Another statement makes this clear, "Whoever believes that he shall be justified by his own works does not know what righteousness is". (3)

Denying salvation by works, Wessel disparaged the claims of the Medieval Church of a treasury of merits and pointed to the perfect justification of Christ. "Hence, too, in his own sacrifice for sin he has made perfect propitiation for the people, perfect reconcilliation, perfect purification, perfect restoration, perfect justification, perfect sublimation, perfect atonement in the fullness of grace and truth". (4) Admitting that there was a treasury of merits, he said that Jesus was the great treasure of the Church, and God - not the pope - dispenses the merit of Christ.

Note the evangelical tone in this remark." But in my stead ruined

(1) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 243
(2) Ibid., p. 244-5
(3) Miller-Scudder, Vol. I, p. 131
(4) Farrago, Miller-Scudder, Vol. II, p. 232

as I was, thy body, my Savior, was broken -- and so broken that the Judge was reconciled, the Advocate was moved to praise, and the Executioner was confounded". (1) "If Salvation is real, Jesus truly saves his people from their sins; if it is perfect, he completely saves them from their sin, and therefore he saves them from all sin". The clearest exposition may be found in his lesson from the dying thief on the cross:

> "He (the thief) teaches us how we may be saved - namely, by confessing our own worthlessness and our Redeemer's innocence. He likewise teaches us how we may forthwith pass into the kingdom. For through penitence, confession and faith -- at whatever hour -- we shall enter just as did this man, who, though he had in every form of robbery and ended little short of blasphemy, with but three sentences passed from punishment into the palace". (2)

The Church

Wessel held up the ideals of the Apostolic Church. He considered the Church, not as an ecclesiastical system, but as a communion of saints, which is not disrupted by quarrels or factions. He taught the universal priesthood of all believers.

Wessel was also a forerunner of the Reformation in his conception of ecclesiastical authority. He believed that not the pope, but Christ was the head of the Church. (3) Not membership, but belief in Christ makes one a member of the Church. In Wessel's theology, the unity of the Church under the pope was accidental, and the aut ority of the pope was conditional on the Gospel. All the prerogatives and powers of the

(1) Eucharist, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 9
(2) Farrago, Miller-Scudder, ibid. p. 101
(3) Ibid., p. 109

pope beyond and above the ordinary pastor was purely jurisdictional. Thus he denied the plenary authority of the pope. In the Farrage he simply states, "The common belief of the absolute rule of the Roman pontiff is untenable". (1) His attitude seems to be very evangelical, "A true prelate is one who sits in Peter's seat by legitimate title ... It follows, therefore, that frequently a true pope is a false apostle". (2) Wessel severely condemns the false prelates in the following words, " Everyone (prelate), therefore, no matter how high his station, in so far as he opposing the will of Christ offends the "little ones" and hinders them in the straight paths of truth and life is ANTICHRIST". (3)

A pope is to be heeded only insofar as he displays wisdom. Since the pope, like St. Peter, can err, he is subject to censorship. He goes even so far as to say, "When a wise man differs with the pope, one should stand by or agree with the wise man rather than the pope". (4) In a letter to Hoeck he said, "I do not think that anything that was settled by Boniface VIII or Clement after him or Gregory ought to be considered in the rule of faith". (5) Here he agreed with Gerson, whom he cites.

Wessel had no sympathy with sacerdotalism and the hierarchy. His teaching on justification, his conception of the sacraments, and his individual interpretation of the Bible show that. He regarded the hierarchy as pastoral - as physicians of the soul. Wessel had no sympathy with an institution to intervene between God and the soul.

(1) Farrago, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 202
(2) Ibid. p. 178
(3) Ibid. p. 173
(4) Ibid. p. 177
(5) Ibid. p. 301

Such assumptions he considered usurpations. The priesthood existed only for the edification of the Church.

As for the corrupt and negligent clergy, Wessel felt that they should not be tolerated. He believed in a recall method to get rid of the undesirable prelate or even pope.

A word might be also said about monasticism. Wessel denied the special sanctity of the monastic life. He did not fight the institution as such, since he felt that many monks were leading useful lives. In his older days he lived among monks and urged them to take up languages and humanistic studies. Wherever Wessel saw corruption he did not remain silent.

Penance

Denying the judicial and sacerdotal aspect of the priesthood, Wessel insisted penance was merely sacramental. The keys that the Lord promised were not judiciary. Wessel defines the key as, "... that key is the Holy Spirit and the grace of God bestowed through it, and the love of God diffused in the hearts of those who have been quickened into life". (1)

With that conception of the keys, Wessel rejected the whole penitential system. He denied that satisfactions should be imposed. In relating the parable of the Prodigal Son he said, "Was any sort of papal indulgences necessary for this returning son? Obviously a complete turn to God is in itself the fruit meet for repentance. Here conversion alone is satisfaction". (2) Or again, "Since his heart

(1) Farrago, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 192
(2) Ibid., p. 225

has been humbled, he already is justified, he has received the forgiveness of his sins. Hence neither contrition, as a first essential, nor satisfaction, as a last, is necessary for justification of a sinner in the Sacrament of Penance". (1) The only works of penance acceptable to God are love, joy, gratitude.

Indulgences

Denying the penetential system, Wessel found no room for indulgences in the accepted sense of the term. He attacked the whole system much more violently than Luther as contrary to Scripture and injurious to Christian morality.

In attacking indulgences Wessel denied the theory that the priest had any judicial authority. He said in a letter to Hoeck, "Christ gave distinct authority concerning the remission of sins; he made no mention of any authority for the remission of punishments" (2) Later on he says:

> "As regards punishments, until I am better informed, I simply hold that the punishment is remitted together with the remission of sin, and that no one who is altogether free from a sin is therefore liable to punishment. For the fact that cleansing is imposed is due to imperfect grace, and that with it certain venial sins still remain. But as these sins are not deadly ~~the power of the pope to~~ their punishment is merely temporal." (3)

Thus denying the power of the pope to grant indulgences we might summarize his argument in the words of Miller:

> "The power of binding and loosing possessed by the apostles was used 'in the exercise of their ministry, not of their authority'. Neither they nor their successors had any right to impose penalties on account of sins which God had freely forgiven. That the Church

(1) Ibid., p. 21
(2) Farrago, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 306
(3) Letter to Hoeck, Ibid., Vol. I, p. 307

That the Church has done this is no proof that it is right, for grave errors have crept into her usages and wolves have usurped the place of her shepherds. Some of her popes have been perjurers. God is the only one who knows the heart, and he Alone can bestow forgiveness and grant indulgence. But plenary indulgence God grants to no one in this life, since no one is absolutely sinless. But if God does not grant such indulgence how can the pope?" (1)

Purgatory

Since Wessel denied the judicial authority of the priest in penance, he did not look upon the fire of purgatory as punitive, but rather as purgative.

He looked upon purgatory as purgative in which the soul was purified though an increasing knowledge and love of God. Miller well summarizes Wessel's viewpoint:

"The religious life begins when the impulse of love to Christ moves our hearts. That love as it increases in this life purifies our natures; in the future life; in the very presence of Christ, that purification is completed and the soul is brought into perfect conformity with the will of God. But even the day of heaven dawns gradually and heavenly perfection is not achieved at once. Though we have no sin in that blissful life, our love for Christ being imperfect is subject to growth. We are accepted as spotless and perfect, but we are still wayfarers journeying toward more perfect love and obedience". (2)

Purgatory, rather than being a place of torment, is heaven itself. The fire is not to be avoided, but welcomed. To deny a person this privilege would rob him of great blessings.

"If Peter or Paul wished to remove this fire by means of indulgences, he would be exceedingly harsh; for he would take away all the splendor of the soul's most brilliant and gratifying achievement, as well as the pleasure of the recipient". (3)

(1) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 180
(2) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 177
(3) Farrago, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 297

His conception of purgatory was that of a beautiful, spiritual, religious experience.

As for praying for the dead, Wessel was not a Catholic either. He explicitly says, " he errs if he asks that they (the dead) be loosed from their sins, just as he errs if he asks an angel to be freed from sorrow". (1)

Wessel, however, did believe in a prayer for the dead - a prayer that the departed friends might make progress and increase in love in the heavenly life. He adds a personal note in the letter:

> "...if anyone prays that these be loosed from their sins even though his prayer proceed out of piety, it nevertheless has error mingled with it. As to this, I have said that I doubted whether I wanted any such prayer of the pious to be offered for me when dead. I do wish that they would pray for my sanctification, and for my progress into the light of the approaching day that shall shine brighter and brighter... so that I may actually see all the treasures of God's house in Christ, -- those vast treasures of wisdom, glory, and love". (2)

(1) Letter to Bernard of Meppen, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. 1 p. 249
(2) Letter to Bernard Meppen, Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I p. 248

The Eucharist

Though Wessel seemed to have a Biblical conception of the sacraments when he said, " Participation in the sacraments is a work of grace, not of righteousness", (1) yet Wessel prepared the way for Reformed Protestantism. The Swiss Reformers, especially Zwingli, were greatly influenced by Wessel, who was their spiritual father. Miller claims that "Zwingli apparently formed his memorial theory of the Eucharist as a result of his reading Wessel's long devotional treatise on that subject, which came into his hands about 1520, when his religious ideas were still plastic. The conception there presented was one that commended itself to the noble rationalism which was such a marked characteristic of the Swiss Reformer". (2)

The whole doctrine of the Swiss Reformer on the memorial character of the Eucharist can be found in Wessel's treatise, The Eucharist. In fact, Wessel's disciple, Honius, was the first one to say "is" means "represents". He crystallized into one statement what Wessel so clearly taught. (3) As we analyze Wessel's doctrine, we will see how much the Catholic Encyclopedia is willing to overlook in its desire to maintain that Wessel was a Catholic at heart. We read: "He emphasizes too strongly the subjective activity of the faithful in sharing the fruits of communion and of the sacrifice of the Mass (opus operantis) so that the objective working of the

(1) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 216
(2) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 145
(3) Ibid., p. 164

sacrament (opus operatum) seems to impaired". (1) Wessel does not "emphasize too strongly", but he insists that the sacrament is only subjective as opposed to the prevalent dogma of the Church. Wessel was as far removed from Rome as Zwingli was.

Wessel regarded the Eucharist as a symbol that nourishes and refreshes by virtue of its symbolism. Its power revolves not about the miraculous presence of Christ, but about the historic Christ, whose life and death are held in remembrance through the Sacrament.

Since the Sacrament was a memorial character, the eating and drinking is a spiritual process. As a proof Wessel offers the following:

> "Hence when Paul says, 'Our fathers did eat the same food', he assumes that to eat is to be spiritually affected; and because this is a mental process, he extends it to include alternate differences of time. For, inasmuch as the Lord's body did not yet exist, the Fathers could not eat of it corporeally. In like manner today all the laity drink of the Lord's blood. For if the fathers drank the same spiritual draught, much more evidently do men of our day drink it" (2)

This spiritual eating Wessel places above the sacramental eating in the Mass. He says:

> "Indeed in some respects spiritual communion is more fruitful than sacramental, at least in this respect, that in the former so far as the laity are concerned they both eat and drink, while in the latter they only eat, -- unless by a blessed draught they are filled with spiritual peace. The latter is bound down by time and place, is permitted to certain persons only, and is compelled to observe in a particular form; the former, springing from a pious heart in faith unfeigned rejects no age, no sex, no race, and is adapted to all places and all times. The latter is often harmful; the former is always fruitful and salutary". (3)

(1) Cath. Ency. Vol. p. 590
(2) The Sacrament of the Eucharist, Miller-Soudder, Vol. II, p. 69
(3) Ibid. p. 56

It is true, Wessel spoke of a corporeal presence of Christ in the Sacrament. He said "... I maintain that in commemorating Christ we not only have him present with us in the body to strengthen us, but that we even corporeally eat of Him". (1) Wessel, however, explains himself when he says:

> "When we receive the Sacrament, we must piously believe that the Lord Jesus is not only spiritually but corporeally present in accordance with the Word that was quoted above, 'where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'. Nor is this inconsistent; for, if He is Sacramentally present in several places, he can do more wonderful things than these without a miracle. May after the resurrection we too will be able to do what only the angels do now. For our bodies will be fashioned after Christ's glorified body. One soul which lifts a hand here, lowers it there". (2)

Wessel believed in a spiritual eating and drinking -- even apart from the material elements. In this he was the forefather of the Quakers. (3) He says, "To the spiritually faithful he is also given -- even in bodily presence -- outside of the Eucharist and apart from the form of bread and wine, since he is given to those who believe in him. For if none hath life except he eat his flesh and drink his blood, and on the other hand, he that believeth on him hath eternal life, it must obviously be admitted that everyone that believeth eateth his flesh and drinketh his blood". (4)
His argument can briefly be summed up. If remembrance and the spiritual activities that follow it -- faith and obedience -- are the essential things in the Sacrament, then the Sacrament may be celebrated wholly apart from the visible bread and wine and the service of the priest.

(1) Ibid. p. 60
(2) The Sacrament of the Eucharist, op. cit., p. 61
(3) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 145,175
(4) The Sacrament of the Eucharist, op. cit., p. 56

This is purely Quaker theology. (1)

As for the benefits of this Sacrament, Wessel outlined psychological benefits derived through the ordinary operations of the mind. This was directly in opportion to the ex opere operato conception of the day. Wessel recognized three faculties of the soul: 1/ memory 2/ intelligence 3/ will. The object of the Sacrament was to move those faculties. To effect the will was the supreme experience of the Sacrament. This, however, was done through much contemplation and preparation.

A certain preparation is required. This differs with the ability of the individual and also differs in its benefits. Thus Wessel says:

> "Therefore the first step of righteousness that is required of all faithful disciples in faithfully believing and remembering the Lord Jesus in all their ways. The second is that they should diligently consider all things that are his. The third is that after tasting of his sweetness they should at least make ready to imitate him. The last is that bearing the reproach of Christ they should glory in his cross. And thus, being crucified together with the Lord Jesus, in the day of the Lord, that shall come swiftly as though it were today, however great a malefactor and robber he may be, he shall be with him in paradise." (2)

Though many could only reach the stage of remembrance, yet it was nothing to be alarmed about, since the ordinary layman was but a "little one". The adult Christians are the monks and priests and those who have specialized in religion. Here we find an inconsistency in Wessel, since he taught the universal priesthood of all believers and the parity of all Christians.

(1) Miller-Schadder, op. cit., Vol. I. p. 196
(2) The Sacrament of the Eucharist, op. cit., p. 42-3

We can sum Wessel's thoughts very well in quotation. We read:

> "Moreover in partaking of the Eucharist we not only eat but also are eaten. For we take of it and are strengthened just as when we take and eat food; yet because this strengthening is effected not by any power of ours, but by the power of the bread we take, it transforms us into itself; and hence we say that we are eaten. It is just as when iron is made red hot, the iron absorbs the fire and yet is entirely possessed thereby. Hence the fire eats the iron and is also eaten by it. But mental changes are even more to the point; e.g., the pupil's faithful belief eats, so to speak, the teacher's wisdom; and the love of two lovers is fed by love".(1)

In justifying his opinion Wessel states:

> "I do not think I am wrong in this opinion. If, however, I err, I regard the error but slight, since it begets piety and will not be fruitless; and I know that I shall reap great benefit from remembering his name, even as Paul did not neglect any opportunity to serve Christ". (2)

"THE EUCHARIST" COMPARED WITH TAULER'S "DEUTSCHE THEOLOGIE"

Since Wessel's treatise on the Eucharist is a devotional treatise, it contains no formal argument. Though it is a devotional treatise, one can see the anti-papal character of the treatise. Wessel states his conception of purgatory (ch. 10,15), his doctrine on indulgences (ch. 10), and his doctrine on the authority of the pope. Furthermore, two chapters of this treatise especially state his doctrine of justification by faith as clearly as Wessel ever expressed himself (ch. 2 and 6). Wessel does not attack transubstantiation, but simply ignores it and destroys it by advocating a spiritual conception of the Eucharist.

(1) Ibid., p. 52
(2) Ibid., p. 59

The treatise on the Eucharist is essentially a devotional book written in the last years of Wessel's life. It is designed to assist the communicant in having such an attitude of heart and mind as will enable him to receive the most benefit from the Sacrament. We might say that it is a manual of preparation for the Eucharist.

The theme of the book with certain variations is this: "It is remembrance of Him that constitutes the true Eucharist". Using this phrase, "This do in remembrance of me", as a point of departure, Wessel tries to show how the individual can be led into closer communion with Christ. Since Wessel spiritualizes the Sacrament, the dominating doctrine is that the Eucharist is simply a memorial sacrament.

It seems that the Dutch scholars were especially anxious that Luther approve this treatise, even more so than any other work of Wessel. Rhodius asked Luther to grant this treatise his acceptance and public approval. In spite of Carlstadt's protests, Luther refused.

At Luther's table Carlstadt was challenged by Luther to undertake a defense of the Eucharist. Carlstadt accepted, and Miller claims that this was the beginning of Carlstadt's alienation as well as the beginning of the controversies that later divided Protestantism. (1) Since Luther refused to accept the treatise, he wrote a letter of introduction for Rhodius to Oecolampadius requesting him to read it and give his opinion. Oecolampadius, however, did not care to enter in controversy with Luther and urged Rhodius that the treatise

(1) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 188

be shown to Zwingli. This was done. Since Zwingli was still in the plastic stage, this book helped him to formulate his doctrine that separated him from Luther.

Now the question arises, "Why was Luther so opposed to this book that contained such a deadly attack on the papal system?" Answer: Luther had something better!

Not very long before Rhode came to Luther, Luther had issued two editions of the "Deutsche Theologie" (1516 and 1519). This book was also anti-papal and was likewise put on the Romish index. That happened as late as 1621. The author, Tauler, was excommunicated, and the pope consigned his books to be burned. (1)

Though this book is decidedly anti-papal, it approached the whole matter from a different angle than the Eucharist of Wessel. True, like the Eucharist, it is also a devotional treatise and has some common material. Both stress personal experience apart from the clergy. Wessel says:

> "What benefit that can be derived from conversations with men or from the reading of books can be compared with that which we obtain from this most holy and blessed name? All else is unfruitful except in so far as it agrees and harmonizes with his most holy name. Great then is the gain of those who meditate, ponder, seek and reflect on him..."(2)

Tauler sounds much the same when he says:

> "Niemand gedenke dass er zu dieser wahren Erkenntniss oder zu Christi Leben komme mit viel Fragen, oder von Hörensagen, oder mit Lesen, Studieren, mit grossen, hohen Kunsten u. Meisterschaften; oder mit hoher natürlicher Vernunft. (3)

(1) Ullmann, op. cit. Vol. II. p. 211
(2) The Eucharist, op. cit., Vol. II. p. 58
(3) Deutsche Theologie, p. 38-9

Like Wessel he seems to emphasize the inspiration of true love through the Sacrament, though he probably had the Romish conception of the Mass. He says, "Und wer dasselbe (Liebe) empfähet in dem h. Sakraments, der hat Christum wahrhaftig und wohl empfangen; und je mehr man desselben (Sakrament), emphahet je mehr Christus, je weniger desselben, je weniger Christus; das ist die Frucht des Sakraments". (1)

We might say that Luther places the Deutsche Theologie next to the Bible and St. Augustine because 1/ the manner of man that the author was 2/ the help that it gave Luther and 3/ the contents of the book itself.

Tauler (1290-1361) must have appealed much more to Luther than Wessel. He was a great celebrity as a preacher among the laity. He was a Dominican monk who opposed the papacy, the interdict, and excommunication. In his early life he was a scholastic and studied, like Wessel, at Cologne, where Thomism was the prevailing dogma. Somewhere around his fourty-eighth year Tauler experienced a "conversion". He was preaching in a town for twelve weeks. He, however, gave way to speculation and displays of learning, but did not get into the heart. A layman pointed out his pharisaical weakness and urged him to put away his "sensuous and rational speculation." Tauler gave up preaching and for two years he through absolute resignation strove to conform to the image of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Having thus disciplined himself, he became a much more fiery preacher.

(1) Ibid., p. 107-8

During the two years of discipline Tauler was despised by his fellow monks for taking things so seriously. Since Luther experienced the same thing, he must have felt attracted to Tauler, for they had much in common. Besides Tauler's opposition to the papacy, there was the burning desire to know the truth. The Christian character of Tauler so deeply impressed Luther that he called him a "man of God".

Luther was attracted to Tauler, because Tauler helped him in those pitiful days of soul struggle in the monastery. Staupitz was the living example of the Deutsche Theologie. He undoubtedly introduced Luther to Tauler's Deutsche Theologie and urged Luther to read Tauler. It was through the encouragement of Staupitz that Luther later edited an edition of the Deutsche Theologie as early as 1516. Thus reading this book and seeing its principles so clearly expressed in the life of Staupitz, Luther received much light and help when he needed it so sorely. Luther in a letter to Staupitz, written a few months before Staupitz died in 1524, confessed to Staupitz that "...it does not become me to forget or be ungrateful to you, through whom the light of the Gospel first began to shine out of darkness in my heart". (1) It is of interest to note that Staupitz, possibly through the influence of Tauler, abolished the reading of St. Augustine at the monastery tables and instituted the reading of Scripture as early as 1512, when Luther became a Doctor of Theology. (2)

Tauler's Deutsche Theologie really contains the experiences of a man who went through much spiritual tribulation. For that reason we can at once see why the book captivated Luther the way it did.

(1) Ullmann, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 243
(2) Ibid., p. 238

Since Tauler's whole endeavors were directed to the achievement of an absolute and complete and humble resignation in all things and to conforming to the image of the Savior, we are not surprised to find that submission is also the theme of his Deutsche Theologie. In this mystical and philosophical treatise Tauler explains the truths of Christianity as applied to the individual. He gives an explanation of Christianity to make it appeal to an intellectual man like Luther. Tauler shows the necessity of Christ being the God-man in such a way that it appeals to the intellectual man. He says:

> "der Mensch vermöchte es nicht ohne Gott u. Gott sollte u. wollte es nicht tun ohne den Menschen. Darum nahm Gott menschliche Natur oder Menschheit an sich u. ward vermenscht (d.i. mit menschlicher Natur vereinigt) u. der Mensch war vergottet (d.i. mit göttlicher Natur vereinigt); also geschah die Besserung. Also muss auch sein Fall gebessert werden". (1)

Showing what attitude the intelligent man must have before it is possible to have faith, Tauler begins his book with the definition of the Eternal Good on the basis of I Cor. 13,10. At first reading it sounds pantheistic, but later he defines himself more clearly when he says, "bei dem Vater verstehe ich das vollkommene, einfältige Gut, das da Alles ist und über Alles, und ohne das, und ausser dem kein wahres Wesen, noch kein wahres Gut ist, und ohne das kein wahres gutes Werk je geschah, noch immer geschieht." (2)

Due to sin man is separated from God. He gives all the things that separate man from God. His keen mind is sensitive to the manifestations of sin in the individual. He gives all the coordinates of sin as,

(1) Deutsche Theologie, p.p. 8
(2) Ibid., p. 126

"Und diese Widerwilligkeit wider Gott heisst man und ist Ungehorsam, Adam, Ichheit, Selbstheit, Eigenwilligkeit, Sünde:- oder der alte Mensch und Abkehren und Abscheiden von Gott: das ist alles Eins." Again he says, "...denn wo und wenn man spricht von Adam, und Ungehorsam und von einem alten Menschen, Ichheit, Eigenwillen, und Eigenwilligkeit, Selbstheit, Ich, Mein, Natur, falsches Licht, Teufel, Sünde; das ist alles gleich und Eins.

Though by nature sin in the manifestations of selfishness separates man from God, there is a chance for man to conquer that sorrow for sin and selfishness, a new man of righteousness will be born. This new man is expressed by coordinate expressions that Tauler gives in the following words, "...wenn man spricht von Gehorsam, und einem neuen Menschen, von dem wahren Lichte, und von der wahren Liebe, und von Christi Leben: das ist alles Eins; und wo derselben eins ist, da sind sie Alle; und wo ihrer Eines gebricht oder nicht ist, da ist ihrer keins; denn es ist Alles Eins wahrhaftig und wesentlich." (1)

After this brief sketch of Tauler's ideas, we can immediately see the superiority of the Deutsche Theologie over Wessel's Eucharist. (2) Tauler confirmed Luther's desire to put his trust in Christ alone. Here Luther got a clearer view of morally creative faith. Tauler placed many of the Biblical sentiments into Luther's heart, and Luther never forgot them. He read and reread it for comfort and reassurance.

The two books, though both aim at the same objective, are entirely different. The Deutsche Theologie is so superior to Wessel's

(1) Deutsche Theologie, p. 107
(2) Ullmann gives a brief summary of this work. Ullmann, op. cit., Vol. II, pp 220-9

Eucharist that one even hesitates to compare them. In fact, after reading the Deutsche Theologie, one cannot but help wishing that it would be republished for us today, who need that inspiration. No one single book outside of the Bible is qualified to speak to the Twentieth Century as Tauler's Deutsche Theologie.