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The Educational Ideas and Methods of the Brethren of the Common Life

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THE EDUCATIONAL IDEAS AND METHODS OF THE BRETHREN OF THE COMMON LIFE

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by

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CHAPTER I

THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

There is a difference of opinion among modern scholars as to the relative importance and significance of the Brethren of the Common Life in the history of education. Elwood Cubberley[1] and Elmer Wilds[2] give scanty attention to the educational work of the Brethren. Albert Hyma,[3] on the other hand, finds in their work the beginnings of modern education. This study was made to investigate the educational work of this fifteenth century religious association and to examine whether and to what extent the Devotio Moderna and the Brethren of the Common Life was a source of educational reforms in both religious and secular subjects in pre-Reformation Europe. Because of the general character of the work of the Brethren, this will include not only formal education in the schools but also, to a certain extent, popular education of the masses.

The Brethren of the Common Life and their educational work are often slighted or neglected in a history of

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[1]Elwood P. Cubberly, The History of Education (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920).

[2]Elmer H. Wilds, The Foundations of Modern Education (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1947).

[3]Albert Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publ. Co., 1950).

medieval and renaissance education. The reasons which appeared in the research for this study may be rather difficult to prove because of their intangible quality and subjective element. For one thing, the Devotio Moderna of which the Brethren of the Common Life was the core, was essentially a mystical and popular movement, and such currents within a people are very hard to trace. For another reason, most of their activity took place in a back-country section of what is now the Netherlands, a country which is today a minor European nation, still speaking local dialects and languages. For a third point, it seems that the work of the Brethren was overshadowed by the times and activities in which the rest of Europe found itself: the great thirteenth century, the revival of learning in Italy, and the Reformation.

The most valuable sources of information in this study were the work on late medieval Europe by C. Ullmann, translated into English under the title, Reformers before the Reformation[4] and the efforts of the Dutch-American scholar, Albert Hyma.[5] The original sources consulted were the Lives

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[4]C. Ullmann, Reformers before the Reformation, translated by R. Menzies (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863), II.

[5]Hyma, op. cit.

of Groote and his Disciples[6] by Thomas a Kempis who was himself a member of the Brethren, and the Chronicle of Mount Saint Agnes[7] by the same author.

Because the growth and work of the Brethren extended over a long period of time and in a large area, it was rather difficult properly to limit the scope of this study. For this reason this study was confined to their activity in the Netherlands in the period from approximately 1380 to 1498, a span which includes their beginnings to the climax of their early work in the person of Alexander Hegius. The Brethren were not founded principally for educational purposes. As a result, it was necessary to examine their whole growth and work in order to obtain a clear picture of their educational methods and aims. Ullmann indicates the character of this growth:

> Whatever is truly great and profound in moral and scientific life, makes its appearance not with pomp and tumult, but in unostentatious silence. Its growth is slow, and its root secret. The seed is cast forth, and often the sower scarcely lives to see it spring. But if there be true life in it, its day comes, and its sun shines, and it springs and waxes into a fruitful and umbrageous tree. One of the most pleasing duties of the historian is to investigate phenomena of this description, in which the quiet life and labour

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[6]Thomas a Kempis, Lives of Groot and his Disciples, translated by J. P. Arthur under the title, Founders of the New Devotion (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1905).

[7]Thomas a Kempis, Chronicle of Mount Saint Agnes, translated by J. P. Arthur (K. Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1906).

> of some individual have issued in a result memorable in the history of the world. In this class we may justly reckon the effects produced by the establishments and schools of the Brethren of the Common Lot in Holland and Germany. The heart-felt piety of a Gerhard Groot, Florentius Radewins, and Thomas a Kempis, confined though it was, within the narrowest sphere, and directed exclusively to practical objects, yet founded the institutions which sent forth the great restorers of science and learning in these countries.[8]

The background to the educational work of the Brethren in this study included: the medieval school, the rise of public-controlled education, and the mystical movements in northern Europe during the late medieval period. It is against this background that the philosophy and work of the founder of the Brethren, Gerard Groote and ths life and educational work among the Brethren are seen in the perspective of their times. The aims and reforms of two of their outstanding schools, those of John Cele and Alexander Hegius, also compliment this educational picture. As a result, the scope of this study might be summarized in Ullmann's words: "Their chief occupation was the religious training of the common people and the education of the young, and in both of these departments they manifestly formed an epoch."[9]

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[8] Ullmann, op. cit., II, 10.

[9] Ibid., p. 94.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE BRETHREN OF THE COMMON LIFE

To set the scene for the educational work of the Brethren of the Common Life, it is necessary to characterize what appear to be the three most influential factors in its development: 1) the medieval school, 2) the rise of public education in the Netherlands, 3) the development of practical mysticism.

The Medieval School

The average thirteenth and fourteenth century school of Northern Europe which would correspond to our primary or early secondary level of education was still completely under the domination of medieval educational ideas and practice. The schools at this time were very much as the Carlovingian revival had left them.

> The system consisted of two classes of schools; monastic schools, which were taught and superintended by the monks and diocesan schools which came directly under the bishop's jurisdiction.[1]

Of the diocesan schools the most important was the cathedral school, so called because it was maintained at the cathedral

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[1]Pierre Marique, History of Christian Education (New York: Fordham University Press, 1924), I, 137.

of the diocese. It was a development of the school which in the primitive Church was kept in the bishop's house.

> From the ninth century on, the monastic schools seem to have included instruction for boys going into the secular priesthood and for nonclerics (externi) as well as for those who were to become monks (oblati). Famous monastic schools appeared at Monte Cassino and Bobbio in Italy, Reichenau and St. Gallen in Switzerland, Fulda in Germany, and Fleury, Tours, Cluny, Bec, and Corbie in France. The monastic schools dominated the educational scene of Europe from the sixth to the eleventh century. Then, with the growth of town life and the rise in importance of the cathedrals located in the towns, they began to give way to the cathedral schools, which rose to prominence in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[2]

The more advanced secular studies pursued in these schools were the seven liberal arts; of these the first and most important all through the Middle Ages was grammar. For this reason the cathedral schools, as also some of the monastic schools, came to be known as grammar schools. Below the cathedral schools, there were in each diocese song and parish schools. The song schools were organized to train boys for the musical part in the services of the cathedral church.

> The parish churches in the towns or on the manors provided elementary instruction in reading, writing, and music through their parish or song schools. The monasteries, collegiate churches, and cathedrals provided not only song schools for elementary instruction but also secondary and higher instruction in the seven liberal arts, medicine, law and theology. To be sure, not all monasteries, parish churches or cathedrals gave all of this instruction all of the time.[3]

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[2] R. Freeman Butts, A Cultural History of Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1947), p. 173.

[3] Ibid., p. 173.

Recent study, however, has shown that not all the schools in the Middle Ages were conducted by the church. As Butts maintains, "It now is evident that secular schools and lay teachers continued to operate, especially in Italy."[4] Such evidence shows that elementary and secondary education, while neither free in the sense of being gratuitous, nor compulsory for children of a certain age, were not confined to cathedral and monastic schools.

> Parents quite generally, if they had the means, were ready to pay schoolmasters fees to instruct their children. Indeed, some villeins in fourteenth-century England were apparently willing to pay further a fine at the manorial court for having sent their sons to school without their lord's permission.[5]

Of course, the medieval pattern of school control had been centered in the church with the Pope in supreme authority but the local administration was in the hands of the bishop of the diocese or was delegated by him to his _scholasticus_. Marique says concerning the development of this school and teacher control:

> Before the eleventh century the practice of teaching was free, in the sense that it was not controlled by any specific ecclesiastical regulation. Later on, all who intended to teach in a diocese were required to obtain a license from the bishop or those to whom he had delegated his powers in the matter. The recipient of the license was required to take an oath of fealty and

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[4] _Ibid._, p. 168.

[5] Carleton Brown, "Elementary and Secondary Education in the Middle Ages," _Speculum_, XV (October, 1940), 403.

obedience.[6]

Thus the discipline of the schools in each diocese ultimately rested with the ecclesiastical superior who could use coercive measures, even, if need be, excommunication and removal from office of any teacher that was deemed unworthy.[7]

The teaching staff in the diocesan schools was composed of clerics of the diocese, assisted, if need be, by religious and laymen whose services had been engaged with the approval of the bishop or the scholasticus of the diocesan schools.

> Sometimes the bishop himself would teach, though the ordinary teacher was the scholasticus, the bishop's delegate at the cathedral school; not infrequently learned monks or even laymen were engaged to assist the scholasticus in his work.[8]

Teachers were not as uncommon during the Middle Ages as is sometimes supposed, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth century. That elementary and secondary teachers, masters in grammar and of the abacus, and those teaching boys to read and write were numerous not only in Italy but north of the Alps is suggested by an early twelfth century writer who remarks:

> To say nothing of other parts of the Empire, are there not throughout France and Germany, Normandy and England, not only in cities and walled towns, but even in villages, as many learned schoolmasters as there are tax-

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[6] Marique, op. cit., I, 137-8.

[7] Ibid., p. 138.

[8] Ibid., pp. 138-9.

collectors and magistrates?[9]

Also for an adequate picture of education during the Middle Ages, it is well to remember that the church always sponsored elementary instruction. The decrees of councils and synods, the records of cathedrals, parishes, and towns and the testimony of contemporary writers all bear witness to the never flagging interest of the Church in this matter, and one is permitted to draw the conclusion that parish work in the Middle Ages always included elementary instruction of some kind.[10]

The method of teaching was quite crude if we compare it with modern times. In general, the most common method of teaching was probably as follows: the teacher read from his book and dictated the words to the pupil, who repeated the words aloud or perhaps copied them on a wax tablet. The pupil then memorized the words by repetition; if he had a wax tablet or slate, he memorized the words before he wiped it clean for the next day's lesson. Apparently, either little attempt was made to explain the meaning of the words, or the attempt was made without using objects or pictures. However, a good teacher perhaps used vernacular words to explain the Latin words as soon as the phrase, hymn or chant

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[9]Brown, op. cit., p. 402.

[10]Marique, op. cit., I, 140.

was memorized.[11] It has already been noted that owing to the scarcity and high cost of books and writing materials, instruction in the medieval school had to be chiefly oral. A common device to relieve the situation was to spread large skins on the walls, on which were represented in the form of trees, stories and genealogies from the Bible, catalogues of vices and virtues, and other diagrams of a similar nature.[12]

The elementary textbooks of the time were the Latin grammars of Donatus or Cato and the Latin psalter or prayer-book. Latin, of course, was the important language of the whole period.

> In those days when there was no literature or fund of knowledge recorded in the vernacular and when all knowledge handed down by the church was in Latin, learning to read and write Latin had a most practical value. Without it one could not broaden his horizon beyond his own little niche.[13]

Most of the universities of this late medieval period required that their students speak Latin. So we can see that much of the time in the lower school would have to be spent in acquiring proficiency in the Latin language.

As far as discipline goes, the rod was strictly in fashion. This was true in the fourteenth just as much as in the twelfth century. The discipline was harsh, to say the

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[11] Butts, op. cit., p. 184.

[12] Marique, op. cit., I, 138.

[13] Butts, op. cit., pp. 184-5.

least. Corrupt human nature was distrusted. "In 1363, pupils were forbidden the use of benches and chairs, on the pretext that such high seats were an encouragement to pride."[14] For securing obedience, corporal chastisements were used and abused. The rod was regularly resorted to even for didactic purposes, as is shown by the ominous nicknames given to school books such as Sparadorsum (back-sparer).[15] According to a general custom, which shows that this painful matter was not treated altogether without humour, the birches used for rods had to be cut in the copse by the pupils themselves on a merry school excursion arranged for the purpose, when frolics of all kinds were indulged in, and even beer was allowed. The school wits christened this festival virgidemia, a word formed after the analogy of vindemia, i.e., vintage (virga, the rod).[16]

Education as conducted on the elementary level in the monastic and cathedral and parish schools revolved around the ability to read Latin. Writing may sometimes have been learned too, but it was not universally taught.[17] The seven liberal arts constituted what may be called the secondary

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[14]Gabriel Compayre, The History of Pedagogy, translated by W. H. Payne (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1886), p. 76.

[15]Fredrich Paulsen, German Education, Past and Present, translated by T. Lorenz (London: T. F. Unwin, 1908), p. 31.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Butts, op. cit., p. 184.

instruction of the Middle Ages. The liberal arts were distributed into two courses of study, known as the trivium and the quadrivium. The trivium comprised grammar (Latin grammar, of course), dialectics or logic, and rhetoric; and the quadrivium consisted of music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. "In most schools, if any religious instruction was given, it was confined to the explanation of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed."[18]

Student life and activity was quite uninteresting. As Hyma relates in The Christian Renaissance:

> Instruction in the schools was usually personal. In many of them the pupils of all the various grades were assembled in one room, and even where on account of larger numbers the pupils were divided into classes, they were for two or three hours a day grouped in one room again. Sometimes several grades were combined. There was often a considerable number of children belonging to no particular grade at all. Much time as a rule was devoted to the rehearsal of lessons that had never been explained. Not seldom were the pupils left to select the lessons themselves. Every day exactly the same subjects were taught as during the preceding day. Only in the afternoon a slight difference was made between summer and winter programs. The method of instruction was exceedingly monotonous. The pupils were kept busy from six in the morning till four in the afternoon, with an interval of one hour for dinner.[19]

Often poor scholars came from a distance to attend the cathedral schools, and had to endure the greatest hardships to maintain themselves by begging and menial work. Among them

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[18] Albert Hyma, The Christian Renaissance (New York: Century Co., 1924), p. 294.

[19] Ibid., p. 291.

were many who could make no progress in the scholastic disciplines and the medieval curriculum of the time through inability to read or write. Furthermore, the school made no attempt to exercise any moral control over their pupils, with the result that they ran riot.[20]

It seems that in the past, historians have been too ready to limit formal education to the future clergy and the wealthy. But Butts states that:

> It is true that the evidence is rather meager, but it seems clear that schools not only continued to exist but became much more widespread in the later Middle Ages than often has been recognized.[21]

And later in his treatment of this subject, the same author says:

> Viewed from the perspective of modern times, with our stress upon widespread public education, the opportunity for education among the ordinary people of the Middle Ages seems limited indeed . . . [yet] even though the church was not widely concerned with giving every child a chance for education, it is apparent that some steps were taken to provide free education for poor children.[22]

The Third Lateran Council in 1179 decreed that every cathedral church should have a master assigned not only to teach boys who wished to become clerics but also to teach without fee poor children whose parents could not afford to pay for the

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[20]Isaac L. Kandel, "Brethren of the Common Life," Cyclopedia of Education, edited by Paul Monroe (New York: Macmillan Co., 1925), I, 446.

[21]Butts, op. cit., p. 168.

[22]Ibid., p. 178.

instruction. These and other ordinances show that the Church took some steps to provide free instruction for the needy.[23]

It is easy to over-generalize concerning the medieval school. In different parts of northern Europe, ideas and practices differed. And in many places educational procedure advanced considerably by the fourteenth century. For instance, in several of the larger towns in Germany, elementary schools for little children were scattered about in different quarters and suburbs of the town.

> At Lübeck the consuls petitioned the cardinal legate to grant them license to build new schools near the outer parish for the elementary boys, since access to the schools at the great church was difficult for the youngsters because of the dangerous and crowded way. By 1317 there were four elementary schools in Lübeck.[24]

The Growth of Public Education

The second major factor in the development of the educational ideas of the Brethren of the Common Life was the growth of public education in the Netherlands. As we examine the thirteenth and especially the fourteenth centuries, we find that everywhere commerce was rapidly rising. Many northern cities, among them Augsburg, Nüremburg, Magdeburg, Hamburg, Lübeck, Bremen, Ghent, Bruges, Ypres, Antwerp, and

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[23] Ibid., p. 173.

[24] Brown, op. cit., p. 407.

London, were fast becoming great trading cities like their Italian sisters in the South. In the history of these times the Netherlands played a part out of all proportion to their population and material resources. Like ancient Palestine and Greece they afford an example of a group of countries small in area but large in influence.[25] They were small but the route of trade traversed them as it did the Oriental arteries of commerce in the days of the Apostles. "From all nations under the sun" the merchants and travelers came to the Low Countries. "It was here that intellectual as well as religious and commercial currents met and mingled, and from here that they issued forth."[26]

As Eby and Arrowood rightly state, "It is clear that the higher civilization of northern Europe began in the port towns of the Netherlands; this civilization early took on a democratic aspect."[27] The beginnings of the Brethren take place in this period when the northern Netherlands were the scene of constant conflicts of the nobility among themselves, with their vassals, and with the towns, which had so

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[25]Edward W. Miller and Jared W. Scudder, Wessel Gansfort, Life and Writings (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, c.1917), I, 3.

[26]Albert Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1930), p. 18.

[27]Frederick Eby and Charles F. Arrowood, The History and Philosophy of Education; Ancient and Medieval (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940), p. 820.

notably increased in wealth and power. Many towns in the Low Countries had already received charters of rights and privileges from their local lords; sometimes these charters were granted freely by the lord; sometimes they were wrested from him by the burghers.[28] This increase of power on the part of the towns had given rise to a lively interest in political, social, and ecclesiastical questions, and the growing love of liberty had shown itself in a widespread antagonism to the clergy.[29] And it was the towns of the Low Countries which were the first in transalpine Europe to supplant the monasteries as chief seats of learning and art.

Another factor auspicious for educational reform and change was the desire for education on the part of the people. In the period from the end of the twelfth through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the most significant cultural phenomenon in northern Europe was the surging impulse to write and to read.

> The growth of civic life especially in the free towns, the conducting of guild organizations, the great expansion of business and commerce, the establishment of universities with the emphasis upon the higher profession, and finally, the deepening interest in religious literature - all these combined to intensify and spread the desire to write and read among every

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[28] Marique, op. cit., I, 127.

[29] "Brüder des Gemeinsamen Lebens," Realencyclopaedie für Protestantische Theologie und Kirche, edited by J. J. Herzog and Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1897), III, 475.

class of society.[30]

At this time the Netherlands were in many respects the most highly developed country in northern Europe. Their numerous cities were hives of varied industry and centers of international commerce. Local industries were developing into important trades in many places, such as the wool and weaving industry in Flanders. A banking class, first developed in the Italian cities, gradually extended to other commercial centers. The use of money and credit once more took the place everywhere of barter, and commercial transactions, being made easier, became more frequent and important. Trade and industry were furthermore greatly encouraged by the faire or yearly markets which were held in the large inland towns. To these flocked merchants from far and near, and people from the surrounding district, who exchanged not only their wares but ideas and experiences as well. Under these conditions the population of the cities increased rapidly and thus there developed a new class, a new estate, by the side of the nobility, the clergy, and the peasants: the city burghers, who needed for their children a new type of education.[31]

A phenomenon of the rise of the public school is also found in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The move-

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[30]Eby and Arrowood, op. cit., p. 817.

[31]Marique, op. cit., I, 127-8.

ment for town control of schools took place somewhat later in northern Europe than in Italy, just as the growth of the cities themselves occurred later.

> In Germany, for example, in the thirteenth century, many towns were taking steps to establish schools under the control of town authorities. Among these were Cologne, Munich, Lübeck, Breslau, Trier, Hamburg, Hanover, and Dresden. Similar steps were being taken in the Netherlands and to a lesser degree in France.[32]

The rise of these popular schools, controlled and administered by the secular authorities, is somewhat clouded in obscurity. It seems that the town acquired the privileges of patronage by making provisions for a school by the erection of a schoolhouse or a grant towards the salary of the schoolmaster.[33] Up to this time the cathedral and parish schools were the only ones available on the Latin grammar level, and they were wholly inadequate to care for the great numbers who now sought instruction. New schools were necessary. During the early time of development of these burgher schools, there was little change between these and the church schools.

> In general, these schools were religious in aim and Latin in content and represented not so much an effort to establish secular instruction as simply to exert civil control over religious schools.[34]

Thus, at the time of the foundation of the Brethren in

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[32]Butts, op. cit., p. 170.

[33]Paulsen, op. cit., p. 29.

[34]Butts, op. cit., p. 170.

the second half of the fourteenth century, the schools in the Netherlands and Germany were of three types; monastic or cathedral, parish, and municipal.[35] But there was also another element in the development of the schools of the Netherlands. Many temporal lords had obtained permission or had simply gone ahead and erected schools and acquired the right to appoint the schoolmaster.[36] But it must be remembered that these schools were in every way a "Church" school. But there seems to have been some question as to who controlled them. The temporal princes or dukes assumed to exercise control over many schools on the ground that they or their ancestors had founded them.[37] As a result, we have a rather confusing picture of a struggle for control between the church, the nobility and the towns. The sources consulted were indefinite on the subject of how the conflict actually resolved itself, but it seems that as the late medieval period moved to a close, the towns and the nobility resolved their difficulty. In 1290, Floris V gave the school of Dortrecht to "the dear faithful citizens," and the control of schools in all the principal towns of the Netherlands where the nobility was in authority was either conferred as

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[35]Kandel, op. cit., p. 446.

[36]Marinus M. Lourens, Education in the Netherlands (New York: Netherlands Information Bureau, 1942), p. 9.

[37]Eby and Arrowood, op. cit., p. 820.

a gift or was purchased by the city authorities.[38] Since the relation of the town to the church in the matter of school control is an exhaustive study beyond the scope of this study, only the general results of this conflict in the Low Countries will be indicated here. Gradually, however, the towns obtained more control. In many places the schools became a public-parochial institution. Often priests would do the teaching, but the town would pay their salaries and look upon them as public officials.[39] This seems to have been especially true on the parish level.[40]

> As early as the fourteenth century, the Dutch proudly boast, "Instruction was the monopoly of the city governments, and practically everyone could read and write." The town councils provided the buildings, regulated tuition, selected and paid the teachers, and decided what children should go to school.[41]

The most prominent of the new schools were still the Latin Grammar schools, whose function was to provide training for the sons of the commercial class so that they could better conduct their own businesses and carry on the affairs of government and of their guilds.

> The character of instruction in these city schools was precisely the same as that offered in the Church Latin schools. In establishing the new schools, the city councils intended no reform in curriculum or in method

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Butts, op. cit., p. 217.

[40] Paulsen, op. cit., pp. 28-9.

[41] Eby and Arrowood, op. cit., p. 820.

> of teaching. It did not occur to the council or to anyone else at that time that the matter or method of instruction in the city schools needed to be different from those in church schools. The city schools were in all respects parallel to the church schools except in the matter of control; they furnished the same opportunities of general education to the children of the burgher class of society that the clergy received.[42]

It is interesting that even in those schools where town control was most pronounced, the Church retained the right of inspection through her scholasticus.[43]

But there was also another avenue by which public education arose. This was the guild school. As charitable and mutual aid associations, the guilds, which were very active in the Netherlands at this time, numbered among their functions the support of schools, assistance of poor scholars, and the payment of schoolmasters.[44] These schools came to represent the interests of the merchant and artisan classes, and gave instruction in subjects of more practical value than had any of the schools hitherto.

> The guild schools were generally elementary in character, but they not infrequently afforded some secondary instruction. While most of the work was in the vernacular, courses in Latin and other higher subjects were also afforded.[45]

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[42] Ibid., p. 822.

[43] Marique, op. cit., I, 141.

[44] Eby and Arrowood, op. cit., p. 810.

[45] Frank P. Graves, A History of Education During the Middle Ages and the Transition to Modern Times (New York: Macmillan Co., 1910), p. 98.

Although the guilds demanded a new type of instruction, their schools were still taught by the clergy. These were usually the priests who had been retained to perform the necessary religious offices for the members of the guild.[46] But as the guild organizations gradually merged with those of the towns, the guild schools were generally absorbed into the municipal or burgher schools.

A third type of school connected with the rise of popular education and sometimes connected with the municipal or guild school was the vernacular writing and reading school. Burgher or town Latin schools were often unable to cope with the people who wanted to read and write. Many towns found that they had to organize elementary schools for the teaching of basic writing and reading in the common language of business life. According to the earliest available historical suggestion, the towns of Ghent and Brugh in the Netherlands were the first to secure vernacular writing and reading schools. The only reliable documentary information shows that Brussels founded such schools under interesting circumstances in 1320.[47] As Paulsen suggests in his book, German Education, Past and Present:

> After all has been said it seems safe to assume that, at the end of the Middle Ages, the entire population of the towns, with the exception of the lowest classes,

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Eby and Arrowood, op. cit., p. 822.

> was able to read and to write. No statistics are available, but the most convincing evidence that could be desired is afforded by the rapid development of the art of printing into an important industry.[48]

To conclude this section on the rise of popular education, Eby and Arrowood list three additional historical factors which were important in the educational thinking of the people of the Low Countries.

> [First] The Italian towns had kept control of their ancient municipal academies throughout the Middle Ages, and many lay teachers were conducting private schools. Contact with Italian towns during the Crusades and later thru commerce must have carried this school tradition to the Hanseatic centers of northern Europe. But even more important than this were the numerous Italian agents, refugees, and sailors who made their homes in these ports of stirring commercial life . . . [Secondly] It is probable that Aristotle's support of public education was another factor that exerted considerable influence. Along with his logical and philosophical treatises which came in by way of the Arabians, there came also translations of his Politics and Ethics. These treatises, it will be recalled, advocated public education. . . . [Thirdly] was the activity of civil leaders from the Emperor down to the local duke. It will be recalled that Charlemagne assumed the lead in the spread of education throughout his vast domains. To be sure, the instruction that he promoted was given in monasteries and the cathedral and parish churches; moreover, only monks or ecclesiastics were employed in carrying out his educational program. Nevertheless, it was the imperial power and not the Church that initiated this first reform movement.[49]

And to meet the broad demand for the tools of learning, school facilities had to be vastly expanded. This expansion took place, however, not through the initiative of the Church

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[48] Paulsen, op. cit., p. 30.

[49] Eby and Arrowood, op. cit., pp. 818-9.

and its scholasticus, but through the action of the temporal authorities.[50]

The Development of Practical Mysticism

At the very core of the educational work of the Brethren of the Common Life was their mysticism. This mysticism, however, was unique in that it was of an unusually practical nature. Their daily schedule included not only contemplation and study but also a strong emphasis on Christian charity and works of benevolence. In addition, unlike many of the monastic orders, they supported themselves by various kinds of manual labor, and at the same time, they required none of the monastic vows.

According to some writers, the Brethren appeared suddenly in the scene with no particular historical antecedents. But C. Ullmann in his Reformers before the Reformation has examined the forerunners of the Brethren and their practical mysticism and has presented a very convincing case for a definite historical development.[51] Mysticism is a life of contemplation and devout communion, and usually appears in history when a religion has begun to harden into formulae and ceremonial, and constitutes a reaction of spirit against the letter. Thus it arose in Christianity from much the same

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[50] Ibid., p. 818.

[51] C. Ullmann, Reformers before the Reformation (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863), II, 9-55.

causes as monasticism: "The vice and corruption of the Roman world, the growing secularization of the Church, and the demand for more immediate religious experiences."[52] This was deeply felt in the Netherlands and Germany among other places. For here especially, the monasteries had long been involved in the universal degeneracy of the age, often to an extent of which it is horrible to think.

Mysticism found its organization in peculiar religious associations which partially wore the outward form of the monastic life.

> But these [religious associations] were exempt from its [monasticism] restraints and connection with the hierarchy, and were animated by a more intense and profound evangelical spirit. Through the greater part of the Middle Ages we can trace a succession of free spiritual associations, which were often oppressed and persecuted by the hierarchy, [these] pertained rather to the life of the people, than to the frame-work of the Church, [and they] exhibited more or less a regular form, and professed a diversity of doctrines, but which all emanated from a fundamental endeavor after practical Christianity.[53]

Already as early as the twelfth century, the female religious associations of the Beguines had become quite common in the Netherlands. About the thirteenth century they were joined by the male communities of the Beghards, whose oldest establishments, so far as is known, was founded in 1220 at Louvain; and then about the beginning of the four-

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[52] Graves, op. cit., pp. 47-8.

[53] Ullmann, op. cit., II, 11.

teenth century, and at first around Antwerp, appeared the fellowship of the Lollards.[54] These groups devoted their attention wholly to practical objects. For the most part they lived together in separate houses of their own, with the utmost simplicity, supported by the earnings of their manual industry and by charitable donations, and chiefly occupied with works of Christian benevolence. In these labours they not only manifested blamelessness of life, but did great good. They were, therefore, beloved by the people, gladly received by the towns, protected by princes and magistrates, and after a temporary oppression under Clement V, in the year 1311, were even sanctioned by the Popes.[55] The inquisitors and mendicant monks were the only parties who actually opposed them; although the clergy did not look upon them with favor, for they were the means of withdrawing part of the Church's customary dues.

The Beguines took their meals at a common table, and assembled daily at fixed hours for prayer and exhortation. The rest of the day was occupied actively, with manual labor and the care of the poor and sick.[56] The rule observed by the Beghards was similar. Being unmarried tradesmen, and like the Waldensians, chiefly weavers, they too lived to-

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., p. 12.

[56] Ibid., p. 13.

gether under a master, took their meals in common, and met daily at a fixed hour for devotional exercises and addresses. The Lollards differed from the Beghards less in reality, than in name. We are informed, respecting them, that at their origin in Antwerp, shortly after 1300, they associated together for the purpose of waiting upon patients dangerously sick and burying the dead.[57]

> Boniface IX, in a bull of 1394, especially commends in them, "that they receive into their domiciles the poor and wretched, and to the utmost of their power, practice other works of charity, inasmuch as, when required, they visit and wait upon the sick, minister to their wants, and also attend to the burial of the dead."[58]

Everything about the purer form of these religious associations reminds one of the Brethren of the Common Life, and it is impossible to mistake the connection between them. But it was their own inward spiritual and moral fall which followed in the course of time that eventually caused their disintegration. The piety of these societies, owing to their exclusively practical tendency, and destitution of sound and substantial knowledge was of a kind that was easily kindled into enthusiasm. And because they were not held together by any fixed rule or strict sequestration, they presented an open arena to the teachers of the most

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[57] Ibid., p. 14.

[58] Ibid., p. 15.

various sorts of false doctrine.[59] It was in connection with this enthusiastic spirit that many of them also became connected with a group of fanatical enthusiasts called the Brethren and Sisters of the Free Spirit. The fall of these religious associations took place in the course of the fourteenth century. Charges were brought against the later Beghards and Lollards for their connection on the one hand, with the fanatical Franciscans, who were violently contending with the Church and on the other, for their association with the Brethren and Sisters of the Free Spirit. These charges relate to three particulars: an aversion to all useful industry, coupled with an inclination towards mendicancy and idleness; an intemperate spirit of opposition to the Church; and a skeptical and more or less pantheistical mysticism.[60]

But besides the opposition of the hierarchy of the Church itself, there was another reaction which was basically a popular movement. As Ullmann interprets it:

> [this was] a better sort of mysticism which reared itself on the basis of Christian theism. Originally of a contemplative character, and though not absolutely the offspring, still in a greatly less degree the adversary of the Church, this theistical mysticism forms a middle link between the heretical doctrines of the Beghards and those professed by the ecclesiastical Mystics; while at the same time, it is the commencement of that remarkable series of evolutions among whom the contemplative mysticism was refined into the prac-

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., p. 16.

> tical, and the pious spirit of association, originally evoked by Beguines and Beghards, obtained a purer and a nobler form.[61]

This theistical mysticism reached its culmination in the Brethren of the Common Life. The man who most influenced Gerhard Groote, the founder of the Brethren, was John Ruysbroek. Ruysbroek was the chief representative of that theistic and still predominantly contemplative and transcendental mysticism and a highly influential man.[62]

> From early youth Ruysbroek devoted himself to the cultivation of piety than to the pursuit of knowledge, and almost all the older writers remark that he was rather devout than learned. Piety was also the power which he was to employ in inflaming the hearts of men, and producing most important results.[63]

According to Ruysbroek, there are three ways which conduct to unity with God. These are the active, the inward, and the contemplative life. The active life consists in serving God outwardly, in abstinance, penitence, good morals, and holy actions, in the same way in which He, as God and man, served us, both by living and dying, even on the cross, and in our taking up the cross, as He did, and denying ourselves. We ought also, however, while directing our minds from outward things, to penetrate into that which is inward. By practising the moral virtues, we turn out-

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[61] Ibid., p. 31.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., p. 33.

wardly toward man. By feeling love we turn inward to God, acquire oneness of heart with him, spiritual freedom, conquest over the distractions of sense, and the guidance of the desires and senses to unity with God. The contemplative life Ruysbroek took particular pains to depict. For, as he says, it is of prime necessity here to distinguish the ecclesiastical doctrine from the heretical views, especially of the pantheistic mystics. This contemplative life consists in entering freely into communion with God, with a mind inclined towards him; in going out of ourselves and becoming one spirit with God. In this state God unites us with himself in perpetual love, which love he is. He abides in us and we in him.[64]

For, as Ullmann indicates:

> However strong might be Ruysbroek's determination to be a true member of the Church, and to live and die as a servant of Christ in the Catholic faith, still, in general, he took the attitude, which, to a certain extent was one of opposition to the dominant Church, maintaining the principle of Internalism, in opposition to that of Secularization, and exalting the spirit of faith, charity, and contemplation, as the more excellent, when compared with the performance of works.[65]

Ruysbroek was a very pious mystic and although he influenced the Brethren very much in their beginnings, yet the mysticism of the founders of the Brethren took a more practical turn. They were more didactic, more methodical, more active in a

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[64] Ibid., pp. 41-3.

[65] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

material or intellectual sense.[66] And it is in this interest in the intellectual and the practical that the Brethren of the Common Life find their active interest in popular and school education.

The religious associations of the Beguines, Beghards and Lollards in the course of time had degenerated and by their own fault, either had fallen to pieces of themselves, or had been suppressed. But the framework of the times still existed. First, there was the inclination toward religious association which was especially powerful in the Middle Ages and which had produced important results. This inclination could not help but gain strength as the great organization of the Church became more and more loose towards the end of the Middle Ages. Secondly, there were the outward conditions of the times which required and rendered practicable the efforts of benevolence and charity, strengthened by co-operation. While these associations, by their practical tendency, relieved the outward afflictions of life, the vital mysticism which was so much at the basis of their whole program, was calculated to satisfy the religious cravings of the heart. This mysticism had degenerated. It had become pantheistic, fanatical and sectarian. But the craving of the heart still existed; for scholasticism, far from imbibing new life, had only increased in pedantic dryness and subtilty.

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[66] Ibid., p. 58.

Men like Ruysbroek had helped much to bring mysticism back from its lowest depths, but it still needed to become less flighty and fantastic and more simple, pure, and practical if it was ever going to exert any general efficacy upon the people.[67]

Moreover, most of these former religious associations were missing an important element necessary if their operation was to be truly salutary and transforming. This element was the decided zeal for the sound intellectual education of the people, especially of the young, or in other words, an interest in learning. And it is in just this area where the Brethren of the Common Life did their most important work.

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[67] Ibid., pp. 56-9.

CHAPTER III

GERARD GROOTE AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BRETHREN

The Life and Work of Gerard Groote

The Brethren of the Common Life was founded at Deventer in the Netherlands by Gerard Groote. It is important that some space is given to his life for it is his different approach to mysticism which gives the work of the Brethren its educational bent. Groote was born of a wealthy family in Deventer in 1340. Considering the times in which he lived, Groote had an excellent education. He attended the school attached to the Church of St. Lebwin for several years. We know very little about these early years of Gerard's life, but it appears that he received some education in the ancient German cities of Aachen and Cologne. In 1355 he matriculated in the University of Paris, where he stayed three years, obtaining the degree of Master of Arts in 1358. He also studied magic at that time, a fact which caused him much regret in later years. He attended the University of Prague but he did not remain there long. Returning to the University of Paris, he devoted about eight years to the study of law. In some of the university documents dating from the years 1363 and 1366 he is mentioned as a student in

the Faculty of Law.[1] He was a scholar, being thoroughly familiar with the Canon Law and the Corpus Juris Civilis. His native city, Deventer, sent him to the court of Pope Urban V at Avignon to try to settle some problems concerning tolls and other dues. He completed the assignment successfully and as a result honors were bestowed on him by the city.[2]

> As a reward [for this successful mission to the Pope], he was presented with two rich prebends at Cologne, which he used to live the ordinary irresponsible life of the clergy of the time, and became known more for his foppishness than anything else.[3]

In 1374, as a result of serious sickness, Groote was suddenly converted, and sought spiritual advice of the mystic Ruysbroek. Ruysbroek found a responsive listener in Groote,

> but Groote was unable to follow Ruysbroek's theories of the kingdom of heaven, the secret of love, the union of the human soul or spirit with God, the various stages of the active and the contemplative life, the hierarchy of angels, and kindred subjects. Groote had not yet made much progress in mysticism as an abstract system of thought. And Ruysbroek knew that. Therefore he said to Groote: "Some day you will understand."[4]

Partially as a result of Ruysbroek's influence, he renounced his worldly possessions, surrendered his house to the use of

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[1]Albert Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publ. Co., 1950), p. 16.

[2]Ibid., p. 17.

[3]Isaac L. Kandel, "Brethren of the Common Life," Cyclopedia of Education, edited by Paul Monroe (New York: Macmillan Co., 1925), I, 446.

[4]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 20.

poor women who wished to consecrate themselves to the service of God, and reserving but one room for himself, he retired for a time to a life of inward spiritual meditation.[5] But Groote could not resign himself to the secluded, unsocial life of a scholastic or mystic.

> Groote saw very little value in abstract thinking . . . [he] refused to subscribe to the views of the scholastic philosophers. He was not a Thomist, though he has been thought one. In his opinion Thomas Aquinas wasted a great deal of time on topics of no practical value whatsoever.[6]

Groote became a kind of mystic. His mysticism, however, differed considerably from that of his aged friend, Ruysbroek. In spite of his great reverence for Ruysbroek, he could never persuade himself to adopt many of his views. Groote's religion was a kind of practical mysticism. Hyma quotes him as saying:

> But how is one to show one's love for God? By sitting in one's cell, aloof from the outside world? Not at all, for he who really loves God, loves all of God's creatures. Although one should avoid too much idle conversation with "worldly people," one ought never to shun their presence, but work among them, trying to make them also participants of the joys celestial, far superior as they are to any delights bestowed by our bodily senses.[7]

Groote loved books. He never had enough of them, and eagerly acquired each new addition to his library. But as a

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[5]Kandel, op. cit., p. 446.

[6]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 27.

[7]Ibid., p. 30.

mystic Groote maintained that the reading of good books should at all times be supplemented by meditation and prayer, for he considered contact with Hod Himself the only way of obtaining the highest wisdom.[8]

After several years in retirement, he came out of seclusion and began to preach throughout Holland in the vernacular, and he soon gained a large spiritual following. We will now turn to the content and theology of his preaching.

The theology and philosophy of Gerard Groote was based chiefly upon the New Testament and the Fathers, and to a lesser degree also upon the works of Greek, Roman, and medieval philosophers. Dr. Hyma contends:

> If we are to compare his ideas with those of any other philosopher, we might say that his works betray the exceedingly powerful influence of Augustine. And if we are to give a name to Groote's philosophy, we might safely call it Augustinian.[9]

Yet, though we might call his theology Augustinian, his view of man was much more Scotist. Groote said that man is not wholly depraved. He still possesses a small spark of divinity within his breast, a radiant gleam of light, which may be fanned into a bright flame.[10] And it was in this possible goodness of man that Groote found some of his edu-

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[8] Ibid., p. 29.

[9] Ibid., p. 28.

[10] Ibid.

cational ideas.

Groote was an orthodox Catholic all of his life. He never refused to accept the papal authority nor the creed of the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, Groote had issued a proclamation attesting his orthodox faith and his subjection to the papal chair.[11] The Church, in Groote's opinion, was a divine institution and its teachings were promulgated by servants of God, who had been inspired by the Holy Ghost. In the realm of dogma or doctrine, therefore, the Church was supreme, and its teachings infallible.

> Although he drew a careful distinction between the Bible and other religious writings, he did not go so far as later reformers, and say: "I submit myself only to the authority of the Scriptures," for he was firmly convinced that since Christ had promised to remain with His church until the end, it would be preposterous for him to lay claim to a better knowledge of the Bible than the Church Fathers and the medieval saints possessed.[12]

Yet, although Groote was a true son of the Church, he was very outspoken in his condemnation of evils and corruption in the Church. Especially did he denounce the immoral and indolent clergy of his time. Groote made his position clear in his "Sermon Against the Immoral Clergy," delivered in the year 1383 before the higher clergy in the Bishopric of Utrecht. He established five points which in recent years have attracted much attention among scholars of this period. One of these scholars discovered in an ancient manuscript a

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[11] Ibid., p. 24.

[12] Ibid., p. 34.

summary of the sermon and a good explanation of the five points.[13] They are quoted in Hyma's The Brethren of the Common Life:

> 1) that an unworthy priest does not detract from the value of the sacrament administered by him, 2) that a priest who openly lives in immorality must be avoided by the faithful members of the congregation, 3) that according to Thomas Aquinas it would be very sinful to partake of the sacrament administered by such an immoral priest, 4) that those prelates who permit a sinful priest to function in his parish are guilty of a grave misdemeanor, and 5) that every woman who by living with a priest should cause scandal to the Church must leave him forthwith.[14]

As was mentioned earlier, Groote became a traveling preacher, preaching throughout the diocese of Utrecht. Crowds flocked to hear him wherever he went. And it was men and women in these crowds moved to repentance by his preaching, who formed the beginning of the religious movement known as the Devotio Moderna and eventually also the organizations of the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life. "In Deventer, Zwolle, Kampen, Zutphen, Doesburg; also in Arnhem, Utrecht, Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden, and Delft, the fires of devotion were kept burning brightly after Groote had passed on."[15] But when Groote attacked the sins of the clergy and the lazy beggary of the monks, the clergy brought pressure to bear on the Bishop to silence him. The reason that they gave was

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[13] Ibid., p. 40.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., p. 22.

that Groote was trying to found a semi-monastic order without the permission of the Church. As a result of this pressure, the Bishop of Utrecht forbade Groote's preaching after four years, and Groote retired to his native town of Deventer.[16]

> Florens van Wevelinchoven, Bishop of Utrecht, was not personally offended at Groote's preaching. He had observed that Groote was being attacked by three classes of persons: 1) the heretics, 2) the immoral clergy, and 3) the mendicant monks, who complained that he had founded a new religious order without the permission required from the Pope. The good Bishop had no desire to placate the heretics, nor the bad clergy. But he was of the opinion that laymen should not be encouraged in the formation of semi-monastic congregations.[17]

To understand the work and organization of the Brethren of the Common Life, it is necessary to consider Groote's view of monasticism. Many examples might be adduced to show that Groote approved of monasticism.

> Whenever he made acquaintance with persons who showed a burning desire to come into closer relation to God, and seemed to be eminently fitted for the monastic state, he did not hesitate to praise and recommend monasticism. To others, who had taken monastic vows, he was accustomed to write frequently, reminding them of the reason why they entered the monastery.[18]

But Groote's approval of the monasteries was not unqualified. Some people seemed particularly well-fitted for the monastic

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[16] "Brüder des Gemeinsamen Lebens," Realencyclopaedie für Protestantische Theologie und Kirche, edited by J. J. Herzog and Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1897), III, 476.

[17] Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 23.

[18] Ibid., p. 33.

life, but not he, nor those among his followers whose ability to instruct the young, to preach to the masses, to remind the clergy of their shortcomings, or to comfort the poor and the afflicted, impelled them to employ their talents in the service of their neighbors, instead of burying them in the solitude of a lonely cell.

Another principle of Groote's work was his emphatic dislike of any form of indolence, either mental or physical. He abhorred all forms of begging, including that carried on by the mendicant monks, and declared that all should work because labor is necessary for the well-being of mankind.[19] For example, he wanted no women to live in his house at Deventer who did not want to gain their own livelihood with their own hands. He is quoted by Hyma as saying:

> In trying to avoid physical exertion, these women fall into the danger of idleness, thereby forgetting the study of their own inner selves, and wander from house to house, inquisitive and restless, prying into other people's affairs, ignoring their own duties.[20]

St. Lebwin's school, the cathedral school in Deventer, was the first school to come under the influence of Groote and the Brethren. William Vroede, a close friend of Groote, was the rector or supervisor of this school from 1378 to 1381. He was succeeded by John Lubberts who directed the

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[19] Ibid., p. 54.

[20] Ibid., p. 31.

school from 1381 to 1385.[21] Groote's only real connection with the school seems to have been one of friend and advisor. He seems to have been well known by the teachers as well as their employers not only in Deventer but also in the schools in Zwolle and Kampen.[22] The school at Deventer appears to have been an ordinary cathedral school with little intervention from the town council. The exact relationship was not established by this study, although forty years later the town played an important part in the management of the school.

In the history of the educational work of the Brethren, Groote is more important for his ideas than for the actual educational reforms which he accomplished. For the Brethren followed the goals and principles of Groote quite closely, and it is they that carried out most of the actual reforms. As is evident from the above discussion, Groote's chief aim was the reform of the Church, and the surest and quickest way to reach that end in his opinion was the training of young men.[23] Young boys were the material most needed, he thought, for the reform of the Church. Religion and learning must go hand in hand. The clergy ought to receive a

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[21]Albert Hyma, The Christian Renaissance (New York: Century Co., 1924), p. 122.

[22]Ibid., p. 36.

[23]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 116.

liberal education before assuming the leadership of the people.

> This training should by no means exclude the study of literature, pagan or classic as well as Christian; while grammar, rhetoric, logic, mathematics, and philosophy were to retain their places in the curriculum.[24]

Yet on the other hand, he was strongly opposed to the scholasticism of his day. "Why should we indulge in those endless disputes," he would say, "such as are held at the universities, and that about subjects of no moral value whatsoever?"[25] Several writers of note suggest that Groote went even farther than this. One of them, Karl Raumer, says:

> [Groote's ideas of a] curriculum of study was accordingly contracted within very narrow limits. "Spend no time," he says, "either on geometry, arithmetic, rhetoric, logic, grammar, poetry, or judicial astrology. All these branches Seneca rejects; how much more, then, should a spiritually minded Christian pass them by, since they subserve in no respect the life of faith! Of the sciences of the pagans, their ethics may not be so scrupulously shunned since these were the special field of the wiser among them, as Socrates and Plato. That which does not better a man, or at least does not reclaim him from evil, is positively hurtful. Neither ought we to read pagan books, nor the Holy Scriptures, to penetrate into the mysteries of nature by that means."[26]

We appear here to have a basic difference of opinion on Groote's attitude toward the curriculum of his day, but it seems that Groote made a careful distinction between the

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 30.

[26] Karl Raumer, "The Hieronymians," The American Journal of Education, IV (March, 1858), 624.

training of personal Christianity in the student and the intellectual training provided by the school curriculum. In this connection, Groote was strongly opposed to the idea that an intellectual approach to Christianity was a way of faith, as many of the scholastics had said. Thus, while scholarship and learning are important, skill in these fields is not an end in itself. But rather, these are only tools for the human mind to use. A person may attain to Christian perfection just as easily without them. As a result, Groote thought that the standard classroom subjects of the time were of very little use to him as a Christian.

> "Whatever doth not make thee a better Christian," he once said, "is harmful." He asserted that for him it was really a waste of time to get a degree in medicine, for such a degree would bring no practical results. The same is true of a degree in civil and canon law.[27]

Although this probably does not settle the question, to a certain extent because of limited knowledge concerning his life and ideas, yet it seems that we can safely say that there were two dominant elements in Gerard Groote: Groote the scholar and Groote the mystic. And these two characteristics existed side by side but never enveloped one another.

Furthermore, Groote reasoned that the boys needed capable teachers, men of sound learning, and of character. These were to be men who would try to win the love of their students, and refrain from any kind of punishment until their

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[27]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 44.

friendly admonition had failed utterly. They should be university men, if possible. As a result, it is recorded that Groote spent much time trying to secure comfortable quarters for homeless and capable teachers.[28]

Groote also advocated a better education, especially in morals, for boys not preparing for the clergy.

> These boys, said Groote to himself, will some day be leaders among men. Some of them will enter monasteries, others will teach; one or two among them are likely to become merchants or magistrates, while a few others may rise to the priesthood, or even higher. While their characters are still pliable, the ardor of youth in their veins, it is time to fill their minds with noble ambitions.[29]

Groote's ideas on non-clerical education went farther than just the education of school-age boys. The people too must read and decide for themselves.

> Religion should be personal for all men and women. What good does it do, he reasoned, for a layman merely to go to church? Will that cure his spiritual ills? Certainly not. He must do more than listen to his preacher; he must read and think for himself.[30]

In order to make this possible, Groote began to translate portions of the Bible and a great many church hymns into the vernacular, at the same time providing these translations with glosses and other explanations.

Groote also employed some boys from the school and

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[28]Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 36.

[29]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 25.

[30]Ibid., p. 26.

several young men to copy manuscripts for him. This copying work seemed to serve a three-fold purpose: first, to help support the boys attending school; secondly, to foster learning and moral advancement among these boys through his personal encouragement; and finally, to provide himself with manuscripts for his own scholarly work.[31]

> He talked with them about their work at school, their aims and ideals. As they opened their hearts to him, he formed plans to help the boys who had no home and practically no friends at Deventer. If they needed good food and clothing he provided it, and he arranged for them to lodge with kind matrons who treated them as their own children.[32]

In the meantime, Groote gathered around him a band of "twelve disciples" at Deventer, who regarded him as their head until his death. Among this number was a young man named Florentius Radewijns, who had given up his prebend at Utrecht to be in closer touch with Groote. In Deventer he was vicar of the altar of St. Paul in the church of St. Lebwin, and soon it became a custom for Groote's followers to hold meetings in the vicar's house; in fact, some of them came to live with him.[33] Toward the end of his life, Groote advised some of them to live together on a permanent basis, under one roof, where they could exhort each other and work

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[31]Edward W. Miller and Jared W. Scudder, Wessel Gansfort, Life and Writings (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1917), I, 6.

[32]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 46.

[33]Ibid., p. 22.

and pray together: in short, to serve God with a greater chance of success. After the death of Groote, leadership of the group was taken up by Radewijns. Thus was formed the first real house of the Brethren of the Common Life. Named in honor of its first rector, it was called "The House of Florentius."[34] Among the men who lived in the house were several copyists, who made their living by copying books.

The Brethren at Deventer faithfully continued Groote's policy in helping poor boys to get an education. "Radewijns and his followers often invited them to their house, providing them with material and spiritual sustenance."[35] Within the next few years, the Brethren began boarding some of the boys at their house, and the older ones, in order to help maintain themselves, were given the work of copying manuscripts. The Brethren carefully looked after the moral welfare of their charges, regularly instructed them in the essentials of the Christian faith, and to the backward students they gave tutoring to enable them to benefit by their school work.[36]

There has been considerable doubt among students of the work of the Brethren of the Common Life as to the exact relationship between St. Lebwin's School and the Brethren

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[34] Ibid., p. 64.

[35] Ibid., p. 65.

[36] Kandel, op. cit., p. 447.

house in Deventer. The most recent scholarship has affirmed Kettlewell's[37] view; that there was actually no connection between the two organizations. However, the Brethren rapidly expanded their program of boarding students from the school, and in a few years a large percentage of the schoolboys were housed in the newly-erected dormitories of the Brethren.[38] At this time also, a few of the Brethren who were qualified began to assist at St. Lebwins and gradually, the ties between the two organizations became closer.[39]

But up until 1398, or the death of Radewijns, the greater part of the educational work of the Brethren consisted in boarding homeless school boys.

> Many devout burghers at Deventer would take an interest in the younger boys, due to Radewijn's influence. One Lambert van Galen always had eight of them in his house, and a certain Bye van Dunen also took care of eight boys. These boys were all consigned to the people by the Brethren in the "House of Florentius."[40]

It seems that there was some sort of a house taken over or built by the Brethren as a dormitory to house students about

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[37]S. Kettlewell, Thomas a Kempis and the Brothers of the Common Life (Abridged edition; London: K. Paul, Trench and Co., 1885), p. 48.

[38]Ibid., p. 51.

[39]Albert Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1930), p. 84.

[40]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 65.

1390.[41] About 1396, however, two years before the death of Radewijns, another dormitory was founded, called the Nova Domus or Domus Pauperum, where the poor pupils of the church school were housed.

In the closing years of the fourteenth century, there were two chief figures in the work of the Brethren. One of these was Florentius Radewijns, mentioned above, and the other was John Zerboldt. Radewijns' religious ideas were rather pelagian and mystical.

> Our aim and final destination, Radewijns writes, is the kingdom of God. The road which leads to that goal is purity of heart. All our labors, our watching, fasting, meditation, prayer, and reading of the Scriptures are only means employed by us to eradicate vice, ere we ascend toward the plane of perfect love.[42]

Like Groote, Radewijns loved the simple life, wearing plain garments even after he had been ordained priest and reading only such books as might aid him in improving his character. His followers he exorted to do the same. Students and other inexperienced people should avoid the study of subtle questions, he used to say. "No one should study to acquire knowledge for its own sake, for there is no true learning except that which teaches us to acquire love through the conquest of evil."[43] Radewijns believed that manual labor

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., p. 60.

[43] Ibid., p. 61.

should be performed by all, but not all forms of manual labor were fitted in his opinion to favor the practice of spiritual exercises; those which resembled the spiritual exercises in kind were preferable, such as copying religious writings. When Radewijns preached to the people, he always spoke to them in their own dialect, unadorned with pompous foreign quotations. Gradually it became a custom among the people to write down parts of Radewijns' discourses, for they were so easy to understand and so practical.[44]

During the life of Florentius, John Böhme was rector of the school at St. Lebwin's and one of his great admirers. He frequently heard Radewijns preach, and for the sake of their respected master, showed much kindness to his protegees.[45]

Radewijns was personally active in providing for the wants of school boys. When Thomas a Kempis came to Deventer as a boy, he tells us that

> he [Florentius] placed me in the school, and besides this gave me the books which he thought I needed. Afterwards, he obtained for me a lodging, at no cost to myself, with a certain honorable and devout matron, who often showed kindness to me and many other students.[46]

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[44] Ibid., p. 58.

[45] C. Ullmann, Reformers before the Reformation, translated by R. Menzies (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863), II, 100.

[46] Thomas a Kempis, Lives of Groot and his Disciples, translated by J. P. Arthur under the title, Founders of the New Devotion (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1904), p. 170.

Kettlewell comments on this work of Radewijns:

> [he] fostered the religious life and gladly held out a helping hand to earnest minded young men who were ready and unable wholly to support themselves, but who showed some ability for learning. Besides providing them with the shelter of a pious home, where they would be faithfully and lovingly tended, and incited to a life of holiness and virtue, he afforded them some means of subsistence, and to some extent provided payment for their instruction whilst studying at the school.[47]

All the feeble-bodied boys and all others who through no fault of their own were in need of material assistance, he supplied with food and clothing and he took care of the writing needs of the poorer class of school boys, supplying them with pen, ink and paper. Thomas a Kempis also states concerning the furtherance of this educational work, that Radewijns as the leader of the first Brethren house,

> sent devout and learned men to other cities also to do a like work, especially to places where there were schools largely attended, such as Zwolle, Doesborch, Herderwije and the like; and these men lived the common life like that in the congregation already founded, and gained their livelihood by writing books. They studied most of all to draw to Christ students.[48]

The real importance of Zerboldt, however, rests in his work as a scholar. In this he was quite different from his contemporary and fellow-member of the Brethren, Radewijns. It was Zerboldt, who, taking Groote's lead advocated and at the same time defended the Brethren's work in popular educa-

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[47]Kettlewell, op. cit., p. 48.

[48]Thomas a Kempis, Chronicle of Mount Saint Agnes, translated by J. P. Arthur (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1906), p. 215.

tion. He wrote a book called De libris teutonicalibus, in which he expressly insists that the laity should read the Bible in their native tongue.[49] Zerboldt possessed Groote's books together with the learned discourses of Groote which might be used as a key to the books themselves. He followed Groote's view in realizing the needs of the masses.

> The farmers and burghers should read the Bible for themselves, he had argued, and since most of them could not read Latin, they ought to be given the opportunity of reading the Bible in their own tongue.[50]

The following summary of his teaching taken from Hyma's book, The Brethren of the Common Life, indicates the trend of his ideas.

Zerboldt said that to read the "sacred writings," as long as they contain no heresy or errors, particularly, if they were easy to understand, and in so far as they did not disagree with the canonical writings in style or subject matter, was permissible and praiseworthy. In Deuteronomy 11:18 is found:

> Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door post of thine house, and upon thy gates.

That such commandments were not addressed to the clergy only

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[49] Raumer, "The Hieronymians," p. 625.

[50] Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 94.

was very plain indeed. From these and many other proofs which might be given, it clearly appears to Zerboldt that laymen are not prohibited from reading religious writings, simply because they are laymen. As far as reading religious writings in the vernacular, much evidence could be brought forward to establish this point also. In the first place, Zerboldt said, the greater part of the Old Testament was written for the Hebrews in Hebrew, which was the vernacular for them. Similarly, the New Testament was drawn up in the Greek vernacular with the exception of the Gospel of Matthew, and Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews, which were directed to Hebrews, hence written in their vernacular. Although, according to Zerboldt, some said that Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans in Latin, nevertheless, the whole or nearly the whole Bible was written in another language other than Latin. Also, Zerboldt continued, we find that many a missionary translated parts of the Bible into the language of the people he was trying to convert. And when the Holy Ghost descended upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, many men were present and each heard the Apostles speak in his native tongue, which was a sign that the gospel of Christ was to be preached in every language on the earth. The sole reason why the Bible was read in Latin in the fourteenth century was because this language was so widely used. Therefore, Zerboldt concludes, why should not they, the Brethren of the Common Life, who counted many laymen among their mem-

bers, be allowed to read the Bible in the vernacular? Everyone endowed with an infinitesimal spark of intelligence would at once admit that they should be permitted to study the Bible in Dutch. And it was not only permissible, but meritorious and quite praiseworthy. But, on the other hand, laymen should read no religious works in the vernacular that deviate from the doctrines promulgated by the acknowledged leaders in the Church.[51]

The Organization of the Brethren of the Common Life

The Brethren of the Common Life spread rapidly from its beginnings in the Yssel Valley, as has been indicated above. At the same time the organization of the houses became somewhat standard.

> The members of the Brotherhood were divided into two classes, the Clerks and the Unlettered Brethren; and of these the former devoted themselves to the cause of education, and to copying books . . . while the latter occupied themselves in manual labor.[52]

Every house had a head called the rector. All the members were pledged to obey him, and without his permission none could leave the house or go anywhere except to church. One of the most important officials was always the librarian, who was not only custodian of the books, but supervised the copying industry and provided the materials for it.[53]

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[51]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, pp. 73-8.

[52]Thomas a Kempis, Lives of Groot and his Disciples, p. xxxviii.

[53]"Brüder des Gemeinsamen Lebens," p. 501.

The Brethren consciously tried to be different from the monastics; for instance, they did not call the head of their houses priors. But as L. Schulze points out:

> If they differed from the monks in feeling it unnecessary to leave the world and bind themselves by solemn vows, they had many of the characteristics of the monastic life - obedience, absolute while it lasted though not irrevocable, celibacy, poverty in the sense of common ownership; and they only seemed to stand in contrast with it because so many monasteries had fallen away from their original principles.[54]

The time of probation for new brothers ranged from two or three months to a year. Each new brother was free to dispose of his property as he chose; but if he gave it to the house he could not reclaim it on leaving.[55]

The most distinctive feature of the Brotherhood was its constant emphasis on what it called Devotio Moderna.

> There is in this term an implied contrast, doubtless, between the active life of the Brethren, in which study and work and conference were the chief means of developing the religious life, and the passive, dreamy devotions so characteristic of monasticism.[56]

The statutes of their houses show plainly enough what was their main object in relation to their religious life. Those of the community at Herford may be quoted:

For the promotion of our souls' salvation, as well as

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[54]L. Schulze, "Brethren of the Common Life," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, edited by Samuel M. Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), III, 173.

[55]"Brüder des Gemeinsamen Lebens," p. 503.

[56]Miller and Soudder, op. cit., I, 9.

> for the edification of our neighbor in the purity of the true Christian faith and the unity of our Mother, the holy Christian Church, we will and intend to live a pure life, in harmony and community, by the work of our own hands, in the true Christian religion and the service of God. We purpose to live a life of moderation, without beggary; to render obedience with reverence to our superiors; to wear a humble and simple habit; diligently to observe the canons of the holy Fathers, in so far as they are of profit; diligently to apply ourselves to the virtues and other holy exercises and studies; and not alone to live a blameless life, but to give a good pattern and example to other men.[57]

Since it was considered most beneficial for all men to perform manual labor every day, the Brethren were expected to spend most of the day in copying religious books, working among the people, or in performing other tasks.[58] It was for these reasons that they incurred the jealousy of the monastics, especially of the mendicants by the very difference that they did not beg but worked for their living. Also as communities of working men, they were sometimes regarded as competitors by ordinary working men and women; or because of their loose and rather informal association, the Brethren were classed by many with the Beghards and Beguines and thus fell under suspicion of heresy.[59] But the kind of life which the Brethren led was the best defense against all the attacks which could be made upon them.

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[57] Schulze, op. cit., p. 173.

[58] Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 111.

[59] "Brüder des Gemeinsamen Lebens," p. 477.

The life of each day was strictly organized. The bell rang at three each morning, and at half-past three all must be ready to rise and offer the first-fruits of the day to God in prayer and meditation. From that hour until nine at night, when the brothers went to bed, every hour, with the exception of the periods for meals and recreation, was divided between work and spiritual exercises.[60] A regular feature of the life were the collationes or conferences. These were edifying discourses, frequently diversified by question and answer, or taking the form of a dialogue for a longer time.

> The collationes were of two classes, one destined for outsiders to whom on Sundays and holidays the doors of the house were open, and always in the vernacular, the other taking place daily among the inmates of the house at the time of their midday or evening meal.[61]

No one should beg from door to door; and in order that they might not be driven to this by want, all should avoid idleness, and according to their abilities should transcribe books or instruct children. They were to take care that they themselves and all whom they should teach should venerate and worship God with the deepest piety.[62] It was also common for the Brethren to confess their sins not only to a priest but to each other, a custom which gave rise among outsiders to

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[60] Schulze, op. cit., p. 175.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 66.

a suspicion of their orthodoxy. Their asceticism was always of a very mild nature, especially compared with that of many of the monks of their day. And as time went on, experience taught them that stinting the body does in no way enhance the beauty of the soul, or the dignity of the spirit. Hyma says:

> We find that after the year 1400, they dressed more properly, used more wholesome meals, reduced the number of hours devoted to copying books, took more exercises in the open air, lived less estranged from "worldly" people, and also acquired more respect for learning as a final end.[63]

It is also interesting to note that the spiritual life of the Brethren was largely nourished on the Holy Scriptures. A special section in both the Herford statues and in the Reformatorium vitae clericorum was devoted to its study.[64]

For purposes of discipline a chapter of faults was to be held at least once a week. This chapter is to be distinguished from the occasional particular chapter for the discussion of the affairs of the community.

> First, the youngest brother was to kneel in the midst and accuse himself of any breaches of the statutes or customs of the house; but he was not to presume to go beyond two. Having asked pardon for his faults, accepted the penalty imposed by the rector, and promised amendment, he returned to his place and the next in order followed.[65]

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[63] Ibid., p. 115.

[64] "Brüder des Gemeinsamen Lebens," pp. 501-2.

[65] Schulze, op. cit., p. 175.

If the penalty of expulsion was inflicted, in case of a grave offense, such as heresy, immorality, or theft, the rector decided how much the offender might take with him in addition to his clothes, which were always allowed.[66] Moreover, every brother was free to leave if he chose, though he could not re-enter, after once having taken his departure.[67]

The characteristic of the Brethren which principally struck people in general was their living in common, whence their name. But the Brethren had a variety of popular appellations in different places.

> Because of the short speeches or sermons provided by the Brethren, they were often called Fratres Collationarii. Another popular name was that of Hieronymani, "Jeromites," because of their liking for St. Jerome, while in Germany the name Nullbrüder or Kugelherren was frequently applied to them.[68]

In some places they were called "brothers of the pen" because of their diligence in copying manuscripts, and in others, "school brothers," because of their work with the schools.[69] Although one of the characteristics of the Brethren was their free intercourse with society, yet they had a simple uniform which distinguished them from their fellows.

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 49.

[68] Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 27.

[69] Schulze, op. cit., p. 174.

This is not too unusual since even the trade guilds each had its own regalia.

> The habit of the Brethren consisted of a simple outer garment of black or gray linen. In the case of clerics it reached to the ground, for the laymen it was shorter. Their undergarments were also of rough linen. In cold weather a blueish-gray cloak with a black hood was worn.[70]

Among the variety of trades and occupations by which the Brethren sought to provide for their own subsistence, that of copying manuscripts held a very important place. This work of copying was important right from the beginnings of the Brethren, as has been shown above. Groote and Radewijns were both active in sponsoring this work. As a result, the Brethren were soon unsurpassed in their work in this field. As Kandel shows: "The greatest ability was shown in the copying of manuscripts, not only of sacred but of literary and classical content, with the result that the price of manuscripts went down at that period."[71] Those who excelled as penmen, among whom was Thomas a Kempis, executed beautiful manuscripts of the Bible and theological works, which then found a place in the libraries of the Brethren; while others employed themselves in copying useful books to be given to indigent scholars or religious tracts for the common

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[70]Miller and Scudder, op. cit., I, 8.

[71]Kandel, op. cit., p. 446.

people.[72] This copying work for the common people is one of their important influences in lay religious education, for as H. Kämmel points out:

> . . . beschäftigten sich die Brüder . . . am hausigsten mit dem Abschreiben der hl. Schrift oder sonst nützlicher Bücher, wobei man unstreitig die gerade so am sichersten zu fördernde religiöse Volksbildung im Auge hatte.[73]

The most diverse authors are met in the manuscripts copied by the Brethren: some were classical, especially Seneca; some were patristic, most frequently Augustine, Bernard, and Johannes Climacus; and some were from their own circle, like Thomas a Kempis, John Zerboldt, or David of Augsburg, the author of the Speculum monarchorum.[74] The most frequently selected were liturgical books, the Vulgate, the Fathers, and works of spiritual edification.

It must be remembered that a sizeable portion of their work was done in the vernacular. This was especially true of the Scriptures and other works for spiritual edification. For instance, a German translation of the Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis was made at Cologne by the Brethren during the first half of the fifteenth century.[75] They also made

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[72]Ullmann, op. cit., II, 93.

[73]H. Kämmel, "Hieronymianer," Encyklopädie des Gesammten Erziehungs und Unterrichtswesens, edited by K. A. Schmid (Gotha: Rudolf Besser, 1862), p. 539.

[74]"Brüder des Gemeinsamen Lebens," p. 504.

[75]Schulze, op. cit., p. 177.

a practice of compiling collections in the vernacular of the most striking passages from the books they read or copied, sometimes with the addition of reflrections by the compiler.[76]

The work of the Brethren in popular education was almost entirely of a religious nature. Of course, sometimes this included a few of the fundamentals of reading and writing since the poor people especially had no opportunity for education.[77] The Brethren labored incessantly to enlighten the people by their discourses. These were of two kinds: either sermons, for the Brethren were very active in preaching in the vernacular, or the so-called collationes, mentioned above. These were often held in addition to a sermon.[78] The school boys and town people were invited to attend these discussions which were held in the vernacular. Certain passages in the Scriptures were read and explained; and in this connection there was opportunity for general discussion, when each member of the house could freely express his opinions, as long as he did not indulge in impractical disputes and argumentations.[79]

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[76] Ibid., p. 175.

[77] Pierre J. Marique, History of Christian Education (New York: Fordham University Press, 1924), II, 54.

[78] Ullmann, op. cit., II, 96.

[79] Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 111.

> Upon dispersing, the Brethren would frequently give short slips of paper to the people containing portions of the Bible, or some of the maxims of the saints, to read in their homes and exchange with one another.[80]

The sources used in this study were not clear as to whether the ordinary lay-people actually took part in the discussions. But Schulze comments that:

> These conferences, offering religious instruction to the plain man in his mother tongue, had an effect that extended far beyond the walls of the houses; and the same is true of the close adherence to Scripture and its application to the practical details of every-day life.[81]

All of the successful Brethren houses were located in cities rather than in seclusion in the country. The nature of their work in popular religious education as well as their education of the youth made a concentration of population necessary. The Brethren at Zwolle wrote in 1415: "We have decided to live in cities, in order that we may be able to give advice and instruction to clerics and other persons who wish to serve the Lord."[82]

The practical mysticism of the Brethren of the Common Life impelled them to work among the people. Their highest aim was the reformation of the Church from the inside. This work could be most effectively done, they thought, by instructing the common people in the essentials of the Christian

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[80]Kettlewell, op. cit., p. 194.

[81]Schulze, op. cit., p. 176.

[82]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 114.

religion, and by educating the youth of the land. But as time went on, they did more and more teaching and taking care of the young. There seems to be two principal reasons for this. First, it seemed so difficult to make much impression on adults, particularly those members of the clergy who deliberately neglected their flocks or led lives of vice. If the Church was to be reformed effectively, the ranks of the clergy, and to a certain extent the laity, would simply have to be filled from year to year with young men who not only had been properly educated, but were trained to imitate Christ.[83] The second factor was the introduction of printing. Before the year 1450 the number of Brethren who actually taught school was quite limited. Most of the learned Brethren sustained themselves by copying manuscripts, but shortly after the invention of printing, manuscripts became less in demand, especially to supply the needs of the people. Since it was necessary to seek other sources of income, many of the Brethren became teachers. Some of the Brethren also took up printing, as Kämmel indicates: "Wir finden daher auch, dasz später, als die Buchdruckerkunst erfunden war, die Hieronymianer mit ganz besonderem Eifer Buchdruckereien unterhielten."[84] Quite a few houses set up presses and sold printed books, thus contributing in a new

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[83]Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 29.

[84]Kämmel, op. cit., p. 539.

way to the general spread of learning.

The work of the Brethren in educating the youth and their connection with the schools varied with the different houses and the period in their history. Many communities conducted a school at some time in their history. Where this was not feasible, the Brethren aided existing schools by providing them with teachers, or by giving books to the students, or by offering board and lodging and employment to needy students, or by encouraging wealthy men to make provision for them.[85]

One of the earliest contributions of the Brethren to the schools was their work in caring for and lodging students. Some of the schools in the towns where the Brethren were especially active were well known at that time for their excellent educational system. Hyma suggests: "The chief factor on which the success of these schools depended was the presence of dormitories of the Brotherhood which housed the pupils."[86] Groote evidently started this idea of caring for students when he asked some of his female followers to lodge some of the homeless and needy school boys.[87] But quite rapidly these groups of women disappear and in their stead we find dormitories owned and controlled by the Breth-

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[85]Miller and Scudder, op. cit., I, 11.

[86]Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 30.

[87]Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 292.

ren. School boys could always get a room in their dormitories, no matter whether they were able to pay for them or not.

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were times of confusion as well as transition in school control. The Church, the town and the guild were all interested in school control; and the trend was definitely toward secular control. The curriculum of the various schools varied from the standard Latin Grammar school to a simple vernacular reading and writing school. The Brethren usually connected themselves with the Latin Grammar or the middle or secondary education of that age.[88] But it did not seem to matter whether the school was under civic or ecclesiastical control.[89] The Brethren worked with either the municipal or cathedral schools. A hard-and-fast line between school and university instruction was quite unknown. As a result, in some of the best Brethren schools, the upper forms did work indistinguishable from that of the Faculty of Arts in a university of that time.[90]

The problem of the Brethren's actual connection with the schools is difficult to settle. In the early days of the

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[88] William Harrison Woodward, Studies in Education During the Age of the Renaissance 1400-1600 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), p. 82.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

Brotherhood, before the fifteenth century, the only tangible connection between the schools and the Brethren was the lodging of school boys by the Brethren and perhaps the influence which Groote had upon the directors and masters of the school. As time went on and boarding students became an important part of their work, aiding these students in their studies also was a part of their activities.[91] "Many of these tutors became so able that they were invited to teach in the schools, with the result that their influence among the pupils was extended."[92] The most that can be said of the educational work of the Brethren is that it was of a widely diversified character. In many localities they had no schools of their own but entered into free connection with those which already existed, and endeavored to promote both the spiritual and temporal advancement of the pupils. This was done by presenting them with books, conversing with them and helping them on subjects of religion and learning, and giving them lodging and the means of earning a livelihood. In other places they set up schools for themselves and in these gave the standard Latin Grammar school instruction, emphasizing religion and Bible history. In some towns again, they connected themselves with an existing school and several of the classes were confided to their particular

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[91] Ibid., p. 83.

[92] Kandel, op. cit., p. 447.

direction.[93] The Brethren were in control of the famous schools at Deventer, Zwolle, Liege, Louvain, Mechlin, Cambrai, and Valenciennes, and founded the College de Montaigu in connection with the University of Paris.[94] Some of these schools like those at Deventer, Zwolle, Louvain, and Liege were large institutions counting as many as two thousand students.[95]

Deventer and Zwolle were the two chief centers of the activities of the Brethren, and it was from the houses in these cities that all the other houses of the Brotherhood were founded, either directly or indirectly.[96] It was also in the schools in these two cities where the Brethren attained their most notable success. In the following two chapters, two of the outstanding school masters and their schools will be discussed: John Cele and the school at Zwolle, and Alexander Hegius and the school at Deventer.

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[93]Ullmann, op. cit., II, 99.

[94]Frank P. Graves, A History of Education During the Middle Ages and the Transition to Modern Times (New York: Macmillan, 1910), p. 146.

[95]Marique, op. cit., II, 54.

[96]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 105.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN CELE AND THE SCHOOL AT ZWOLLE

At Zwolle, John Cele was rector of the city school from 1375 until 1417. Cele had received the degree of master of arts. Prague is usually suggested as the school which conferred the degree.[1] It is not known, however, whether or not he had been ordained to the priesthood. The rector of the school usually was. Also, Thomas a Kempis in his obituary of Cele implies that Cele was a priest.[2] Also, as Kettlewell mentions: "If he [Cele] was not ordained to the priesthood, . . . [he] must have received some authority also to give public instruction in the Church."[3]

Cele was a very close friend of Groote. "These two men were one heart and one soul,"[4] says Thomas a Kempis. At first, Cele had not been inclined to teach, but Groote showed him the crying need of education for all classes of men and

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[1]Albert Hyma, The Christian Renaissance (New York: Century Co., 1924), p. 91.

[2]Thomas a Kempis, Chronicle of Mount Saint Agnes, translated by J. P. Arthur (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1906), p. 191.

[3]S. Kettlewell, Thomas a Kempis and the Brothers of the Common Life (Abridged edition; London: K. Paul, Trench and Co., 1885), p. 247.

[4]Albert Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publ. Co., 1950), p. 45.

women, particularly for the clergy. "How are these men to instruct the masses, if they have no knowledge to give, their brains being empty and void of all sound learning?"[5] Cele still wished to enter the monastery, where life would be easier for him, but Groote would not hear of it. Through Groote's friendship and influence, Cele obtained his position as rector in Zwolle in 1374 or 1375.[6] Cele often went with Groote on his visits to Ruysbroek at Groenendaal and like Groote was strongly influenced by Ruysbroek.[7]

But Cele was more inclined to follow Groote in his practical mysticism. As a result, we find him a close friend and admirer of the Brethren of the Common Life, and in a certain respect a member of their house at Zwolle, although he did not live in this house. The Brethren had a custom of granting membership to men who were closely connected or who were of service to their order.[8]

> Cele was actually more than a member, for he served as a guardian of the new house at Zwolle. Furthermore, he conformed in manners and speech to the habits of Groote and Radewijns, and "in all things made himself like unto their congregation."[9]

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[5] Ibid., pp. 45-6.

[6] Ibid., pp. 89-90.

[7] Thomas a Kempis, Chronicle of Mount Saint Agnes, p. 195.

[8] Albert Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1930), p. 86.

[9] Ibid.

The history of the Brethren house at Zwolle and its connection with the municipal school is difficult to ascertain. The house was founded by Groote himself, probably with the help of Cele.[10] Until the house was actually organized, there were efforts on the part of individual followers of Groote to lodge some of the students from the school. Among Groote's first and most influential disciples was Henry Foppens of Gouda. Anxious to imitate his master as a friend of poor school boys, he bought a house at Zwolle, where he lodged some of them.[11] There was also a certain Meynoldus of Windesheim, another of Groote's disciples, who had sold his property and had come to Zwolle, where in a humble dwelling he lived with a few poor school boys. Encouraged by the success of the Brethren at Deventer, he wanted to found a house where men might live the common life. With the help of the remainder of the Brethren from Mount Saint Agnes, a Brethren house a short distance outside of Zwolle which had failed, and with money that came from some of the disciples of Groote, a suitable site was secured and a fine building erected in 1396, called "House of Saint

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[10]L. Schulze, "Brethren of the Common Life," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, edited by Samuel M. Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), III, 173.

[11]Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 89.

Gregory."[12]

The new house immediately gained wide acclaim and success, and it attracted many devout men from Flanders, Brabant, Friesland, Westphalia, and other districts.[13] Because of the presence of Cele in Zwolle during these years of formation and his activity on behalf of the Brethren, the house in Zwolle almost immediately began lodging students. The Brethren themselves lived in the chief building, "The House of Saint Gregory." Several other buildings were used to house the great crowds of school boys which came from all over this section of Europe. There was the Domus divitum scolarium for boys with means; the Domus vicina or Parvus domus, also for those whose expenses were paid by their parents or guardians; the Domus pro mediocribus, where boys were lodged who paid part of their expenses; and the Domus pauparum scolarium, for the poor students.[14]

The rector of the Brethren house had an important place in the life of students in Cele's school. For it seems to have been the custom for them to confess their sins to the rector.[15] The first two rectors of the house were John

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[12] Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 89.

[13] Ibid., pp. 87-8.

[14] Ibid., p. 105.

[15] Ibid., p. 102.

Ummen who, incidentally, was blind, and Gerard Scadde.[16] Scadde was succeeded as rector by Theodore Herxen in 1410. Herxen was at once a zealous preacher, a skillful teacher, and a versatile writer.[17] "His influence must have been great upon some few at least among the many boys who came to him, as their custom was, to confess their sins."[18] How one could most successfully win children and youths for Christ's kingdom he sets forth in three of his writings: A Book Showing How to Draw Little Ones to Christ, A Treatise Concerning the Drawing of Youths to Christ, and A Book Concerning the Praiseworthy Efforts of the Brethren in Drawing the Little Ones to Christ.[19] There were several other noteworthy men among the early Brethren at Zwolle. Thomas a Kempis, author, or at least compiler of the Imitation of Christ, and John Busch, who was Cele's biographer, might be mentioned.[20]

Cele's school was basically a Latin Grammar school. Cele was not at all opposed to book-learning. He asserted that God's will or testament was expressed in sacred writings and that the Church would long have perished had it not been

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[16]Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 105.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., p. 106.

[19]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 101.

[20]Schulze, op. cit., p. 173.

for the reading of good books.[21] He believed that one should develop his intellect. A priest, for instance, ought to know a great deal about literature and philosophy. Also the teacher, so long as he avoided as much as possible the merely theoretical or formal side of things, would be justified in retaining all subjects taught in the schools thus far. There was no harm in the study of these subjects, as long as they were used as a means of reaching a certain end. "Not a single subject was scrapped by him from the curriculum then in vogue. It was wise to examine everything, he thought, but one should learn to select the best, the useful, the practical."[22] Because there never could be too many good books in the world, Cele taught his students the elements of rhetoric. Besides grammar, rhetoric, logic, and philosophy, the pupils also learned something about arithmetic, music, and astronomy, while ethics was not wholly neglected, and the elementary principles of medicine were also taught.[23] Cele seems to have had the idea that the needs of individual students were different. Subjects must be geared to future needs.

> There was no harm in the study of geometry, astronomy, logic, and medicine, as long as one used those subjects as a means of reaching a certain end. If one was to

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[21] Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 94.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 85.

> become a priest some day, he would not need to know so very much about geometry, for example, nor would the future merchant or farmer have much occasion to study medicine or astronomy.[24]

Friedrich Cramer states that Cele even included Greek in the curriculum, but no confirmation of this could be found.[25] Thus, it is obvious that the curriculum of Cele's school included both the medieval trivium and quadrivium, nor did he cast aside the old medieval grammars.[26]

An innovation of Cele's, however, was the division of the school into eight classes, and each class was subdivided into groups of eight or ten pupils.[27] The usual length of time needed to pass from one grade into the next was one year. Very capable students were advanced more rapidly, and each teacher was authorized to examine every one of his pupils from time to time. The six lower classes were each taught by one teacher during the whole day. The instruction given in the two lowest classes was entrusted to the best pupils found in the highest grades, or to those who had completed the whole course. Within each class, each group of eight or ten pupils was in charge of one advanced student who

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[24]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 92.

[25]Friedrich Cramer, Geschichte der Erziehung und des Unterrichtes in den Niederland während des Mittelalters (Stralsund: C. Hingst, 1843), p. 279.

[26]Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 85.

[27]Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 293.

had to keep order.[28] In the two highest classes, each subject was taught by a special teacher. These men were supposedly specialists in their field. As the inevitable result of these reforms by Cele, his pupils generally made more rapid progress at the universities than most of the other students. Cele also cut down the number of class hours in the day until the former nine-hour school day was trimmed to three and a half or four and a half hours. It is indefinite as to whether this was due to more successful teaching methods, to overcrowded conditions, or to some other cause. Hyma comments:

> If Cele and his successors could teach the same subject matter in three and a half hours which was done in nine hours by most other teachers, their method must have indeed caused favorable comment. They realized that a child's mind cannot concentrate very long on any one subject.[29]

Another factor which may partly explain Cele's fame as a schoolmaster was his way of keeping order in the school room. The teachers of that time resorted to various forms of punishment, which in spite of, or rather perhaps, as a result of their harshness, failed to bring about better discipline.

> Cele rightly reasoned that a teacher's personality was the great factor in the matter of order and discipline. He took a personal interest in every one of his pupils; as far as he was able, naturally. As to punishment, every form was too severe, if one had not first exhausted

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., p. 292.

> all the ways of correction taught him by sympathy and love.[30]

But discipline was maintained effectively in Cele's school. Absences and delinquencies were punished. The infliction of corporal punishment was not done away with, but Cele and his teachers were not cruel or harsh. With them the force of love came foremost in all the relations of life. Pupils who would not behave were usually sent away from school.[31] As Thomas a Kempis states:

> But wandering and froward fellows he would not admit [to his school] nor endure, but either by correction changed them to a better mind or drove them forth from his presence, lest the naughtiness of such presumptuous persons might work ill to them that were well-disposed to obey and disturb the peace of the studious flock and their rector.[32]

Runaway scholars were not received back again by Cele and those that were found out in stealing anything were expelled.[33] While in very many schools of the times, the parents of the pupils would often intervene, thus weakening the authority of the teacher, Cele and his teachers were the sole masters in matters of discipline.[34]

As far as religion is concerned, Cele took an active

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[30] Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 93.

[31] Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 293.

[32] Thomas a Kempis, Chronicle of Mount Saint Agnes, p. 193.

[33] Kettlewell, op. cit., p. 248.

[34] Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 292.

part not only in the teaching of religion to his students but also in their religious worship. Although Cele's school was a municipal school, evidently they used one of the nearby churches for their worship. Thomas a Kempis remarks: "He himself [Cele] was there present with cheerful countenance, directing the whole choir in their harmonious melody; and likewise on feast days he often played on the organ."[35] Kettlewell adds to the material given us by Thomas:

> He was conductor of the choir, like Böhme of Deventer, and led the singing when his choristers sang at the early service, high mass and vespers on Sundays and saints' days. The rest of the scholars he placed opposite to him, on the east side of the choir; and after the early service on Sundays and saints' days, he expounded the Epistle for the day, robed in his academical gown; and after the high mass had been celebrated, the appointed Gospel.[36]

As far as Cele's actual teaching of religion, John Busch, one of his pupils, wrote concerning his chief aim:

> Although he took great pains in teaching the trivium and quadrivium with effect, nevertheless, he did not thereby diminish his interest - nay, he ever increased his zeal in instructing his pupils in the sacred writings, good manners, a saintly and Christian life, and the fear and love of God.[37]

The whole character of men like Cele was such that even when they were teaching ordinary subjects, their whole trend of thought was directed to the divine. The life of Christ was

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[35]Thomas a Kempis, Chronicle of Mount Saint Agnes, p. 192.

[36]Kettlewell, op. cit., p. 248.

[37]Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 86.

continually referred to as the only reliable pattern which can be found on earth. Cele told his students that to imitate Christ was his chief aim, and it should be theirs also. Busch says: "Cele himself as a true imitator of Christ, never taught us anything which he had not previously practised, in order that he might be our example."[38] Cele believed that the Bible should be studied by everybody, for all men were created in God's image, and he taught that they should all strive to regain a part of their lost heritage. Virtue and love were essentials, character a necessity, if one wished to build up a society where peace and order would reign.[39] And as for the study of religion and the harmonious development of one's mental and spiritual self, the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament, and other Biblical works, together with the Fathers, were a more fruitful source of instruction than the subtle and wholly impractical scholastic disputes engaged in by the learned doctors of Paris and Cologne.[40] A famous maxim of Cele's quoted by Schoengen, the archivist at Zwolle was: "The kingdom of heaven consisteth not in knowledge and speech, but in work and virtue."[41] His pupils were taught to pray in both Latin and

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[38] Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 93.

[39] Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 92.

[40] Ibid., p. 90.

[41] Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 93.

in the Low Dutch vernacular. Furthermore, Thomas a Kempis states: "[He] taught them to attend church assiduously, to honor Priests, to love religion, to hold converse with devout and learned men, . . . and gladly to take part in singing the praises of God."[42]

One feature of Cele's method of teaching religion was the raparium, or collection of excerpts, later also called farrago, which every pupil had to make. From the Gospels and other books of the New Testament he selected the plainest and most helpful sayings. These he dictated in a loud voice to the whole school.[43] As John Busch comments:

> For he wanted his boys to have the leading events and the most striking passages found in the Epistles and the Gospels collected in one copy-book, a theological exerpt-book, in which the most useful thoughts found in the sacred writings were gathered in brief extracts. This would enable them more easily to commit such passages to memory.[44]

The students who came to Cele's school were not equally well supplied with funds. With the Brethren of the Common Life, Cele made arrangements to house them in a suitable manner. Those who could afford it were expected to pay the Brethren for their room and board, while Cele asked tuition. The poorer class of boys, of whom there was a great number

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[42]Thomas a Kempis, Chronicle of Mount Saint Agnes, p. 192.

[43]Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 85.

[44]Ibid., p. 86.

instead of being compelled to beg, were kindly taken care of by the Brethren, and Cele even gave them money for the books, ink, and paper they needed for school.[45] Thomas a Kempis remarks:

> These [the poor students] did the Master instruct gladly and without price when besought to do so for God's sake, for he was a true father of the needy and he exhorted them to strive to turn their studies to God's service.[46]

Cele's school was a great success. One reason for the fame of this school was the presence of the Brethren of the Common Life in Zwolle, since their dormitories were famous throughout the Low Countries. Also, Cele made a careful distinction between the form and the inner essence of the subject matter of the school, and he consciously tried to prune away as much of the dead formalism from his curriculum as possible. Then, too, wherever a large number of pupils could be counted upon, it was also possible to engage and permanently retain the services of more distinguished teachers. This served to counteract the wandering of learned men from place to place as was the custom of the time.[47]

As an indirect result, Cele also gained many novices for the stricter monastic orders. Thomas a Kempis remarks:

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[45] Ibid., pp. 85-6.

[46] Thomas a Kempis, Chronicle of Mount Saint Agnes, p. 193.

[47] C. Ullmann, Reformers before the Reformation, translated by R. Menzies (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863), II, 101.

> What Order that is illustrious for its life or reputation hath not had monks that were his pupils? Although above others, the Canons Regular,[48] the Cruciferi, and the Cisterciani have gained many adherents to the Order from among his many students.[49]

Also, his fame seems to have spread quite widely throughout northern Europe, for Hyma records students at his school from the bishoprics or principalities of Cologne, Trier, Louvain, Utrecht, Brabant, Flanders, Westphalia, Holland, Saxony, Cleves, Gelderland, and Friesia.[50]

Cele, following Groote's views of popular religious education, was active in this field also. Probably in cooperation with the Brethren, he invited all the inhabitants of Zwolle to attend his discourses which he held for his students on Sundays and saints' days, thus giving them a chance to gain a better understanding of the Bible and the teaching of the Church.[51] Although he was very generous in helping his poorer students, Cele made a great deal of money with his school. With this money he constructed a fine library in the church of Saint Michael. All devout citizens of the city as well as the students of the school were freely admitted.[52] Furthermore, many of Cele's followers

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[48]The monastic order loosely connected with the Brethren.

[49]Thomas a Kempis, Chronicle of Mount Saint Agnes, p. 191.

[50]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 94.

[51]Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 94.

[52]Cramer, op. cit., p. 279.

imitated his noble example by collecting books and lending them to others. By this means also, the city of Zwolle became a center of popular learning.[53]

John Cele was succeeded as rector of the town school by Livinius of Middelburg, another follower of Groote, and he in turn by Herman Kerstken. After him John van Dalen was appointed rector but none of these seem to have achieved any unusual success.[54] Perhaps this was partly due to the incoming of humanism about the middle of the fifteenth century and the resulting confusion which it caused to the educational situation. However, two outstanding men were educated at Zwolle during this period, both of whom play an important part in the development of Christian humanism in the Low Countries: Alexander Hegius and Wessel of Gansfort.

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[53] Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 93.

[54] Ibid., p. 125.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTIAN HUMANISM AND THE WORK OF ALEXANDER HEGIUS

Christian Humanism in the Low Countries

About the middle of the fifteenth century, the Renaissance began to be felt in the North Countries. This revival necessarily had a deep-rooted effect upon the scholars and teachers of the Netherlands and Germany. Scholars went to Italy, studied in the Humanist schools, and returned home fired with the zeal to reform the schools along classical lines.[1] These early northern humanists passed by easy stages from the medieval faith to an enlightened and urbane cosmopolitanism. Such men as Rudolf Agricola, Rudolf von Langen, and Alexander Hegius, rector of the school at Deventer, were touched by the Italian learning and began to work for educational reform without necessarily criticizing the system of the Church.[2]

> In the north there seemed to be a much stronger alliance between religion and Humanism than in Italy, and consequently the interest in the classical languages was stimulated by the desire to study and investigate the original sources of the Scriptures in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. The classics were thus studied as sacred langu-

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[1]Freeman R. Butts, A Cultural History of Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1947), p. 222.

[2]John H. Randall, Making of the Modern Mind (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1926), p. 132.

ages as well as secular languages.[3]

Until the middle of the fifteenth century the Brethren of the Common Life were not affected by the educational theories of the humanists. Their methods remained largely medieval and their textbooks differed not at all from those used in other centers of learning.[4] The educational reform and revival that had taken place by the efforts of the Brethren and their sympathizers had developed wholly independent of the Italian Renaissance. However, when the influence of the Renaissance began to be felt in the North, the Brethren, while retaining much of the old medieval curriculum, particularly in its strong moral and religious element, introduced the new studies into their schools, and, as a result, many of these became centers of humanism in Germany and Netherlands. This change-over to Humanism has led some scholars like H. Kämmel to divide the work of the Brethren into two definite periods:

> Hierbei nun läszt sich ihre Thätigkeit wieder nach zwei Perioden betrachten. In der ersteren ist das religiös-praktische Interesse durchaus vorwaltend, und die Theilnahme für die Classiker bestimmt sich fast ausschliesz-lich nach dem Werthe, den sie für sittliche Bildung haben konnten; in der folgenden Zeit aber, als von Italien aus der Humanismus immer mächtiger zu wirken begann, richtete sich die Thätigkeit entschiedener auch auf Nachbildung classischer Formen, woran Gerhard Groote

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[3]Butts, op. cit., p. 222.

[4]Albert Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1930), p. 30.

noch gar nicht gedacht hatte.[5]

Soon were heard in the North Countries various expressions which have a strong Humanist sound to them. Rudolf Agricola said concerning the school:

> If there is anything which has a contradictory name, it is the school. The Greek called it scholæ, which means leisure, recreation; and the Latins, ludus, that is, play. But there is nothing farther removed from recreation and play. Aristophanes called it phrontisterion, that is, place of care, of torment, and this is surely the designation which best befits it.[6]

Agricola wrote several books on educational subjects. His De Inventione Dialectica supplanted Aristotle's work in many schools, including also the University of Paris. Another important production was the De Formando Studio, a book devoted to the reform of the curriculum. The true method of study, according to Agricola, has three aims: First, to understand the subject-matter, secondly, to remember it, and finally, to assimilate and reproduce it.[7]

The introduction of Humanism and the classics was early taken up by the Brethren in some localities. As Friedrich Cramer points out:

> Dass das Studium des Griechischen diesseits der Alpen nirgends früher als bei den Hieronymianern eingehende

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[5]H. Kämmel, "Hieronymianer," Encyklopädie des Gesammten Erziehungs und Unterrichtswesens, edited by K. A. Schmid (Gotha: Rudolf Besser, 1862), III, 542.

[6]Gabriel Compayre, The History of Pedagogy, translated by W. H. Payne (D. C. Heath and Co., 1886), p. 87.

[7]Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 115.

> Plege gefunden hat, ist eine Thatsache, für welche auch von andern Seiten her Belege sich beibringen lieszen. Die aus ihren Schulen hervorgegangenen Restauratoren der classischen Studien waren auf griechische Sprache und Literature zuerst doch auch bei ihnen aufmerksam geworden.[8]

When Wessel Gansfort, the outstanding Dutch humanist, studied Greek and Hebrew he was chiefly motivated by a desire to read the Bible and the Church Fathers in the original. He was not anxious to acquire linguistic knowledge as an end in itself, but merely to make use of it as a tool.[9] In the same spirit, he attached different moral values to the various classical writers. "We may read Ovid once, but we ought to read Virgil, Horace, and Terence with more attention."[10]

Not all the Brethren took an interest in Humanism. The printing press of the Brethren at Brussels, for example, did not turn out a single classical or humanistic production.[11] But in some of their more influential houses, there is definitely a sympathy for humanist aims and methods in

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[8]Friedrich Cramer, Geschichte der Erziehung und des Unterrichtes in den Niederland während des Mittelalters (Stralsund: C. Hingst, 1843), p. 205.

[9]Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 121.

[10]Compayre, op. cit., p. 87.

[11]Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 109.

education.[12]

> Right in the citadel of the movement, so to speak, in the Brethren house at Deventer, some very pious souls became greatly affected by the teachings of the humanists. When Alexander Hegius wrote to his friend Rudolf Agricola that he had read Valla's dialogue, On the True Good, he seemed not a bit shocked, although Gerard Groote would have exhorted his friends never even to touch it.[13]

Thus, it is evident that although members of the Brethren were among the first carriers of Humanist ideas in the North Countries, many years elapsed before these ideas were at all widespread among the members of the Brotherhood.[14]

The terms, humanist and Humanism can be defined in different ways. The humanists of the south were very different from these early humanists in the Netherlands and northern Germany. Many of them taught that man has a perfect right to enjoy himself in this world, that human nature is not fundamentally bad, and that human beings have great innate power, for which reason they need not be so self-depreciating. They exalted human nature and had little use for theology as such.[15] In fact, they spent considerable time ridiculing scholastic philosophy, because the Schoolmen at

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[12]William H. Woodward, Studies in Education During the Age of the Renaissance 1400-1600 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), p. 82.

[13]Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 37.

[14]Ibid., p. 87.

[15]Ibid., p. 11.

Paris and Cologne built huge structures of dialectics on mere hypotheses instead of turning to the examination of the sources and of nature.[16] Often the Italian humanists made learning an end in itself. And as Raumer remakrs:

> Still less did these latter [the Italian humanists] think of circulating the Bible, or of promoting popular education, which cause was so dear to the Brethren; even when, like Guarino and Vittorino di Feltre, they turned their thoughts to education, they devoted themselves chiefly to the instruction of princes or nobles.[17]

However, among the humanists connected with the Brethren, the emphasis was on employing learning and humanistic principles as a tool only. Furthermore, they stressed the fundamental need of popular religious instruction. We have here a sort of alliance between the humanities and the Gospel: a beginning of the maxim popular in the sixteenth century, sapiens atque eloquens pietas.[18]

The outstanding humanists who were associated with the Brethren of the Common Life were Wessel of Gansfort, Rudolf Agricola, Alexander Hegius, and Desiderius Erasmus, though Erasmus during his later life repudiated any connection with the Brethren. An idea of what Wessel, for instance, taught will perhaps clarify the aims of these Christian humanists.

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[16] Ibid., p. 39.

[17] Karl Raumer, "The Hieronymians," The American Journal of Education, IV (March, 1858), 628.

[18] Fredrich Paulsen, German Education, Past and Present, translated by T. Lorenz (London: T. F. Unwin, 1908), p. 68.

John Wessel received his first schooling at Zwolle, and after studying and teaching the classics and Hebrew in Cologne, Paris, Florence, and Rome, he returned to his old school at Zwolle as instructor where he remained until his death in 1489.[19] Although together with Rudolf Agricola he was considered among the outstanding scholars of his time, his interest was in teaching even more than in scholarship, for as he said, "The scholar is known by his ability to teach."[20] He made a sharp distinction between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is the interpreter of truth while wisdom is concerned with human welfare. For this reason, he said, knowledge may be useless and vain. Such is all knowledge which follows truth merely out of curiosity. Just as the garrulousness of women is foolish because it seeks satisfaction in mere talk, so knowledge seeks merely the truth. But wisdom seeks the benefit from the truth. It understands that the highest wisdom is the wisdom of God and the use of this godly wisdom is a holy life. Wessel goes on to say that there is a strong and weighty argument against universities to be drawn from the fact that Paul had but little success at Athens; accomplishing more in the neighboring city of

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[19]Frank P. Graves, A History of Education During the Middle Ages and the Transition to Modern Times (New York: Macmillan, 1910), p. 147.

[20]Karl Raumer, "Eminent Teachers in the Netherlands prior to 1500," The American Journal of Education, IV (March, 1858), 715.

Corinth and in Thessaly, which was then almost barbarous, than in the Attic city, which was at that time the fountain of Greek philosophy. Wessel says that this goes to show that liberal studies in themselves are not very pleasing to God.[21]

Alexander Hegius and his School at Deventer

To turn to the exclusively educational work of the Brethren during this period of Humanist influence, we look to the school of St. Lebwin at Deventer during the rectorship of Alexander Hegius for an outstanding example. Before Hegius arrived at St. Lebwin, the school was definitely a medieval institution and seems to have been hardly affected by the humanists.[22] Erasmus went to school here in the last years before Hegius' arrival, and from his remarks it is evident that the school was according to humanist standards very narrow in its curriculum and teaching methods.[23] Hegius had taught at other schools which were connected with the Brethren before he came to Deventer. Born in Westphalia in 1433, he was a teacher at Wessel in 1474, and from 1475 to 1483, he taught school in Emmerich where he seems to have

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[21] Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 120.

[22] Ibid., p. 87.

[23] Ibid., p. 82.

been supported by the Brethren.[24] In 1483, Hegius was appointed rector of the school of St. Lebwin at Deventer, where he remained until his death in 1498.[25] When Hegius arrived at the school, Erasmus was finishing his last year there.[26] Hegius' close friend and a teacher at Deventer was John Sintheim, or Sintius, a man "whose repute for learning and for skill in teaching survived in North Germany for half a century."[27] Under the capable leadership of these two men, the school grew to a size of twenty-two hundred students within a span of a few years.[28]

Hegius was not a humanist in the proper sense of the term during his earlier teaching years. He must have been a very capable teacher and administrator even before he came under the influence of Humanism, for Hyma records that he was able to attract fifteen hundred pupils to his school at Emmerich.[29] It does not appear that he was influenced by Humanism until his last few years at Emmerich, for it was

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[24] Ibid., p. 118.

[25] Albert Hyma, The Christian Renaissance (New York: Century Co., 1924), p. 126.

[26] Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 105.

[27] William Harrison Woodward, Desiderius Erasmus Concerning the Aim and Method of Education (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), p. 3.

[28] Albert Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life (Grand Rapids: William B. Erdman's Publ. Co., 1950), p. 119.

[29] Ibid.

then that he became acquainted with Agricola. Through Agricola, a close friendship between Hegius and Wessel also began, as appears from one of Hegius' letters.[30] Hegius prided himself in having learned Greek from Agricola. As he confesses:

> "Although a man of forty, a Master of Arts, I was but a novice in true learning up to the day when I fell in with my youthful teacher Agricola . . . . From him I learnt all I know or what men suppose me to know."[31]

It appears that Agricola taught occasionally in St. Lebwin's school during Hegius' rectorate, for he stayed at Deventer for extended periods in between his wanderings.[32] Hegius was strongly influenced by Agricola and although his knowledge of Greek was very elementary, his burning ambition to teach the language produced marked results. In his tract, De Utilitate Linguae Graece, Hegius set forth the value of Greek for the study of theology, and in true humanist spirit, its indispensable importance to a sound knowledge in every field of inquiry.[33]

As a boy Hegius had been instructed in what might be called the rudiments of Christian education at the Brethren

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[30] Ibid., p. 118.

[31] Woodward, Studies in Education During the Age of the Renaissance 1400-1600, p. 84.

[32] Woodward, Desiderius Erasmus Concerning the Aim and Method of Education, p. 3.

[33] Woodward, Studies in Education During the Age of the Renaissance 1400-1600, p. 85.

school in Zwolle.[34] Besides this, all through his life he maintained the closest relations with the Brethren of the Common Life. As a result, we find that many of his educational ideas strongly echoed those which the Brethren advocated. He said that all learning which is acquired at the expense of piety is futile.[35] With Hegius character took precedence over learning, though like a true humanist, he believed that sound learning, rightly applied, conduces necessarily to moral worth.[36] As Hyma points out:

> Hegius was not the kind of man to imitate the typical Italian humanists. He was in perfect accord with the Brethren of the Common Life at Deventer. Worldly things had very little value in his eyes. Personal property he did not accumulate, nor did he seek the name of a great scholar. Character, not book-learning, was for him the highest gift.[37]

Although he was one of the leading humanists of the late fifteenth century, "he was nevertheless too closely associated with the Brethren of the Common Life to dispise the use of the vernacular, as so many scholars of his time were doing."[38] In these respects, he owed much to his predecessors, Groote and Cele.

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[34]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 119.

[35]Raumer, "Eminent Teachers in the Netherlands prior to 1500," p. 724.

[36]Woodward, Studies in Education During the Age of the Renaissance 1400-1600, p. 85.

[37]Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 107.

[38]Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 126.

The Brethren at Deventer had large and satisfactory living quarters for the school boys but the sources used in this study did not provide much information concerning these facilities.[39] Also, quite a few of the Brethren were teaching in Hegius' school. This led many people to send their boys there since the Brethren were famed for their piety and sober learning.[40] Like Zwolle, the rector of the Brethren house at Deventer was the confessor of the school boys. A biography prepared in the Brethren house gives the following details concerning John Hatten, one of the rectors of the house while Hegius was at Deventer:

> "He instructed the school boys with his short addresses and exhorted them to study the sacred writings, the lives of the saints, and the Quatuor Novissima, which taught chastity and the contempt of the world. And he used to give examples of what was happening to saintly people, through which he induced many to confess their sins."[41]

The school at Deventer not only served as a means of improving the intellectual and moral standards among the clergy, but it offered preparatory courses for students intending to enter the universities, and also sent out a great number of teachers to other cities. Like Cele's school, St. Lebwin's school was divided into grades. At Deventer, however, there were nine grades instead of eight

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[39] Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 66.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., p. 92.

but the ninth was simply a preparatory grade.[42] Woodward offers the program in detail:

> In the Eighth the pupil learnt to read Latin, to write, and to repeat the declensions and conjugations; in the Seventh, an easy Delectus was used and exercises formed upon it, and a beginning was made with sentence structure. The Sixth class began to read a simple Latin author; grammar was systematically learnt; prose composition and prosody were included. In the Fifth, syntax is completed; historical writers are read for the first time, their style noted and imitated; verse exercises attempted, and the first steps taken in Greek. In the Fourth, more time was given to Gree; the rudiments of logic, principles of rhetoric from Cicero and Quintilian, and original prose are taught. Not until the Third was Greek composition begun, and along with the close study of Greek grammar and authors, mainly poets, logic and rhetoric were continued, with regular exercises in composition after ancient models. In the Second, the Organon of Aristotle was read in Greek, and also Plato; Euclid was read in Latin and the elements of Roman law. Orations were composed in strict accord with the laws of structure as laid down by Cicero; and disputations on classical subjects were practiced. In the First, theology was introduced, and increased use was made of disputations, in which the two senior classes joined; and the study of rhetoric was completed.[43]

The introduction of Greek was a major step, for as Hegius maintained to his scholars: "Whoever desires to understand grammar, rhetoric, mathematics, history, the Holy Scriptures, and other learning must learn Greek. For to the Greeks we are indebted for everything."[44] The amount of Greek actually

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[42]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 121.

[43]Woodward, Studies in Education During the Age of the Renaissance 1400-1600, p. 87.

[44]Raumer, "Eminent Teachers in the Netherlands prior to 1500," p. 724.

learned by the pupils was probably quite small, for the difficulties involved in the lack of texts and grammars, and of methods tested by experience are readily perceived.[45] But as Woodward suggests, by incorporating Greek into the school course, Hegius established its place in German education.[46]

The method of instruction followed the plan of praecepta, exempla, and imitatio. The rules or praecepta were presented first and above all by the instruction in grammar, but also in rhetoric and poetry; models of style or exempla were found in reading the classical authors; imitation or imitatio was the general name for all exercises on the part of the pupils in the practical use of the Latin language, in writing as well as speaking.[47]

Hegius was especially opposed to the old medieval grammars then in use. He said:

> The current grammars are barbarous. This the Italians know best; they love their children too much to impose on them such useless, harmful trash. As a matter of fact, if grammar, which is the art of speaking, could talk itself, it would turn with vehemence against those educators who great it in such a manner that it can no longer be called grammar.[48]

At another time he remarked concerning grammar and its use:

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[45] Woodward, Studies in Education During the Age of the Renaissance 1400-1600, p. 85.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Paulsen, op. cit., p. 69.

[48] Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 108.

> Grammar is a fine art, but not that which at present is being studied at great expense by the boys. The grammarians of our time sin heavily against their pupils, since they compel them to learn barbarous Latin. He who improperly writes or accentuates German words is ridiculed by everybody, but those who corrupt our Latin language (and they are legion) and elevate their "art" to heaven with eulogies are not condemned. The Church Fathers, like Augustine, Jerome, Gregory, Ambrose, and Cyprian wrote correct Latin, for their models were the best writers among the ancients, such as Cicero, Sallust, Livy, and Virgil.[49]

Hegius in continuing Cele's work, advocated a reform in the text-books. The Medulla was not worth being read any longer, he said. On the last page of his Invectiva, he gives a list of grammars which should be altered. Throughout this whole essay, in fact, he indicates the need for better text-books.[50] Besides the Medulla, he reasoned that the Disciplina Scholarium, the Gemma Gemmorum, the Lexica of Hugutio Brito and John Januensis, and the Catholicon be cast aside as no longer worthy of serious study.[51] One of the old grammars, the Doctrinale of Alexander de Villa dei, which had played a dominant role in instruction for nearly three centuries was radically revised by Sintheim. Short and simple manuals of classical Latin were introduced, and the pupils were provided with the works of classical authors as reading matter and taught to imitate their style in poetry as well as in

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 127.

[51] Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 108.

prose.[52] It was evidently a big task reforming and throwing out some of the old grammars and text-books. Ullmann comments:

> These books, no less than the most important article in the Creed, enjoyed the protection of the Church. Any attack upon them was sure to call down upon its author not merely the anger of the schools and their rectors, but the weight of the ecclesiastical arm, as upon a heretic. The delusion, however, was destoyed by the more learned of the Brethren of the Common Lot. They wholly laid aside those useless books, or formally attacked them, put the classics themselves into the hands of the young, and furnished them with better grammars. In this way the school at Deventer, and at the head of it, Alexander Hegius, and John Sintius, earned for themselves an imperishable desert.[53]

Among the classical authors, Demosthenes, Plato, and Aristotle in Greek and Cicero, Caesar, Virgil and Horace in Latin were included in the readings. At the same time, considerable attention was paid to the Scriptures. A play by Terence was also performed by the students.[54] Hegius' chief concern in this regard was to reduce grammar to its rightful place by relieving it of its dependence upon logic, and by treating it as an aid to the study of classical texts.[55]

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[52]Paulsen, op. cit., p. 53.

[53]C. Ullmann, Reformers before the Reformation, translated by R. Menzies (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863), II, 102.

[54]Isaac L. Kandel, "Brethren of the Common Life," Cyclopedia of Education, edited by Paul Monroe (New York: Macmillan, 1925), I, 447.

[55]Woodward, Studies in Education During the Age of the Renaissance 1400-1600, p. 85.

Hegius himself taught the senior boys, and by way of lecture read Latin poets and gave moral instruction from Cicero and Plutarch. Of course, the material taught the seniors was really of a university level, since the last two years in the Deventer school provided courses commonly taught in the universities.[56]

Concerning the overall success of his school, Hegius had favorable circumstances in his favor. For one thing, he had the Brethren of the Common Life to work with and their dormitories as a suitable lodging for his students. This is important, for the Brethren were known for their loving care of students both in the dormitory, and, where the situation permitted, in the classroom. Furthermore, neither Hegius or his followers or the Brethren were roving teachers or humanists as so many of the scholars were at that time. This gave their school a permanence which was rare in Renaissance Europe.[57]

As can be seen from the above discussion, Hegius made a definite contribution to the educational philosophy of his day. A large part of this contribution was related to the influence of humanism upon him. He received the orators and poets of classical antiquity into the academic body of his curriculum. Then, too, he expelled medieval Latin and re-

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[56]Hyma, The Youth of Erasmus, p. 132.

[57]Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life, p. 119.

placed it with classical Latin. Poetry and rhetoric based on the classical writers which were read and imitated were included in the prescribed range of subjects. Besides this, Greek was introduced into the curriculum.[58] How well Hegius' ideals worked out in the classroom is not known. The large number of students which flocked to Deventer during the rectorship of Hegius seems to indicate considerable success. However, as Woodward suggests:

> The actual working of a school separates ideals from practice. The "love for sound learning" has not always proved to be readily translatable into terms of class-work, instruction, and exercises. Hegius and Sintius were men of scholarship; but their assistants, the text-books, the range of possible subjects, the available methods of instruction were inevitably those of the time.[59]

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[58]Paulsen, op. cit., p. 53.

[59]Woodward, Desiderius Erasmus Concerning the Aim and Method of Education, p. 3.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Viewed by modern standards the educational work of the Brethren, especially in their earlier period, seems quite narrow. On the other hand, their work took place at a turning point in history: in the transition period from a medieval culture to modern civilization. For this reason, it is dangerous to judge their work by modern educational standards. It is impossible to say that they possessed a particular educational method of their own, outside of the general principles followed by the association and their houses. Nevertheless, in their antagonism to the scholastics, they introduced a more liberal curriculum in place of the scholastic dominated plan of education advocated by their predecessors. Then, too, by their support and aid to teachers and their schools, they established the school on a much more permanent basis than it had been as an unorganized and uncontrolled assembly of pupils under constantly changing teachers. Their regulation of school life outside of the classroom was important. This was accomplished chiefly through well-supervised and managed dormitories.

It did not seem to matter to them whether the school was controlled by the Church, by municipal authority, or under their own control. They were ready to step into the existing situation and render whatever help they could. As

a result, we find the Brethren and their co-workers caring for poor students, dividing the school into grades, writing and revising text-books, copying and, later on, printing books, doing work in popular religious education, and introducing the elements of modern subjects. It is also important for an overall evaluation of their work to remember their labors in inculcating a living religion and piety among both students and towns-people.

On the other hand, however, it is an extreme to list them as direct precursors of the Lutheran Reformation. In general, their theology through their whole period of growth was definitely semi-pelagian. In fact, it was partially as a result of this semi-pelagian theology that they embarked upon their educational program: the "good life" is obtained through education in morals. In this way, although they were precursors of the Catholic Counter-Reformation rather than of Luther and his work, they evidently worked considerable good in preparing Netherlands for the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

When reporting on a study of this kind, one is inclined to try to trace the influences which the work of the Brethren had on later educational organizations. But ideas are very difficult to trace and an influence becomes almost impossible to substantiate, especially in the confused pattern of Europe at this time. But it is worthy of note that the schools connected with the Brethren educated some of the

important and even revolutionary men of their time and in some cases employed them as teachers: John Wessel of Gansfort, Rudolf Agricola, Desiderius Erasmus, and Thomas a Kempis mentioned in the text of this paper, Murmellius, Dringenberg, and Wimpfeling, outstanding German educators, Pope Adrian VI and Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa.[1] Martin Luther and Johann Sturm might also be mentioned. But let it suffice to say that the Brethren of the Common Life played an important role in the development of education at this time in northern Europe.

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[1]Pierre J. Marique, History of Christian Education (New York: Fordham University Press, 1924), I, 134.

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